

My name is Veronica Toyomi Ota and I am a certified candidate for ministry with San Gabriel Presbytery and serve the Presbytery of San José as the Peacemaking and Justice Advocate. At the moment, I also continue to serve First Presbyterian Church, Altadena as Community Outreach Director. I am passionate about living out faith in action through education, activism, and reflection. I'm particularly interested in the intersections of ecological sustainability and spirituality, and hope to find paths in ministry that help the church cultivate sustainable communities that celebrate the interconnectedness of God's creation.

My cultural heritage is important to me. I'm a *yonsei* fourth-generation Japanese American of mixed cultural descent. One side of great-grandparents emigrated from Japan to Hawaii and California, while the others left Ireland and Germany for Ellis Island in New York. I grew up in an interfaith family with Catholics, Presbyterians, Buddhists, Agnostics, and non-religious folks. I continue to find myself drawn to interfaith spaces where all faith backgrounds are appreciated. My immigrant great-grandparents and American-born grandparents were incarcerated during WWII at Santa Anita Racetrack and in Rohwer, AK. We lived in my grandpa's house while I was growing up. He shared stories of some of the injustices he experienced, which profoundly shaped my own sense of justice, as well as my awareness of racism, wealth disparity, and generational trauma.

I attended Tufts University and received a degree in International Literary and Visual Studies, focusing on Japanese literature and culture. My senior honors thesis became a seminal project. I translated and compiled a collection of haiku poetry written by hibakusha survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After meeting Mr. Shigemoto, a survivor whose work I translated, I felt I must dedicate my life to making the world a more peaceful place.

I've always loved education and felt it was a force for positive change in the world. After college, I taught 6-12th grade choir then 7-8th grade math at a public school in Pasadena, and then spent one year teaching English in Japan on the JET Program. During this era, I also began working part-time in children's ministry at First Presbyterian Church, Altadena and started a Summer Peace Camp program that I continue to direct. Peace Camp combined my calling to peace work, my affinity for teaching, and my deep love for my intergenerational home church community. Through Peace Camp, I sensed God calling me to ministry.

I received my MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary in 2024, with a certificate in Theology, Ecology, and Faith Formation. I worked at the seminary farm, The Farminary, overseeing the compost program, and later became the school's first Student Sustainability Coordinator. I also helped start a student group, Theological Ecological Initiative, with others who were passionate about earth care. Upon graduating, I received the Graduate Fellowship for Parish Ministry Award which funded my travels to nine countries spread out over the course of around seven months. The focus of my travels was to explore the intersections of spirituality and sustainability in other cultures, especially in interfaith community relations. Some of the most incredible and fulfilling parts of my travels included experiencing the Amazon Rainforest with Ticuna indigenous guides, working on an organic farm at the Asian Rural Institute in Japan, exploring over 20 temples in the Angkor Wat complex, hiking in the Himalayas, and talking with people from all over the world about the beauty of our planet and shared hopes for world peace.

The most pressing issue of my lifetime is the ecological crisis that threatens the viability of all life on this planet. The Bible, Church, and Reformed tradition are resources that help me understand my calling to peacemaking and justice ministry that is rooted in earth care. I pray that my sense of calling can be confirmed and supported through the process of ordination.