

**Speech: Response to Receiving a Certificate of Appreciation from
the Japanese Government by the Japanese Consul of Sydney Mr.
Kiya Masahiko 19th February 2022**

Pastor Lauren Merritt and I as Chairman of the Darwin memorial Uniting Church Congregation gratefully and humbly accept this Certificate of Appreciation. This act is very symbolic and is a reaffirmation of the continuing act of peace and reconciliation between our nations started by Mr. Ryugo Fujita at the opening of this Church on 23rd July 1960.

Most people here today know the story of the Fujita gift of 77 crosses. For those who are not let me briefly remind of the story.



The Fujita Salvaging Company commenced clearing the Darwin harbour of eight sunken ships in 1958. At the same time this church building had just commenced.

At the time of the salvage operations, Detective Sergeant Barry Tiernan was responsible as a member of the Police Special Branch for ensuring the safety of the movements of the Fujita Company workers. Mr Tiernan was a member of this church.

Since this church building was under construction at the time, it seems that Mr Tiernan and Mr Fujita were also thinking about some way for him to become involved in this new church. From this connection grew the idea of a metal cross which consequently became 77 bronze crosses. The metal came from the sunken vessel Zealandia.



One of the questions that has puzzled us for some time is, why there were that specific number of crosses. Because of those who were involved in the decision we believe the answer is found in:

Matthew's Gospel Chapter 18 verses 21 and 22

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times? – (Peter was being generous. Jewish law at that time required a person to forgive a person three times before taking a person to court.))

²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

In 2010 Mr Senichiro Fujita and his daughter Yoshiko visited for the 50th anniversary of the opening of the church.



Senichiro worked with his father during the salvage. His job was to produce oxygen for the divers. He had visited Darwin a number of times.

On his visit in 2010 he donated to the NT Library all his father salvaging documents and many photographs. He also gave our church a substantial donation.

As a good church we formed a committee to decide what to do with the money.

In 2013 Senichiro and Yoshiko returned. They spoke at a public meeting in the church which generated a great deal of community interest and a large number of people assembled.

As a result the committee decided that we should do more to promote the story and so engaged a number of local design experts who kindly donated generously of their time to plan the exhibition. At the same time

our young people decided to build a peace garden. This enabled us to design a Peace and Reconciliation Exhibit. Funds were raised to put story boards in the garden.



In 2016 the Northern Territory Government started a program called the Territory Remembers which was to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of



the bombing of Darwin. They were looking for new stories and unique projects. We applied for a grant to build a memorial reflect pool which was successful.

The Government also decided that our story was worth their own presentation and asked if they could use our hall. Their very impressive display is in this room. After the 75th anniversary celebrations the Government donated the display to us. We treasure the display as it encapsulates the essence of the story we are promoting.



One of our designers Trish Brick saw in the NT Library a photo of Ryugo Fujita's grave in Japan which has a blade of the Meigs propeller on it and suggested we should build a replica of it in the garden. We contacted Yoshiko and asked if the family was interested in donating a replica of the propellor blade. After a while she responded and said, "we will do better than a replica, we will send the original back to you as we believe this move will be the best memorial for my grandfather."



We decided to place the blade out the front of the church so everyone can see it and read the story. Fortunately for us Mr Michael Sitzler and his company erected the blade for us.

Members of the Fujita family came to Darwin for the 75th Anniversary and the unveiling of the propeller blade. They had planned to be here today but were unable to travel.

There one other story connected to our exhibition. Professor Takanaka visited our church when it was being built. His church in Kyoto donated pulpit and lectern frontals. That story is displayed on the windows in the link between the foyer and the chapel. The window display was paid for by Inpex for which are eternally grateful.



We decided that the exhibition was to be a valuable resource to promote this wonderful story. Pastor Lauren will tell you how it is being used.