The Spirit of Place

Buddhist Church of San Francisco
The Buddhist Church of the West was the first Buddhist organization in North America, originating in 1923 as the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA). In 1925, the Buddhist Church of the West was founded and moved in 1928 to the Japanese Church in San Francisco. In 1933, the church moved to 3200 California Street in San Francisco, where it remained until 1974. The building was known as the Jodo Mission. The San Francisco Buddhist Temple is located at 3200 California Street. The temple provides programs in Buddhist meditation, lectures, and classes to the community. Visiting the temple is recommended for those interested in exploring meditation and learning about Buddhist philosophy and practices.

Catholic Church
The Old Catholic Church of San Francisco was founded in 1870 by the Jesuits on Mission Street in San Francisco. The church was later transferred to 2620 California Street in San Francisco. The church provides programs in Catholic meditation, lectures, and classes to the community. Visiting the temple is recommended for those interested in exploring Catholicism and learning about Catholic philosophy and practices.

Independent Churches

19th Century Church
The Independent Church of San Francisco was founded in 1850 and is the oldest continuously operating church in San Francisco. The church offers programs in 19th century Church meditation, lectures, and classes to the community. Visiting the temple is recommended for those interested in exploring 19th century Church philosophy and practices.

Japanese Benevolent Society
The Japanese Benevolent Society of San Francisco was founded in 1886 and is the oldest continuously operating society in the city. The society provides programs in Japanese culture and history, lectures, and classes to the community. Visiting the temple is recommended for those interested in exploring Japanese culture and history and learning about Japanese society and practices.

The Spirit of Nihonmachi

Religion has long played a central role in the life of the Japanese American community. Most local church did not subscribe to a single, exclusive religious belief system but instead incorporated various religious elements into their daily lives. In Japan, similarities registered with their local Buddhist temple and also observed time honored rituals at local Shinto shrines. Traditional beliefs encompassed folk gods and demons, nature spirits, shamans and Confucianism. Several thousand “hidden Christians” practiced their faith in secrecy to avoid persecution during Japan’s Edoh period.

The first documented Japanese American organization was the Fukusui Kō, the Japanese Gospel Society, which began meeting in 1877 in the basement of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in San Francisco’s Chinatown. In a few years this organization would give rise to various Christian churches and be joined in the community by Buddhist and other religious groups. Despite differences in religious doctrines and practices, these groups established a common tradition of community service.

Community Activities

Sunday School & Japanese School
Japanese children have attended a Sunday School for religious and educational purposes since 1866. The Sunday School in the Japanese Church is held weekly and includes religious classes and community activities. Parents are encouraged to attend the Sunday School to learn about Japanese culture and history and to support their children’s religious education.

Church Bazaars
Church bazaars are annual community events that allow Japanese American businesses to showcase their goods and services. These events provide an opportunity for community members to come together and celebrate Japanese culture. Japanese American businesses and organizations participate in these events by selling traditional Japanese goods, food, and crafts. The bazaars are held at various locations throughout the city, including the Japanese American National Museum and the Japanese Cultural and Community Center.

Okinawa Festival
The Okinawa Festival is a community event that celebrates the rich culture and history of Okinawa, Japan. The festival features a variety of activities, including live entertainment, traditional Japanese food, and demonstrations of traditional Okinawan martial arts. The festival is held annually in May and attracts participants from throughout the Bay Area.

Scouting and Youth Activities
Scouting is an organization that provides leadership, character development, and fun activities for young people. The organization is open to both boys and girls and provides opportunities for young people to learn about leadership, teamwork, and community service. Scouting is available in a variety of programs, including Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Venturing. The organization has a strong emphasis on community service and provides opportunities for young people to give back to their communities.