

UCC leader Teruo Kawata dies at 94

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [August 10, 2022](#) issue



(Courtesy of the Hawai'i Conference of the United Church of Christ)

Influential United Church of Christ leader Teruo Kawata died July 1. He was 94.

Kawata, a Japanese American whose family was interned in an Arizona relocation camp from 1942 to 1944, was instrumental in creating the UCC's Pacific Islander and Asian American ministries. He was also the first person of Asian descent to hold the office of conference minister in the Central Pacific Conference and in the Hawaii Conference.

Kawata was ordained in the Congregational Christian Church—one of the denominations that would later merge to become the United Church of Christ—in 1952. After serving local churches in California and Hawaii, Kawata joined the national staff of the UCC in 1970, working primarily on efforts to support local churches and spiritual formation.

In an open letter to the Hawaii Conference of the UCC following Kawata's death, David Vásquez-Levy, president of the Pacific School of Religion, one of Kawata's alma maters, called Kawata a "remarkable individual" who "embodied the best of PSR's vision and commitments and contributed so richly to the development of the leaders for the church across many communities with a powerful impact on the leadership, theology, and formation of Asian Pacific Islander communities."