

## “Being There” as the Meaning and Call of the Church: Involvement in Pastoral Care on the Buddhist Soil of Hokuriku and Noto

by Osumi Keizo, retired Kyodan pastor

Those of us doing evangelism in Hokuriku sometimes get completely unexpected phone calls requesting funerals. These requests come from people who have never attended our churches and who live a long way away. I cannot imagine that something like this would happen in a metropolitan area.

Until the outbreak of World War II, the Canadian Methodist Church took responsibility for the evangelization of the Hokuriku region (which is along the Japan Sea coast north of Kyoto, with Noto being the peninsula sticking out into the Japan Sea). One of this denomination's strategies was circuit evangelism, basically meaning that each church was a focal point, with responsibility for going out to bring the gospel to any place in the area where people lived. This was at a set time every year. As a result, little groups of Christians sprang up in every part of this region. However, when the missionaries had to leave because of WWII, these believers were left unsupported. Among them, however, a small number managed to keep their Christian faith alive. Indeed, “Only a remnant of them will return” (Isaiah 10:22).

After the war, it was possible for the churches to begin evangelism again, but they did not have the resources to reach everywhere, and thus we have to say that the believers in the most remote places were abandoned. In spite of this, they continued their lives, depending on Jesus Christ. And as they approached the end of their lives in this world, they contacted far distant churches to request Christian funerals. The churches cannot simply ignore this. Just because they have not been active members of his or her own church is no reason for a pastor to ignore these believers' requests. Similarly, such an opportunity can also be given to those who have come to faith while living in the cities but have returned to end their days in their hometowns or villages. This is one aspect that gives added meaning to the existence of churches throughout Hokuriku.

Hokuriku has been called the “Kingdom of Shinshu” (the Jodo-Shinshu sect of Buddhism). It is fair to say that the whole of society is living according to Buddhist beliefs. For funerals, although there is a basic pattern, each area has its own firmly established customs. Even as Buddhist believers, the reality is that a family cannot hold a funeral purely according to its own wishes, and there are cases where the members of the community take charge of the arrangements.

To hold a Christian funeral in such an environment means to go against local conventions. Thus, there are serious obstacles that require courage to overcome. We can therefore say that in this way, a confession of faith is strongly made manifest to the world. In this area, funerals can become the setting for proclamations of faith.

Togi Village, with Togi fishing port directly adjacent, lies in a remote part of the Noto Peninsula. The mackerel there

are particularly good. Along the coast in the fishing village of Shitsumi, there lived a Christian fisherman. Pastors not only from the Noto area, but also from Ishikawa and Toyama prefectures often used to gather there, where he taught them the art of fishing. It was said by those around them that they were glossing over their lack of success in evangelism by making it look as if they had time for fishing. When this believer who had been their fishing instructor was called to heaven, the ministers attended the funeral to pay their last respects, not because there had been any request for them to do so but simply out of feelings of friendship. As this was a small community, the villagers all knew each other by sight. Yet here were seven or eight completely unknown faces, and some of these strangers were wearing ministerial robes. The news quickly spread that these were “Jesus priests”—Christian pastors.

In this area, as a general rule, you can tell the importance of the funeral by the number of Buddhist priests in attendance, and so to have such a number of Christian clergy showing their faces at a funeral was a major incident in the village. It became a big talking point, and the image of Christianity rose in the minds of the people. Although it seems amazing that such a simple thing should have so much influence on public opinion, this established a kind of precedent, and to this day, whenever there is a funeral anywhere in Noto, the ministers from the three Noto churches make it a point to express their goodwill by being in attendance.

Recently there was a baptism at the small Togi Church for the first time in 30 years. If we are going to talk about the efficiency of evangelism, it is not a number worth mentioning. Any company would have pulled out of this place long ago. Yet in spite of this reality, a new church building has been erected for Togi Church. After the Noto Peninsula Earthquake in 2007 brought the already aging church building to the verge of collapse, a new one was built with the help of various Kyodan churches, and I want to express my thanks for this. This new building has attracted new people.

In a long life of faith, it is not uncommon for people to be faced with various personal relationships that make it difficult for them to continue attending church. Also, there are many cases of believers who are isolated and surrounded by deeply rooted Buddhism, or who find it physically impossible to maintain a church connection. The only people who can support such brothers and sisters are fellow Christians in the churches. Paul says, “I planted, Apollo watered” (1 Cor. 3:6). We also have our part to play. When we can help in any way in such an effort, from wherever we are located, then we can also share in the joy of the fruits of the labor. Paul goes on to say, “For we are God's fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:6, RSV). Can we not say that great things are expected of us? (Tr. SN)

—Summarized by KNL Editor Kawakami Yoshiko

Based on an article in *Shinto no Tomo (Believers' Friend)*, June 2013 issue

## Okinawa Hosts Tohoku Student Exchange Program

“Wow! It’s beautiful beyond belief!” “No way! How can this actually be real?” Beholding the beauty of Tokashiki Island in Okinawa, the children from northeastern Japan shouted out with excitement.

From August 7 to 11, a group of 16 elementary and junior high school students from the disaster zone in the Tohoku region spent five days on Okinawa Island and Tokashiki Island at the invitation of Okinawa Christian University. The Kyodan general secretary, a pastor, and a former relief center staff member accompanied them as leaders and were joined in Okinawa by 9 student volunteers, a pastor, and a seminary student to make the total number of 28 participants.

The breathtaking views, both during the evening and during the day, make it one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. The participants were able to swim with sea turtles and tropical fish in the nearby water; to participate in Eisa, the local traditional dance; and to eat delicious Okinawa Soba. The whole experience was like a dream.

Among the 16 students, some had lost their homes in the tsunami, others were forced to relocate because their homes were near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, while others were from areas less severely affected who had been able to remain. However, despite all of the worries the leaders had in preparing for the event, the youth who gathered were able to find a true time of healing and to leave feeling very satisfied after the five days. With its culture, the warmth and hospitality of its people, and its abundance of natural beauty, Okinawa is a place people in Tohoku have always found attractive. This gathering, however, was aimed beyond merely being a sightseeing trip to Okinawa, as there were three very specific goals in mind.

First, because of the health risks the students face in their everyday environment, bringing them to the prefecture of Japan furthest away from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant was a desire shared by the parents of the students as well. Likewise, for these children who had not been able to enjoy the ocean since the tsunami and nuclear

contamination, being able to enjoy such a program at the beach was quite a wonderful present for them.

Secondly, in Okinawa, there is an expression “*nuchidou-takara*,” meaning “life alone is precious.” This expression comes from the tragedies associated with World War II. Tokashiki and the other small islands of the Kerama group within the Okinawan chain, were the first to experience being forced to kill each other so as not to fall into the hands of the U.S. military, which occurred as the Okinawan invasion began. On the first day of our visit, we were shown the place where over 300 islanders were killed. It was a valuable experience and a testimony to the value of life.

Thirdly, the people of Okinawa know firsthand what it is like to be denied access to one’s own home for an extended period of time, as there are people on the island who have been waiting for well over half a century for the U.S. military and the Japanese government to return their property. Of course, the circumstances are not identical to those who are cut off from their homes because of radiation, but the two groups share common ground and share similar stories of pain. I would very much like to express my gratitude to the people of Okinawa District for their invitation. They are people who truly have known the deep sorrow of the loss of one’s own land.

Each day we had a worship service, and for some of the children, it was their first experience with the Bible and singing hymns. However, beholding the handiwork of God’s creation in Okinawa’s natural splendor and seeing and hearing the history of Okinawa was like a living worship service through which the true meaning of the cross was etched in our hearts in a very profound way. During the flight back from Okinawa, as we flew over the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, I prayed that these students might be empowered to become Christ’s disciples, bringing hope and comfort to a community that wrestles with an uncertain future.

(Tr. AKO)

—Arai Isaku, pastor of Natori Church, Tohoku District  
From *Shimpo* (*The Kyodan Times*), No.4782

## Executive Council Debates Rebuilding of Japan Christian Center

The second Executive Council Meeting of the 38th General Assembly Period took place July 1-2 at the Kyodan headquarters, with 29 of its 30 members present. Vice-moderator Ito Mizuo gave the sermon at the opening worship service. Then Haga Tsutomu, newly installed president of Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, expressed thanks for the restoration of good relationships with the Kyodan and stated that his attendance was not as an individual but as the official representative of the seminary.

General Secretary Nagasaki Tetsuo reported that Kyodan grants and loans for the rebuilding of churches and parsonages destroyed in the 2011 Great East Japan Disaster are being distributed on schedule, along with continuing support for church-related schools and the general rebuilding of the region. The Committee on Issues Surrounding the Japan Christian Center Building, continues to debate possible earthquake safety measures. Waseda Hoshien, located in the building next door, is prepared to cooperate, so based on the decision of the Kyodan Executive Committee, the Building Maintenance Committee proposed several options, including reconstruction. As arguments against the rebuilding proposal continued, Moderator Ishibashi Hideo suspended further debate. It was voted that the Kyodan Executive Committee reorganize the committee considering these issues.

Evangelism Committee Chair Kobayashi Katsuya reported that the basic policy of the Task Force on Evangelism Promotion is “to promote evangelism and research of best practices, with the intended goal of a unified faith based on the Kyodan’s Confession of Faith, Constitution, and Bylaws.” This relates to the aim of forming a Board of Evangelism in the future.

Vice-moderator Ito, chair of the Kyodan’s Preparation Committee for the International Conference on the Great East Japan Disaster, reported that the conference will be held at Tohoku Gakuin University, March 11-14, 2014 on the theme “Against the Myth of the Safety of Nuclear Energy—The Fundamental Question from Fukushima.” Representatives from overseas churches are being invited.

The Board of Publications ended the past fiscal year “in the black” despite the depression of publication business as a whole. It was also able to donate a portion of the sale proceeds from books on the Great East Japan Disaster to the affected areas. (Tr. TB)

—Kato Makoto, executive secretary

Based on an article in *Shimpo* (*The Kyodan Times*), No.4778

## In Mission with the First United Methodist Church of Cedar Park, Texas

by Kataoka Hoko, pastor  
Kamakura Sensui Church, Kanagawa District

From July 20 to 30, under the the auspices of the Task Force on Evangelism Promotion, I went on a mission trip with a group of ten young people, made up of mainly high school and university students. The First United Methodist Church of Cedar Park, Texas, which is a suburb of Austin, had invited us. More than 20 young people, together with our host families and other church people welcomed us. We attended the church worship service together and went out to do volunteer work on weekdays.

This church had sent a mission team called Project Youth to Japan (PY2J) in March 2012 to do relief work in the disaster-stricken areas. The fellowship born out of that experience with their brothers and sisters in Japan continued, and as they talked together about their missionary vision of "what to do next," the plan to make this trip was set in motion. During our ten days in Austin, we shared together in worship and experienced various volunteer activities with the homeless and people living in poverty. We learned that the relationships God has both with us and with others are blessed.

The young people who participated in the mission trip had each experienced earthquakes or other such times of suffering while they were growing up or at turning points in their lives. Some of them told me that their visits to the homeless reminded them of being in the disaster zones after an earthquake, and they mentioned they had wondered why it is that God allows us to experience such sorrowful things. But as these youth acted upon what they understood to be God's will, they also began to be present with others and to listen to what they had to say. And as they really faced up to these issues, they learned how to share God's love through their actions. I could see them maturing and becoming stronger day by day.

As I look back on this mission trip, I can see that none of us could have done this by ourselves but only as we walked together and shared together. It is my hope that we can continue this vision of mission together as we are blessed by ongoing fellowship and ask our brothers and sisters in Texas what it is that we can do next. (Tr. SM)

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## Participating in the Presbyterian Youth Triennium 2013

by Mochizuki Asao, pastor  
Yotsukaido Church, Kanto District

The Presbyterian Youth Triennium (PYT), hosted by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA), held once every three years, is a big event for high school students. High school students and leaders belonging to the PCUSA and related churches gather on the spacious campus of Purdue University in Indiana where several thousand high school students experience an unforgettable event. This year's event was held from July 16 to 20 under the theme "I am." The highlight of every day was the two-and-a-half-hour assembly held in a huge auditorium that could hold the more than 5,300 participants. The program included worship, dancing, singing, and drama. The worship brought about a passionate harmony to the whole event. The high school students separated into more than 150 small groups, and each group engaged in guided discussions and workshops with the group leader most of the day. In addition, there were other enjoyable programs in the garden outside, including dancing, concerts, picnics, et cetera. For the leaders, various lectures were also provided.

A lot of participants from various countries of the world joined in this PYT as global partners. As a global partner, the Kyodan sought candidates among high school students and sent Hanna Edefors (Shizuoka Eiwa Jogakuin High School) and Takano Yume (Yamanashi Eiwa Gakuin) as its representatives. Mochizuki Asao (a member of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations) and Takada Teruki (a Kyodan headquarters staff member) acted as leaders for the two students. It was not an easy decision for the

Japanese high school students to travel overseas in mid-July because of their school schedules, with examinations and other school programs still going on. Likewise, as the PYT is aimed at U.S. high school students, the language barrier was difficult for them. Nevertheless, through the various programs, they were challenged to think about their faith. Moreover, as they were representing the Kyodan, participation in this event was not something they could take lightly.

It is not difficult to imagine how tense the two girls felt during the bus trip from Indiana Airport to Purdue University through the endless corn and soybean fields, as they were surrounded by precocious U.S. high school students who were speaking too fast for them to follow easily. They literally prayed their way through, making their best effort. They were given an opportunity to introduce Japan and to teach U.S. high school students origami while wearing *yukata* (light cotton kimono). They also taught the Lord's Prayer, in Japanese, to many students. The U.S. participants really enjoyed the help of the students from Japan in choosing Chinese characters to write their names in Japanese. There was always a large group gathered around the two students, and many people were pleased with their participation.

Thanks to the PYT, they encountered a new world. I hope that this experience becomes a new door of life for them and that their personal experience will become a catalyst within the Japanese church. (Tr. KY)

## Thinking about Religious Life in a Multi-faith Society

by Kobayashi Makoto, pastor  
Enshu Church, Shizuoka, Tokai District

One's life of faith as a Christian is one of being sent out from the Sunday worship service into the world of one's everyday life and then coming back to church the next Sunday after living out one's faith that week. In other words, it does not end with just one's church life, and thus the portion of one's life of faith lived outside the church is much longer than that lived within.

Moreover, the situations one is sent out into—be that one's family, one's workplace or school—are in the context of a society with a Christian population of less than one percent. So while there may not be actual persecution, other people typically have little understanding of or interest in faith issues. Likewise, particularly for churches in outside metropolitan areas, the issues of how to relate to other religions are often difficult, as the surrounding communities are more closely knit and the religious traditions are stronger than in the cities.

Parishioners frequently ask their pastors such questions such: "What do I do when the situation leaves me no option but to attend some religious observance of another religion?" "When I attend a Buddhist funeral, how should I approach the issue of offering burnt incense?" "It causes bad feelings when I refuse to contribute money to the local Shinto shrine or to join in cleaning the grounds, et cetera, so what should I do?"

When I am faced with such questions—particularly those that relate to other religions and their facilities in the local community, I respond as follows: "First of all, we need to be cognizant of the fact that just as the Ten Commandments state, the God of the Bible is actually the only God that exists, and there are no other gods that really exist. Thus, Christianity is not a religion where we simply worship one God among many. It is true monotheism, where we worship the one and only God. So really be clear about that in your minds, and once you fully understand that, then how you react to situations involving other religions will fall into place naturally."

So, with the above principle in mind, we then move on to the specifics of each situation. Whatever the response decided on, it is always important to remember to show respect for other religions and their ceremonies. Without that, one will develop an exclusivist attitude, which will only result in the Christian becoming isolated. Of course, if one simply adjusts one's actions to suit other people without being guided by principles, this will not be pleasing to God, so care is needed.

For example, when offering incense during a Buddhist funeral, my personal opinion is that it is all right to do this, provided that you are clear in your own mind that the only God who actually exists is the God of the Bible and that you clearly show that you are doing this out of respect for the deceased and to show sympathy for his or her family. Likewise, it would be good to say a prayer something like, "O Lord, receive unto yourself the spirit of the deceased" while burning the incense.

Likewise, when it comes to making a contribution to the local shrine, I think it is permissible to do this as a symbol of relating to the community, provided that you can accept this as a part of local Japanese culture. Of course, simply declining to participate in this way because of one's personal faith is another option.

What is important here, of course, is that there are no pat answers that fit every situation, so the individual Christian will need to make these judgments according to the "measure of faith" he or she has been given. Can one live one's life only before God without paying any attention to what others think, or is a certain amount of compromise necessary? One's stance on these matters is something that develops over time and is part of one's maturing in the faith.

Perhaps you have been making the expected contribution to the local shrine, but as your Christian faith matures, you decide to change your mind and become able to decline graciously to make future contributions. To my way of thinking, giving careful consideration to such matters is what is important. One should not make such contributions without giving it any thought, but for instance, if you feel unable to decline, then the person coming around to collect could be asked to wait a minute at the door while you offer a prayer to God, saying something like, "I am sorry, Lord, but I just do not yet have the courage to refuse." I think God honors such prayers.

The above thoughts, of course, are my own, and so I should add that there is a range of opinion on what kind of advice should be given for such matters. At any rate, a good bit of wisdom is necessary to figure out how to be faithful to the one true God while living out one's Christian faith within a multi-faith society such as Japan, and this kind of wisdom is not something that is gained overnight. It takes time and is acquired as we continue to listen to and study the words of Scripture.

Finally, I would like to add a bit of historical background as to why Shinto shrines would expect to be able to collect contributions from all local residents as though they were all their parishioners. During the Edo Era, the feudal government set up a forced registration system for local Buddhist temples, where all the people had to register to "prove" that they were Buddhists (and not one of the outlawed Christians). After the Meiji Restoration, this system was changed so that in effect, the government gave special status to Shinto shrines, and in 1871, the Meiji government passed a law requiring everyone to register at the local shrine. This was thus closely related to the establishment of State Shintoism. The idea was that "1,000 households would support one shrine," so all citizens were made "parishioners." This system was in effect for only two years before being rescinded, but the effect has lasted until the present. (Tr. KY)

—From *Shinto no Tomo (Believers' Friends)* February 2013 issue

## Gertrude Sara Bigelow: Educational Missionary to Yamaguchi Prefecture

Gertrude Sara Bigelow was born on May 17, 1860 in the town of Batavia in Genesee County, New York. After graduating from Hamilton Ladies' Seminary, she worked at a local school. One year, when a missionary on furlough spoke about mission in Japan and called out for "those who would dedicate their lives to spread the gospel to Asia," Bigelow responded to the call. As preparation for coming to Japan, she earned a middle-school teaching license from the State of New York in September 1886 and was sent to Japan in 1887 at the age of 26.



Gertrude Sara Bigelow (1860-1941)

### *From Shinei Girls' School to Kojo Girls' School*

In 1888 Bigelow took a teaching position at Shinei Girls' School as an educational missionary from the Presbyterian Church. After a year, she became the principal, but in 1890, she moved to Hokuriku Girls' School in Kanazawa, where she remained for two years, to help establish the school there. In 1892 she moved to the city of Yamaguchi to a newly established school, Kojo Girls' School. The school was founded as Yamaguchi Eiwa Girls' School in 1891 by Hattori Shozo but had just been relocated and renamed. There is a record of the local people's remark that "such a young lady came to such a deserted area in the midst of the mountains!" It was a small school of only about 20 students, with a principal (Hattori Shozo), one foreign teacher, and three Japanese teachers. Bigelow taught English, ethics, music and physical education.

Bigelow went back to the U.S. on home assignment for the church mission board for a year from 1893 and attended the mission conference in Detroit. Including that time, she went home to the U.S. four times for home assignments (1893, 1903, 1915, and 1923). In 1897 her younger sister Florence Bigelow arrived at Kojo Girls' School. In 1899, at the age of 39, Sara Bigelow became the school's second principal. She even brought out a small organ and various sporting equipment, such as dumbbells and sticks, to the school playground in order to help teach physical education class. She was a multi-talented person who could also teach sewing (both Western and Japanese style) and needle-point work. Her students remembered her enjoying horseback riding on her own horse, named Kaiser. In 1909, she contributed an article, "Japan's Daughters and Missionary Teachers," to the magazine *The Assembly Herald*, published by the Presbyterian Church, reporting about girls' education in Japan.

### *Yamamoto Tsuchi and Yamamoto Goro*

In April 1899, a twelve-year-old girl entered Kojo Girls' School in Yamaguchi City from Chohu (Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture), traveling by steamboat and horse carriage. It was Yamamoto (Hironaka) Tsuchi, who later became the principal of Joshi Gakuin in Tokyo (1947-1966). Tsuchi was one of the precious fruits of Bigelow's hard work. She was Bigelow's successor, and she contributed greatly to women's Christian education in Japan. When Joshi Gakuin lost its building, right after it had been rebuilt following World War II, Tsuchi stood firmly and faced the difficulty as she led the students with confidence. She is also known as the translator of *Pollyanna* (by Eleanor Hodgman Porter, Japanese translation published in 1916).

Yamamoto Goro, Tsuchi's husband, was the person who introduced the Big Brothers Big Sisters movement to Japan. As chair of its board of directors, Yamamoto also led Baiko Jogakuin, which was Bigelow's last school, when it was going through a tough time during WW II.

### *Baiko Jogakuin*

In 1914 Kojo Jogakuin merged with Umegasaki Girls' School in Nagasaki and moved to a new location, where a new school called Baiko Jogakuin was established in Shimonoseki in Yamaguchi Prefecture. The name "Baiko" was written with a combination of characters from the names of the old schools. The principal was Hirotsu Tokichi from Umegasaki Girl's School, and Bigelow taught the Bible and English.

It was said of Bigelow: "She did her best wherever she was placed by the Lord and endeavored to be a cornerstone." "It was all because of her that the students were not so much affected by the bad influences of that era." Her beloved student, Yamamoto Tsuchi, also worked with Bigelow at Baiko for a time. In 1919, Bigelow received the medal for service to education from Yamaguchi Prefecture and in 1921, a celebration of her 30 years of service was held.

Bigelow also dedicated herself to the friendship between Japan and U.S.. In 1927, through the work of missionary Sidney Lewis Gulick, who longed for friendship and peace between the two countries, a total of 12,739 "Blue Eyed Dolls" were sent to Japan from the U.S.. Bigelow gathered student representatives from elementary schools to a conference hall in Yamaguchi to dedicate them. Even today one doll remains at Odonon Elementary School in Yamaguchi. The doll is wearing a winter coat with a back pocket and is called Rose Mary.

### *Returning Home and Her Last Days*

In May 1930, after staying in Japan for 45 years, of which 38 years were spent at Kojo and Baiko, she finished her service and returned to the U.S. at the age of 71. She donated 200 books and a strong brick building on the hill behind the school as a prayer and meditation house for Baiko Jogakuin. This "Prayer House" is still standing as one of the few buildings that survived the bombing of Shimonoseki in July 1945. Sara Bigelow went to her heavenly home on Nov. 1, 1941 in Los Angeles, California at the age of 81.

Baiko Gakuin will celebrate its 100th anniversary in Shimonoseki in 2014. Bigelow, who has been praised as a "reserved" woman who had "a gentle and sincere personality" and who "loved the students with an extraordinary passion," was an excellent educator and missionary for the young girls. Her will and longing for peace still lives on in the "House of Prayer" at Baiko Gakuin. (Tr. BN)

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—Toyoda Shigeru, archivist  
Baiko Gakuin University

## Serving a Japanese Church in Present-day Canada

by Zama Yutaka, pastor of Vancouver Japanese United Church (UCC)

I was sent to the United Church of Canada (UCC) as a commissioned Kyodan missionary in August 2012 and assigned to serve the Japanese congregation in Vancouver. Although I am recognized as an official member of the local UCC Presbytery, there is no clerical category of “foreign missionary” within this denomination. Thus, I am simply an ordained clergy of another denomination who is appointed to be a minister at a particular local congregation of the UCC. I find this situation a bit awkward, however, since being sent by the Kyodan is not formally recognized. Christian ministry to Japanese people in Canada began with this congregation in 1892, 15 years after the first Japanese immigrants arrived, and was supported by the Methodist Church in Canada (which became part of UCC). Today, Vancouver Japanese United Church is the only such congregation remaining from the prewar years that is active in Canada.

This history of over 120 years is divided into two stages by World War II. Prior to the war, membership grew so that by 1941 the church consisted of 340 members and had developed various community services for Japanese people, such as language study and education, social work, a community newspaper, a medical clinic. It also spread the gospel to those who lived in remote areas along the coast and inland towns and established a second-generation sister congregation operated in English. While these two congregations exist under one banner of Japanese-Canadian, they have nevertheless operated as separate entities from the beginning.

When WWII broke out in 1941, all those of Japanese origin or ancestry, whether or not they were Canadian citizens, were treated as “enemy aliens,” and forced by the government to relocate to various inland “internment camps” far from the West Coast, losing their jobs, properties, and community life. Thus, the history of the Japanese church was interrupted by the war.

The Canadian Government gave people of Japanese descent two options: go back to Japan or move to the eastern provinces for resettlement. As a result, several Japanese churches were established in Toronto, Hamilton, Winnipeg, and other cities east of Rocky Mountains. For four years after the war, Japanese people were forbidden to go back to their homes in and around Vancouver. The authorities had sold their houses, properties, cars, fishing boats, et cetera, without their consent, and even the building and property of Vancouver Japanese United Church was sold by the denomination. As the church has not yet been repaid, the congregation this year is claiming compensation for the unjust loss of the original property to UCC.

After the war, 50 former members of this congregation tried to restart the church in Vancouver and purchased a building. Later, new immigrants from Japan joined the congregation. During the 1960s, Sunday worship and other activities regained their former strength, and during this time, the number of Japanese UCC churches across Canada increased to 14. The ministers periodically rotated in serving these congregations and formed the Caucus of Japanese United Churches as an ethnic network among the Japanese UCC churches. This continued until about 1990, but since then, the Japanese-Canadian churches have been in decline.

In the old days before the war, the Japanese church in Vancouver functioned as a social community center. People met others in the church and connected with and supported each other, particularly the newcomers not yet used to life in Canada. Non-Christian people also valued the cultural

center, and people often gathered to enjoy Japanese food, such as *udon* and *sushi* and sweets, such as *manju*. Nowadays this function has mostly been taken over by secular organizations. One event that this church still holds, however, is a spring bazaar with a variety of homemade Japanese food, such as 4,000 traditional manju cakes, 1,000 rolls of maki sushi, and 600 bowls of udon noodle soup.

Before the war, new immigrants were mainly relatives or those who came from the same hometown as the early arrivals, and thus their relationships were strong and mutual. Many worked as farmers, fishermen, or in the mining and lumber industries. After the war, the occupations of new immigrants characteristically changed to ones related to the economic development of Japan, such as commercial business, professional engineering, and independent enterprises.

The population of those who speak Japanese in and around the Vancouver area has remained about 25,000, with few Christians among them. The number of Christians has not increased because coming from Japan are already Christian, and new arrivals often long for traditional Japanese things so are actually less open to Christianity than they would be otherwise. Also, society in western Canada has been becoming progressively less religious, and Christianity is not attractive to Japanese immigrants. Not only my Japanese congregation but also other Canadian churches are considering mergers to survive.

The Japanese community in Vancouver has a well-organized volunteer network that works hard to present Japanese culture with traditional spirituality: for example, *omatsuri*, *bon-odori*, *mikoshi*, *karaoke*, *mochitsuki*. These activities come from a common longing felt by those living in this multi-cultural society to connect with their Japanese identity, which is rooted in the desire to remember the good things of Japan even when overseas, along with the general multi-cultural atmosphere of Canadian society, which accepts everyone.

New immigrants since WWII are comparatively good in English, so if they marry an English-speaking spouse, they may more easily go to a local English-speaking church, if they go at all. Children of Japanese-speaking parents are raised as Canadians, and even if they attend church school in Japanese, they soon “graduate.” Unless new Japanese-speaking people come into the church, the Japanese-speaking church cannot survive. However, it is difficult now to find new Japanese believers who can join this church.

The time for change has come. One by one the Japanese-speaking congregations across Canada have shut their doors and merged with other local Canadian congregations. Many of the Japanese-speaking ministers have retired without being replaced. When the Japanese economy began to shrink in the 1990s, the number of new immigrants to Canada decreased, and the Japanese business market began downsizing. Such a change in the social environment had a negative effect on the Japanese-speaking congregations as well. As of today, Vancouver Japanese United Church has only 30 members and is the only Japanese-speaking congregation in the UCC. The number of members is getting less and less as well as older and older. In the last decade, only a few have newly joined the congregation.

As mentioned previously, I started my missionary life here in Vancouver just a year ago. The church had been without a pastor for almost six years as the last Kyodan missionary left ten years ago. It has been a time of transition again,

(Cont'd on p. 7)

## A change from poor English and poor personal relationships – Learning to Live to Become My True Self

by Hasegawa Satoshi  
Keiwa College Graduating Class of 2012

My mother took me to church from the time I was a child, and I grew up in that environment. In the beginning, church was a place for me to interact with friends, but as I grew older, I became aware of God's presence in my life and was led to baptism. With a desire to further deepen my faith, I entered Keiwa Gakuen High School.

During my school life at Keiwa, I found my dream for the future. That dream was to be an English teacher at a Christian school. The truth is that I was poor in English from the time I was a junior high student. The main reason was simply that I could not understand how to read and write English.

However, one of my high school English teachers taught me how to find phrases when reading and took time to teach me carefully the rules of English. As a result, I began to understand what I was reading, and this understanding led to the enjoyment of English. Because of this experience, I want to be able to share that enjoyment with students who are having difficulty. When I found out that I could acquire an English teaching certificate/license here at Keiwa College, I felt that God had led me to continue my study here to become an English teacher.

Now, as I reflect before graduation, I realize that in the midst of the difficulties of my course of study, I have experienced much joy. I have learned the importance of accomplishing tasks not just as an individual but also as a member of groups working together. And I have felt the

challenge and calling to be a teacher. Further, in the midst of my education at Keiwa College, I have found a new me. During high school, I was rather passive and had poor social skills in relating to people. However, toward the end of my high school life, I began to take some leadership in school activities. Through those activities I realized the pleasure of interacting with people. Once I entered university, I decided to be actively involved and try something new. That led to my participation in the Brass Band.

I had been interested in music from childhood and had tried to play various musical instruments. Here at the university, I decided to try the tenor saxophone. Until that time I had generally held back from doing what I really wanted to do, but I finally realized that it was okay to express myself. Furthermore, I found it enjoyable. In this way, I became more positive and active in personal relationships. Since then, I have been blessed with wonderful friends, and these four years of university life have been an endless source of joy and fulfillment for me.

I have studied here for seven years. During high school, I was able to make a start, and during my university life here I have found myself. Reflecting on this, I strongly feel that God led me here and has given me my dream for the future. At this point, I am still looking for a teaching position, but it is my intention to do my utmost to realize my goal of being a teacher. It is my strong wish to use my gifts as a teacher in a Christian school. (Tr. JS)

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## A University Equipping People to Serve

by Suzuki Yoshihide, principal of Keiwa College

Keiwa College was established in April 1991 as a university based on Christian educational principles for service to the local community and to the world at large. Since then, we have maintained these principles of education. The name "Keiwa" itself was chosen to reflect the principles of our institution: *kei* means "honor" or "respect," which reflects our honor of God; *wa* means "peace" or "harmony," which reflects our commitment to the creation and preservation of harmony and peace among people. In keeping with our principles, we are sending out men and women equipped to serve people, not things.

At Keiwa College, a commitment to a liberal arts education is one of our distinguishing features. By "liberal arts,"

however, the emphasis is not simply on intellectual acquisition. It is also on application, experience, and an awareness of our neighbor. In other words, it is holding in common with the local community those problems that concern all of us. As people living in the 21st century, this is the starting point for a proper global perspective.

Keiwa College is a community developing within its local setting, and there is a larger community of people who value and support Keiwa College. We are educating men and women who come together in this setting to prepare for their journey into the future. (Tr. JS)

From *Shinto no Tomo (Believers' Friend)* May 2013 issue

(Cont'd from p.6)

with the finances so critical that by the end of this year, the bank balance will be completely exhausted. The monthly deficit is \$4,000. The Presbytery, which is the supervising body and thus holds a certain degree of authority over it as well as the responsibility to see that it remains in good standing, has advised this congregation to join with other Asian congregations that are also unable to be fully self-supporting. However, this congregation decided to remain independent as a Japanese-speaking group as it is quite proud of its long history in this country, its deep relationship with immigrants from Japan, and the good reputation of its former activities that helped the Japanese people gather into a mutual supporting community.

The purposes of my ministry are, first of all, to care for this congregation in accordance with the Christian faith, to preach the gospel in the Japanese language, to encourage each member of the congregation towards maturity in faith and love, and to build up this congregation in Christ. It is quite urgent and essential to carry out this mission for this church, which had spent many years without its own minister. Thus as my priorities, I focus on Sunday worship, prayer meetings, Bible study groups, visiting the sick and elderly people, calling on long-term absentees, communication, and fellowship with individual members of the congregation, as well as constructive discussion with the administrative board.

## A Message From General Secretary: Comments as a Kyodan Observer at District Assemblies

The various district assemblies around the nation were successfully held with near perfect attendance of the delegates. But from the standpoint of the relations between the Kyodan and the districts, both Kyoto District and Okinawa District again declined to accept an official observer from the Kyodan. However, Kyoto District did promise to invite Kyodan Moderator to its some next executive committee meeting, so that is a hopeful sign.

Regarding the presence of a Kyodan observer at district assemblies, this is a practice that has continued from when the Kyodan was first organized. In Article 6 of the Kyodan's Constitution, it is stated that the Kyodan will establish districts for the purpose of facilitating its ecclesiastical functions and operations. Thus, on these occasions when local church pastors and laypersons gather together, receiving an official observer from the Kyodan headquarters to extend greetings from the denomination and to deepen relations with the districts and their churches is a way of sharing in the grace of God. The Kyodan representative prays for the Lord's blessings and peace upon the district assembly and is there to share together in the mission issues the districts and their churches are facing. It was with those expectations in mind that I attended the various district assemblies this year, and I was warmly received by all. The following are my thoughts concerning things that stood out to me.

First of all, I felt that while all the opening worship services, the ordination and licensing ceremonies, and the memorial services for deceased clergy and laity were very dignified, they were also full of joy and thanksgiving. For those clergy and lay members who are forced into lonely battles in their daily lives among the discord of the societies they live in, this is a time of comfort and encouragement for their faith.

The strength of the districts was shown in the worship service messages, hymns, and prayers that were overflowing with the joy of a common faith in the one Lord. Likewise, I was really thankful to see that the ordination and licensing ceremonies were all done according to the *Kyodan Shikibun* (Book of Common Worship), which is certainly a hopeful sign for the future health of the church. I was curious, however, why some districts dropped the "Amen" from hymns while others did not.

When it came to financial reports and other legal matters, I sensed a firm hand in all the districts. Likewise, I could sense a real effort to support smaller churches with a variety of financial aid programs so that the "life blood" could flow into the capillaries, as it were. This, of course, is related to the "Kyodan Subsidies for District Activities" system that is being reviewed now, so there were those who voiced their opinion that this should be handled very carefully.

In his words of greetings, Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo emphasized anew the unity of the Christian church as well as the integral unity of baptism and the receiving of Holy Communion, and he encouraged all to live their lives in such a way that as many people as possible will be led to be baptized and receive Holy Communion. There were numerous questions posed concerning this at many of the district assemblies, but as these were only questions of clarification and no voices of opposition were raised, I felt

that this movement towards a unity in the faith was making good progress in all of the districts I visited.

Following the dedication ceremonies for the new Task Force on Evangelism Promotion on Easter Sunday at the end of March, it began holding study seminars on the operation and educational policies of church-run childcare facilities, and the office is endeavoring to do this in all around the country. In conjunction with these efforts, seminars are being held for those seeking ordination through the "C course" (for those not holding a seminary degree), and youth delegates are being sent to the "Youth Mission 2013" exchanges with Germany and the U.S., and with the cooperation of the districts, ways are being sought to bear evangelistic fruit.

One issue that has come to the fore in all of this is the difficulty many churches face due to fewer children in the pipeline, so there is a trend toward a decreased demand for childcare along with the trend of aging and declining congregations. The initial proposals of the Research Institute on the Mission of the Church, which are based on the "Basic Principles of Mission" under discussion during the previous general assembly period (2010-2012), are still under review in the districts. While there are criticisms of these proposals, it cannot be denied that the church leaders who were pushing for reformation in the churches and cooperative regional evangelism 40 years ago also became radicalized to the point of violence.

Times have changed as present-day evangelism policies have developed, and although some districts still have vestiges of the former ways, the new understanding is that the church's social action consists of service and witness in the Lord, and nothing more. Together with this, the way districts are administered is quickly evolving as they take over the responsibility for the various Kyodan centers in accordance with the directives for reorganization of the Kyodan. Several notable proposals have surfaced in some districts, such as the establishment of a personnel committee.

Lastly, I want to express both my surprise and gratitude to the three districts of the Tohoku region that were affected by the March 2011 disaster because they are continuing to contribute their share of the support for ministerial pensions and the support of retired pastors. (Tr. TB)

—Nagasaki Tetsuo, general secretary

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