

International Youth Conference Considers Sustainable Energy Issues

by Iijima Makoto, executive secretary

Kyodan East Japan Disaster Relief Projects Planning Headquarters

The International Youth Conference on “Aiming to Realize a Sustainable Energy Future,” hosted by the Kyodan in Kyoto March 28-31, was a very significant event in the ongoing efforts to consider issues associated with nuclear power generation and energy consumption, in the following three respects.

1. The conference was held in Japan, which has experienced radiation exposure three times—in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Fukushima.
2. Not only did the conference clarify problems of nuclear power generation from a variety of viewpoints, it provided suggestions about how to realize a sustainable energy society in the future.
3. The conference, which was planned and implemented by youth leaders, gave birth to the possibility of a network that is rooted in the church and based on shared awareness among Christian youth from 12 countries, including not just Asian countries but also Canada, the USA, and Germany. There were 110 participants, with 20 from overseas.

These points are explained further below with corresponding numbers.

1. In 1945 Japan suffered the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and, after the East Japan Disaster on March 11, 2011, also experienced the nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. We therefore bear a special duty, now more than ever, to alert the world to the grave effects of radioactive contamination on our lives. At this conference we did not limit ourselves to speaking out; we were able to invite youth from other countries that listened earnestly to our voices and were willing to engage in new challenges with us.

2. The conference made it clear that the nuclear power plant accident of 2011 caused irreparable harm and dire situations in the following ways.

1) There are people who cannot return to their homes due to high levels of radiation.

2) Not only has mandatory evacuation destroyed local communities, differing viewpoints on radiation risks have also caused division in families and among friends.

3) Harmful effects on the health of children resulting from radioactive contamination are growing more serious with the passage of time.

Such problems were illustrated through the use of meticulous materials, and the situations and initiatives in other countries were also introduced. Through this, participants were also made aware of how important it is for us to adopt sustainable energy options into our daily lives; for example, going “off-grid.”*

3. The fact that this conference was planned over a period of one year and was carried out by young people is very



Participants at the International Youth Conference in Kyoto

meaningful not only for the future of the Kyodan but also for the Christian community in Japan. As we look forward with anticipation to the rich relationships that may develop among the youth who gathered, including those from abroad, we in the Kyodan must ask ourselves what we can do to foster such relationships.

Fellowship can take many forms. The special characteristic of the fellowship experienced at this conference was that participating youth discovered the importance of collaborating across denominational boundaries while remaining firmly grounded in the Gospel faith. Also noteworthy is the fact that 16 of the Kyodan’s 17 districts were represented at the conference. (Okinawa sent no delegate.) It is encouraging to know that the Kyodan can come together like this to engage a single issue as one body.

Aside from the closing day’s plenary session, where we discussed and adopted a final statement, the conference was an intense event that featured 20 lectures and presentations in 21/2 days. The young organizers did a wonderful job of implementing the program. We can say that this youth conference inherited the spirit of the Kyodan’s first international conference, held at Sendai in 2014, and bore fruit beyond our expectations.

The tasks that lay ahead of us are: (1) to ensure that the issues of nuclear power transmitted from Japan will be deeply and widely received abroad and (2) to work with overseas partners who sent youth to this conference to host in those countries, on a rotating basis, a series of conferences focused on nuclear power issues.

With heartfelt prayers to the God of history, this concludes my report on the conference. (Tr. DGM)

*Going “off-grid”: Disconnecting from the power distribution network (“grid”) of major electric power companies by installing and using one’s own power-generation facilities.

East Japan Disaster Sixth Annual Memorial Worship Service

by Kato Makoto, executive secretary

In March 2017, Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) personnel, namely, Rev. Dr. Kerstin Neumann (Head and Deputy General Secretary of the Department of Mission and Partnership), Rev. Solomon P. Benjamin (Liaison Secretary for East Asia and India), and Dr. Carola Hoffmann-Richter (EMS member) visited Japan. The purpose of their recent visit was to attend the anniversary meeting that was to be held in remembrance of the East Japan Disaster—to attend it on the date that the disaster occurred (March 11) and at the actual place it happened—and further, to meet leaders of the various Japanese churches and institutions affiliated with EMS and deepen their friendly relationship with them.

From March 10 to 13, I accompanied them as we followed an itinerary that took us to Sendai, Ishinomaki, Fukushima, and Asian Rural Institute (ARI). Since Secretary Neumann and Secretary Benjamin joined in the work of EMS last year, this was their first visit to Japan. As a former EMS mission co-worker, member Hoffmann-Richter had previously spent eight years in Japan, working primarily in the Kansai area. This time she came to Japan to provide translation and serve as a guide. At 2 p.m. on March 10, we met at the Kyodan Tohoku Disaster Relief Center, Emmaus in Sendai to hear presentations by Tohoku District (which has shouldered the burdens of Emmaus), the Aizu Radiation Information Center, and the Kyodan Tohoku District Nuclear Disaster Relief Task Force, Izumi concerning their work. Following these presentations, the ensuing discussion period was marked by a lively exchange of opinions.

On the morning of March 11, we moved to Ishinomaki to observe directly what is currently being done in the disaster area. At Ishinomaki Yamashiro-cho Church, from 2:30 in the afternoon, we participated in the East Japan Disaster Six-year Memorial Worship Service, which was sponsored by Tohoku District. Rev. Sato Masashi, who had been sent by the Kyodan to serve as a director of Emmaus, delivered the sermon.

On Sunday, March 12, we moved to Fukushima Church, where we participated in another worship service commemorating the sixth anniversary of the East Japan Disaster. Rev. Hoshina Takashi, pastor of Fukushima Church, gave a sermon entitled, “Especially in Weakness.” He is also vice-moderator of Tohoku District and head of the Izumi Room of the Kyodan



At Ishinomaki Yamashirocho Church.
From left: Solomon Benjamin, author Kato Makoto,
Kerstin Neumann, Kataoka Terumi
From right: Xiaoling Zhu (CGMB), Carola Hoffmann Richter

Tohoku District Nuclear Disaster Relief Task Force (which deals with radioactivity issues).

Late afternoon on the same day, we visited ARI in neighboring Tochigi Prefecture and shared in the dinnertime fellowship. We stayed in the guest room; however, the construction of the building was different from that found in Germany, and the coldness of the night in Nishinasuno caused some difficulty. The next morning, we participated in the morning program. After experiencing various farm chores, we had breakfast and shared in the morning worship service led by missionary Jonathan McCurley, who comes to us from the United Methodist Church. There are no students there at this time of year, so this gave us an opportunity to hear from the staff concerning ARI's programs.

On March 13 we met with Kyodan Moderator Rev. Ishibashi Hideo and a number of other pastors and executive secretaries at the Japan Christian Center. After that we visited the Korean Christian Church in Japan, the National Christian Council in Japan (which is in the same building as the administrative offices of the Kyodan), and in the afternoon, the Tomisaka Christian Center.

Later EMS personnel visited the Kansai region; (I did not accompany them for this portion of their schedule in western Japan). On March 18 they completed their scheduled activities and returned to Germany. (Tr. DM)

Prayer Meetings

II. Lay Leadership of Church Prayer Meetings

by Taino Keiko, member
Kawakami Church, Ehime Prefecture

Kawakami Church was founded by a U.S. missionary in 1909 as a place for the Japan Methodist Church to hold lectures. At the time of its founding, there were already many Christian farmers. Pastor Matsuda Suzuo, appointed in 1947 just after World War II, got involved by providing land for the establishment of Galilee Home, which is part of Airin-en Special Nursing Home for the Elderly. This facility is a social welfare corporation, which at that time was still rare in farming towns. For a long time, he operated a kindergarten named "Olive Garden." It closed ten years ago, but until then it had contributed greatly to community welfare and education. After his death in 1983, there were intermittent periods in which there was no pastor, and then the baton was passed to Pastor Mori Kenshiro, Pastor Imai Makio, and Pastor Hirosawa Mikio. Since 2015 the church has been experiencing its third period without a pastor. At present, Pastor Ota Tatsuo of Matsuyama Eiko Church in Ehime Prefecture is overseeing the church, which is a small congregation of 17 resident communicant members. He comes to hold worship services and attend church board meetings. Kawakami Church is also assisted by other pastors in the subdistrict.

I was baptized when I was 22 years old at Iimorino Church in Hyogo Prefecture. I transferred to Kawakami Church when I got married 54 years ago. I thought, "I want to marry someone with whom I can go to church." That was the reason I married a Christian man. However, his family operated a dairy farm with 40 to 50 cows. It was all we could do to observe Sunday worship. It was about ten years ago when I was finally able to go to the prayer meetings. I am now 79 years old. Even during periods when there was no pastor, Kawakami Church maintained its prayer meetings, never once canceling them. Prayer meetings used to be held on Wednesday nights; then about 50 years ago it was moved to the afternoon, and now it is held from 10 to 11 a.m. There have been fewer attendees as time has passed because members have died or stopped coming for other reasons. Including myself, there have been three people who have always attended. Even so, there is never any talk of discontinuing the prayer meeting. We are continually encouraged by the words of Ueda Noriko, who is now 92 years old and still active as a Sunday school teacher. She says, "As long as there are people who can gather together, even if it is only one or two people, I want to continue the weekly prayer meeting."

When Pastor Ota took on the role of overseer of the church, we considered moving it to the afternoon so that he could also participate. However, because there would have been someone else who could not attend, we decided to continue holding it in the morning, as a prayer meeting for the laity. For the first half of the

prayer meeting, we study the Bible. We are presently studying the books of the Chronicles. The person whose turn it is to lead reads the Bible passage ahead of time, and then comes and shares his or her thoughts with everyone. Though there are many sad things happening in today's world, as we study this subject, we think about what Jesus is saying to us now, and we all discuss it together. After that, we follow a booklet issued by Shikoku District called "Inoro Shikoku no Kyokai" ("Churches of Shikoku, Let's Pray as One Body"). We pray for Kawakami Church, for the people connected to it, for the many children who gather in the facilities related to the church, and for each other.

Whenever I think, "Today there is a prayer meeting," it is very encouraging for me. In life, there are many unpleasant things, but if you go to church and pray, God will listen to everything. Since my husband died I have been living alone, but it is reassuring to realize that God is with me so I am not really alone. Whenever all three of us look at each other and feel the same way about something, we are thankful and say, "It is so good that we were able to come to the prayer meeting today." Our prayer meeting is also a place to confirm such blessings from God.

Although Kawakami Church is small, in 2014 we were able to construct a new building. The old church, built in 1934, was a two-story wooden structure that had badly deteriorated. It was also inadequately retrofitted to withstand earthquakes. It had reached the limit of how much repair could be done to stop the rain from leaking in. The church was on a mountainside, where transportation was definitely inconvenient. A long time ago, the road in front of the church building was also the main road that ran through the center of town, so there was a lot of traffic. However, since then a bypass and a highway have been constructed, and the circumstances are completely different.

We decided to rebuild, using our fund of 20 million yen that had been saved by the church for 40 years, adding donations from churches all over the country. We relocated to level ground. We had prayed for this for 40 years, and it became a reality. We were blessed because when the church was founded, missionaries had prepared for us a large sanctuary for worship and a parsonage. Proceeds from the sale of the large plot of land and the buildings could be used for covering the cost of repaying the debt. We are thankful for God's wondrous guidance. (Tr. KT)

—From *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend), January 2017 issue.
Summarized by KNL Editor Kawakami Yoshiko

Testimonies Featured at the 2017 Missionary Conference

by Takada Teruki, staff
Kyodan General Office, Tokyo

A three-day missionary conference was held at the base of Mt. Fuji at Torchbearers Yamanakako from Monday, March 20 (a holiday), with the theme, “Joy at the Household of God” (Acts 2:42-47). Including missionary families and Kyodan staff, a total of 37 persons attended, among whom 23 were missionaries.

The Site: Torchbearers Yamanakako

The Torchbearers, which originated after World War II from the mutual friendship between the churches of British Wales and Germany, was founded for the purpose of opening Bible camps throughout the world. The one in Japan is a retreat established in an area located one kilometer from the shore of Lake Yamanaka and made to resemble closely the forests of Germany and the countryside of Canada. The wooden building felt soothing to me. The fragrance and heat of the wood burning in the fireplace warmed not only the participants’ bodies but also their hearts. This was different from a hotel or a Japanese inn. The immediate feeling of “narrowness” sensed by those who came—that very cozy closeness of space—shrank the distance between the participants, and relaxed relationships were instantly formed. In the midst of this cozy atmosphere, free of tension, the messages at the worship services and the testimonies reverberated deep within our hearts, and we experienced a noticeable rise in our ability to concentrate.

The Schedule

The message at the opening worship service on the first day was offered by Pastor Imaizumi Nobuhiro of Mukonoso Church (in Hyogo, near Osaka), and following a delicious supper, we split into small groups to introduce ourselves and pray for one another. It snowed from the morning of the second day. That morning, testimonies were given by Elizabeth Mbundu and Karen Strydom, teachers at Kyoai Gakuen High School, and following breakfast, under the direction of Kyodan Executive Secretary Kato Makoto, there was a treasure hunt and a ping-pong tournament. During individual free time that afternoon, we went to a nearby hot spa and other places. The evening campfire was canceled due to snow, but instead we warmed up the meeting room and held a candlelight service during which Nishinasuno Church (in Tochigi) Pastor Ban Hyung Wook and Sheila Norris, a teacher at Kwassui Women’s University (in Nagasaki), gave testimonies of their personal struggles of evangelizing in Japan.

From the morning of the third day, the weather was fine. The program began with the testimony of Uotsu Church (in Toyama) Pastor Ruth Ester Waehrer, followed by a worship service commemorating deceased missionaries led by Kobe Jesus Band Church Pastor Claudia Genung-Yamamoto and a communion service, with Rev. Thomas Goetz of Hokusei Gakuen University (in Sapporo) officiating. During the final meeting, the next year’s planning committee was chosen. Then Rev. Akiyama Toru, chair of the Kyodan’s



In the chapel at Torchbearers Yamanakako.
Front row, lft.-rt.: Devora Umipig-Julian, Carol Imaizumi,
Imaizumi Nobuhiro, Josephine Kimura, Elizabeth Mbundu

Commission on Ecumenical Ministries, gave the message at the closing worship service. Throughout the entire meeting, Josephine Kimura of Ferris Girls’ High School (in Yokohama) provided the music.

The Participants

From Hokkaido in the north to Kyushu in the south, attendees were able to gather together from throughout the country. First-time participants were Mrs. Carol Imaizumi from Mukonoso Church, Rev. and Mrs. Lee Meng Jer from Tokyo Taiwan Church, Rev. Lin Mei-Ying from Saitama Chinese Worship Mission Church, missionary Karen Strydom of Kyoai Gakuen Gakuen, and Yuka, the adopted daughter of missionaries Jonathan and Satomi McCurley. There was sparse participation by missionaries from Korea and Taiwan and only Akiyama Toru, moderator of Kanto District, who also serves as chair of the Committee on Ecumenical Ministries, represented the Kyodan districts.

The Special Blessings of this Missionary Conference

I have worked in the Kyodan Office for the past ten years, but I have never before experienced as great a blessing as I did at this missionary conference.

1. The site was separated from daily life, a place free from our regular work and interpersonal relationships.
2. On the contrary, the institution was in the middle of nature, and when you tuned your ears to God’s Word, strangely it was a place where that Word reverberated in your heart.
3. Again, this time especially, there was a blessed chance to hear the testimonies of senior missionaries who had given their lives and struggled for a long time during their mission work in Japan. Sheila Norris’s testimony about her work of teaching and overcoming difficulties particularly struck my heart.

(Cont’d on p.5)

Kyodan Executives Attend the PCT General Assembly in Taipei

by Kato Makoto, executive secretary

The 62nd (2017) General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan was held April 18–21 in a large conference room at Mackay Memorial Hospital in Taipei. I attended at the invitation of the PCT as a Kyodan representative, together with Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo and Hayashida Yoshiyuki and his wife Kyoko, former missionaries to Taiwan. Following the opening worship service led by Rev. Suda Tada, moderator of the previous PCT General Assembly, those of us from overseas churches gave our greetings. First was Rev. Hayashida, presently the pastor of Uneno Church in Kawanishi, Hyogo, Japan. The Hayashidas had served the Japanese church in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, from 1983 until March 2017. The PCT covered their expenses to attend and gave them this opportunity to speak to the assembly. The fourth and final greeting was that of Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi, who expressed his deep gratitude to the PCT for exchanges with the Kyodan and particularly for its great support for the victims of the Great East Japan Disaster of March 2011.

One of the distinguishing features of the PCT is the large number of pastors of aboriginal ethnicity. As a result, the handbook used at the assembly included Scripture readings in Amis, Bunun and seven other representative native languages. The assembly itself was conducted in Mandarin Chinese, but one could hear the Taiwanese language being used as well. Delegates' statements and remarks were limited to three minutes, and since the remaining time for each delegate was displayed on a screen above the platform, no one spoke overtime.

On the first day, the new moderator was chosen by ballot, with Rev. Chen Ming-Chin being elected. The main agenda on the second day was the ratification of the executive secretaries at the church headquarters,

(Cont'd from p.4)

For this reason, participants soon opened their hearts, and as if they had been acquaintances for many decades, they were mutually able to deepen their trust relationships. It was a heart-cleansing experience.

The Planning Committee

What we must not forget about the missionary conference is the existence of the planning committee. On the last day of the 2016 Missionary Conference, held in Sendai one year ago, the following four persons were chosen and have borne that heavy responsibility:

1. Rev. Imaizumi Nobuhiro (United Methodist Church), Mukonosu Church),
2. Rev. Timothy Appau (All African Baptist Fellowship,



Hayashida Yoshiyuki

and while there was some heated discussion concerning that, the slate was approved. The new associate general secretaries chosen were Rev. Tsai Nan-Hsin and Rev. Eleng Tjaljimaraw, while Rev. Joshua Lian was selected to be the executive secretary for the Ecumenical and International Committee. Executive Secretary Ching An-Yen, who played such a vital role in the deepening of relations between the PCT and the Kyodan during the past four years will be stepping down at the end of June.

The PCT is deeply divided over the issue of sexual minorities. There was passionate debate with no unity evolving, so the matter is shaking the foundations of the denomination.

Our schedule was such that we needed to bid farewell on the third day of the conference, but former General Secretary Andrew Chang made arrangements for Ishibashi and myself to drive through the Keelung area of northern Taiwan together with Rev. Lee Mneg Jer and his wife, who were the former PCT missionaries to the Kyodan's Tokyo Taiwanese Church. I was so thankful that we could have good fellowship on the way to the airport. (Tr. TB)

- Asian Rural Institute),
3. Rev. Chang, In-Hye (Korean Methodist Church), Hizume Church), and
4. Ms. Devora Umipig-Julian (UMC, Yoyogi Uehara Church).

At the initiative of Secretary Kato during the first consultation held in the Kyodan conference room in July 2016, the place, theme, and Bible passages were decided. Then while staying overnight at the site of Torchbearers Yamanakako, the committee proceeded to draft the schedule as well as to decide the division of responsibility. During the five days prior to the conference, when we were so busy with preparations, the flexible coordination of Devora Umipig-Julian was particularly helpful, for which I am very grateful. (Tr. RT)

Let Us Testify to the Good News through our Lives

by Otomo Satoshi, pastor, Nakamuracho Church, Tokyo
Professor, Tokyo Union Theological Seminary

My hometown is Kuroishi in Aomori Prefecture. Some 140 years ago, in 1878, three students from Toogijuku School, which had just been established in Hirosaki, came to Kuroishi and boldly began Christian evangelism. That was the beginning of Kyodan Kuroishi Church. One anecdote from that time is found in a book written in 1880 by an English traveler named Isabella Lucy Bird entitled, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (published by Kodansha). She said that while she was staying in Kuroishi, these three young men from the former samurai class arrived and enthusiastically told her in broken English that they were there to communicate the Gospel to the people of Kuroishi. Thus, during this time of great upheaval in Japanese society soon after the Meiji Restoration, a U.S. missionary had gone to the far north snow country of Aomori and made known the Gospel of Christ. These young men, who had gladly received the message, then were baptized and soon went out on their own to evangelize the surrounding areas, and Kuroishi Church was born.

It was in that small church that my faith was nurtured. I became a pastor and am now taking on the responsibility of raising the next generation of evangelists. The question I also ask myself is whether I have been able to inherit the evangelistic passion of those young men of long ago.

Isabella Bird was the daughter of an Anglican Church vicar, and when she traveled to Japan in the early Meiji Era, she wrote this concerning the few Japanese Christians that existed then: "These converts to the Christian faith were not simply converts, they were evangelists of high moral character, and in that there is great hope for the future of Japan." However, she also warned that while the Japanese were adopting Western civilization at a prodigious rate, they were also resistant to Christianity, and their society and politics were in danger of moral decline due to materialism. She stressed the importance of communicating the gospel to the Japanese, expressing her hope that all Japanese who received baptism would themselves become evangelistic in their proclamation of the gospel. She concluded that hope for the future of Japan really lies in that. This message really speaks to us today as well.

It has been over 150 years since Protestant evangelism began in Japan, and yet the Christian population of Japan has not reached even one percent. While the numerous mission schools in Japan have had a positive effect, the total number of baptized Christians who attend worship services is still less than one million. Moreover, it has even been gradually declining in recent

years. This decline is most apparent in rural churches. While evangelists are certainly necessary to revive the church, more important is the work of the laity. There are some types of evangelism that only lay people can do—namely, living a life that "releases the fragrance of Christ."

One laywoman who is a pediatric doctor in a rural town has a box of Gideon Bibles in the waiting room of her clinic, with a sign on it saying, "Take as many copies as you want." Worried mothers who bring their sick children to the doctor and are encouraged by her kindness often take a Bible back home with them. Some of them are moved by the words they read and think they would like to visit the church this doctor attends, so they bring their children with them. Some of those have then been baptized and become active members of that church.

Another laywoman married a Japanese man who was very much against her becoming active in church, even forbidding her to attend services. So on Sunday mornings, she would sit in the corner of the living room reading her Bible and, with tears in her eyes, softly singing hymns. Their three children grew up, watching their mother do this each Sunday. They saw their beloved mother treasuring this so much that they went to church themselves, and this eventually led to all three being baptized, which in turn led to their father changing. He also eventually was led to Christ and became a baptized Christian.

Last year, I experienced a totally unexpected stroke. Being faced with the possibility that my life would soon be over, I was forced to think seriously about what I should do with the rest of my life. I told of my experience in an article in a certain magazine, where I mused, "If I only have a short time left in life, I would want to use that time for the Lord and not myself. I would want to use it for evangelism, and I wonder if others think the same way." As a result of that article, one pastor's wife was encouraged to enroll in Tokyo Union Theological Seminary.

If each layperson would get involved in the kinds of evangelism they can do, we would see a revival of the Japanese church. I want to communicate the Gospel message and to do that as a joint project with all of you as we think together about what each of us can do.

(Tr. TB)

—*Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend), Feb. 2017 issue
Summarized by KNL Editor Kawakami Yoshiko

Our lives will end someday. What must we do before then?

by Takiyama Kiyomi, pastor, Takanosu Church, Akita Prefecture, Ou District
Director, Kodomoen Shalom, Certified Nursery School and Kindergarten

My father used to declare, "I want to be working as a pastor until the day I die." Ironically, just as he had said, he finished his earthly journey when he was 58 years old as the head pastor of Fukushima Shinmachi Church. My father was a happy-go-lucky kind of fellow who really loved children and liked to talk with people but did not like going to the doctor. He was so happy the day of my graduation from college, but that very night a stroke caused by arrhythmia took him away to heaven. It was just four days before Easter.

On that Easter Sunday my mother, the assistant pastor, gave the message instead of my father, who had almost always preached the sermons. Before that day, I had seen my mother stand at the pulpit only a few times. I do not remember the content of the message, but I will never forget the sight of my mother, illuminated by the light coming from the crystal glass of the chapel, looking straight ahead while speaking.

My parents were the kind of people who got really excited every Sunday. My mother used to get up especially early on Sunday mornings and sing hymns. I generally hid under the covers, but as her voice gradually got closer, I would jump out of bed. For me, the hymns that my mother sang were not a lullaby, but an alarm clock. My father had a habit of saying, "The job of a pastor is the best job!" He was the kind of person who, whenever he was asked about his sermon, would not stop talking.

I do not remember ever being told that I should become a pastor, but at some point I began to feel, "It is unnatural for me to live life as something other than a pastor." I had been thinking, "Someday I will dedicate my life. Until then, I will do what I like." But when I lost my father, I made up my mind and said, "Now is the time!" Right away, I got an application form and headed to an interview with a committee from Tohoku District in order to apply for the "C-course" examination.* The answer of the committee members was, "You are too young. But if you go to seminary, we will give you a recommendation. You need to study." When I think about it now, all I can do is just blush. But at that time, I was ignorant of the fact that I did not know anything at all. Angrily, I headed for home.

I could not endure leaving my home in Fukushima, so I procrastinated about going to seminary and got a job at a nearby *juku* (cram school). Work was enjoyable, and every day was comfortable. But somewhere in my heart there was a sense of impatience. I thought, "I should not be doing this." However, I could not break away from what I was doing. I kept saying to myself, "One more year," until six years passed.

Then the East Japan Disaster happened. March 11, 2011 was supposed to be a normal day without anything unusual

happening. It started out no different from usual. I left home, cleaned my workplace, and began to prepare for my lessons. At 2:46 p.m. as the ground shook violently, everything changed. It was announced that everyone should return home, so I went home and found my mother cleaning the church sanctuary. But our house was a mess! My mother was worried and said, "I wonder if we can hold the worship service this Sunday." I looked at her, dumbfounded, and thought, "She really thinks of nothing else but church." After my father had passed away suddenly, she was worried about the worship service even as she was crying. And now, even during the Great East Japan Disaster, she was more worried about the worship service than about our own home, even though we had just had a sudden earthquake. Watching my mother, I saw that she had a divine and unwavering calling to be a pastor.

Every day, in the newspaper and on television, there were reports about the people who had died. I heard the names of people who were younger than I was. I am sure that each person had been spending that day no differently from any other day. However, days that are no different from other days do not last forever. Life in this body is going to come to an end someday. That "someday" will surely come, and it will come suddenly. As I faced the reality of so many deaths and became conscious of my own mortality, I started to think about what I wanted to do before I die. At the time of death, what would I be thinking? As I considered that, the answer was very clear to me. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." (Jer. 1:5)

Five months have now passed since I graduated from seminary and was called to Takanosu Church. As the church had been without a pastor for three years, I was appointed right away. My first Sunday in the pulpit was March 27, which strangely enough was Easter Sunday, and I recalled the sight of my mother, standing at the pulpit. This church is just a small group of seven church members, but they support me, a novice evangelist, both physically and spiritually. They are patient and polite with me, so I am getting along fine. Also Kodomoen Shalom, a church-related center for early childhood education and care, has welcomed me warmly as its director. I am really grateful. I think that I am protected like this due to much prayer behind the scenes.

"But by the grace of God, I am what I am." (I Cor. 15:10)
The Lord is with me, so I will keep trusting in the Lord. I will endeavor to do my daily work, which has been given to me today. (Tr. KT)

—From *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend), October 2016 issue

*Without attending a seminary or theological school. C-course candidates are required to pass all of the exams within a certain number of years after beginning the program.

Acting General Secretary's Report:

Strengthening Ties with Korean Churches in Korea and Japan

The work of the General Secretariat Office is quite varied, and one important function is its work in relating to church bodies outside the Kyodan. Our relationship with the "Group of Three" Korean Churches [The Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), and The Korean Methodist Church (KMC)] together with the Korean Christian Church in Japan (KCCJ), is increasingly getting stronger.

The Kyodan had formulated a mutual mission agreement with the three Korean churches (PCK, PROK, and KMC) in 1992, but after 1999, we had not held a joint conference until 2016. Likewise, even though the Kyodan and the KCCJ established their mutual mission agreement in 1984, sufficient exchanges between clergy have not been developed. However, during 2014 and 2015, former General Secretary Nagasaki Tetsuo led the way in finally initiating substantive dialog on the subject of clergy exchanges. In addition to Nagasaki Tetsuo, Kyodan Secretary Kumoshikari Toshimi, Executive Secretary of General Affairs Dohke Norikazu, and Executive Secretary for Ecumenical Ministries Kato Makoto were selected to represent the Kyodan in the consultations, which first began with several meetings with the KCCJ. The conclusion of those initial consultations was that the three Korean churches should also be invited to participate in these consultations, so in 2016, formal discussions between the three Korean churches (PCK, PROK, and KMC) and the two Japan-based churches (Kyodan and KCCJ) began.

One topic of discussion is the two routes by which a clergy member of a different denomination can become a Kyodan pastor. One is to come in as a missionary sent by another church. Such a person is sent by the home church or denomination to work as a Kyodan clergyperson in a Kyodan church or related school or other institution. Another route is for such a clergy person to transfer his or her ordination to the Kyodan. The first route is handled by the Commission on Ecumenical Ministries, while the second goes through the Commission on Ministerial Qualifications. Recognition of missionary status is almost always done through documentation, but for the transfer of ministerial qualifications, the process involves the various regulations of the Kyodan Constitution and bylaws, together with interviews, and so on.

For overseas pastors working in Japan, there is another significant issue. When someone is sent from overseas as a missionary to Japan, documentation from the sending body is sufficient to obtain a religious worker's visa. However, when it comes to the transfer of ministerial qualifications, it is much more difficult to get such a visa. Depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary to apply for a different kind of visa. It is to discuss these various issues that we are now continuing these dialogs between the two Japan-based churches and the three Korean churches.

I would also like to report on the "Minority Mission Center." This new office is focused on the work of the KCCJ and was established at the Japan Christian Center on April 8, 2017 in the former office of the KCCJ and its general secretary. The impetus for establishing this center was the International Conference on Minority Issues and Mission held at the Korean YMCA in Japan, Nov. 18-21, 2015. Working under the slogan "Living Together under a Big Tent," this conference initiated numerous efforts to deal with the problem of "hate speech" and other forms of discrimination faced by foreigners living in Japan—particularly Koreans in Japan.

The Kyodan is cooperating with this effort by sending one member to the Minority Mission Center Board of Trustees and two members to its Executive Committee. We pray that the grace of God will reign over the earth. (Tr. TB)

—Acting General Secretary Dohke Norikazu
Executive Secretary of General Affairs

KNL Corner

Publisher: Dohke Norikazu

Editor: Kawakami Yoshiko

Copy Editor: Hazel Terhune, Timothy Boyle

Executive Secretary: Kato Makoto, *Staff Assistant:* Niina Tomoko

Editorial Committee: Kofukada Yutaka, Nishio Misao,
Tokuta Makoto, Suematsu Kozue

Translators: Timothy Boyle, David G. McIntosh,
David Murchie, Joe Stroud, Robert Terhune, Kevin Tysen

Note: The names of Japanese persons are listed in traditional order, with last names first.