

Facing the Challenges of the Greatest Crisis in Japan since World War II: The Great East Japan Earthquake

Being Servants of Life Together with the Churches in the Devastated Regions

by Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo

“Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (Ps. 124:8)

We wish to express our heartfelt concern for all the people affected by the recent earthquake and tsunami. At 2:46 p.m. on March 11, a devastating earthquake struck eastern Japan. At the magnitude of 9.0, it is the fourth strongest earthquake in recorded history, and it wrought horrendous devastation. The energy released was 45 times more than the Great Kanto Earthquake (Tokyo) of 1923 and 1,450 times more than the Hanshin-Awaji (Kobe) Earthquake in 1995. Likewise, the massive tsunami it generated devastated the Pacific coast for some 500 km (301 miles), swallowing up entire communities in the Ou, Tohoku, and Kanto regions. Ten days after the event, we are still unable to confirm the full extent of the damage and destruction.

As of March 22, over 8,000 people were confirmed dead, and more than 12,000 were officially listed as missing. Moreover, almost 350,000 others were left homeless and forced to live as refugees. Blocked roads and severed communication lines have left many areas isolated, and there are severe shortages of such necessities as gasoline, diesel and heating fuel. Relief supplies are not reaching many areas, and there are shortages of food and water. Likewise, the wintry weather has added to the misery, and with the shortage of doctors and medicine, many lives are in danger. This desperate situation surpasses anything we could have imagined, and with aching hearts, we pray to God for help.

Besides this, the serious situation at reactors 1 through 4 at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Facility has dealt the area an additional catastrophic blow, deepening the suffering and anxiety of not only the direct victims of the earthquake and tsunami but many others as well. The explosions at the facilities have caused radiation to spread through the air. All this has attracted the attention of the world. We can only hope and pray for the safety of the people in the area.

The crisis brought on by the dual disasters of the earthquake and tsunami, followed by the radioactive contamination from the nuclear facilities, are threatening lives in the greatest crisis to face Japan since World War II. In response to this, the Kyodan has set up a Disaster Relief Planning Committee, and a delegation consisting of the moderator, two executive secretaries, and four other committee members have worked diligently to gather accurate information on the extent of the damage, spending four days, March 13-16, in the Sendai region to visit churches in the affected areas of Miyagi and Iwate prefectures. To assist in this effort, the moderator and the staff of the Kyodan's head office have remained in the office day and night since the time of the earthquake to gather information.

On March 15, the Kyodan delegation met with the moderators of Ou and Tohoku districts at Ichinoseki Church in Iwate Prefecture to confirm information about the damage suffered by the churches and the communities they serve and to deliberate on how best to deal with the situation. Under the direction of its moderator, Tohoku District immediately set up a disaster relief center in the district office to begin gathering information and to coordinate relief efforts.

Pastors of the churches in the disaster zones have devoted themselves to such tasks as checking on their congregations, the staff of their related institutions, the children in their kindergartens, in spite of the difficulties imposed by the breakdown in the communications network and the severe shortage of gasoline for their vehicles. They need the prayerful support of all of the Kyodan in these difficult times.

There was also considerable damage in Kanto District as well, so its moderator has been coordinating relief efforts for the affected churches in his district. The frequent aftershocks are also causing some damage, but the effects of the main quake were far reaching, not only severely affecting the above-mentioned districts but also resulting in considerable damage in Tokyo, Tokai, and Kanagawa districts as well. There was even a death in Hokkai District.

In response to this situation, the Kyodan Executive Committee at its March 22 meeting established a Relief Planning Headquarters to coordinate relief efforts, and a special Executive Council meeting has been scheduled on April 18 to determine a long-term plan.

The Kyodan has received numerous messages of support from overseas churches, offering their prayers and financial assistance. These prayers and contributions have greatly encouraged us, and they will help us in our efforts to support the churches in the disaster zones as they rebuild and serve their communities.

We call on all our churches to pray to God for his comfort and help as they support people who have lost family members in this disaster or who are still searching for their loved ones, those who lost their homes in the tsunami and are at a loss about where to go from here, those who are experiencing anxiety over the nuclear accident, and those who are being forced to live in evacuation centers under difficult circumstances. (Tr. TB)

March 23, 2011

Kyodan Delegation Visits Stricken Area Two Days after the Quake

On March 12, the day after the recent massive earthquake, the Kyodan's Relief Planning Committee, headed by General Secretary Naito, decided to send to the stricken area a delegation of four persons: Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo, Executive Secretary Fujimori Yuki, Executive Secretary Kato Makoto, and Morita Kyoichiro, a member of the Committee on Social Concerns. Their main purpose was to visit the affected churches to gather information about people's safety, damage, and casualties; to deliver some relief items; and if possible, to discuss with the moderators of Ou and Tohoku district plans for dealing with the crisis situation.

Early Sunday morning, March 13, we left Saitama and Tokyo in two cars. Deciding to enter Sendai from the Japan Sea coast to avoid Fukushima nuclear power station #1, due to its serious condition, we first aimed for Niigata. We attended Sunday service at Tokamachi Church, one of the bases for relief operations after the Niigata Chuetsu-oki Earthquake, and received advice from Pastor Arai Jun. We left quickly with relief items purchased at a local supermarket, entered Sendai via Niigata and Yamagata, and arrived at 10 p.m. at Sendai-Higashi-Rokubancho Church, pastored by Tohoku District Moderator Takahashi Kazuto. Although the water and electricity were both cut off, some young men in the area on a trip had taken shelter at the church via an evacuation site. That night we moved to Tohoku District Center with District Moderator Takahashi and exchanged information with the chair of the District Commission on Mission, Kataoka Etsuya. Electricity and water were both available at the district center although not in other parts of Sendai.

On Monday, March 14, we ate bananas for breakfast and headed for Sendai Kita Church with Moderator Takahashi. We saw all kinds of lines: lines of cars for gasoline; lines of people at stores; and another line of people at a park where water was available. What every line had in common was unusual silence. The Sendai-Kita Church sanctuary was exposed to the wind because two large panes of glass at the front had been broken. Pastor Konishi Nozomi agreed to be our guide as well as our driver, and we headed for the churches in the northern part of Miyagi Prefecture.

Collapsed and destroyed buildings were not so conspicuous in this area, in spite of the earthquake. However, some collapsed houses were visible around Rikuzen-Furukawa Church, pastored by Seki Jun'ichi, maybe because the town is old or the ground is not very firm. The severely damaged building next to the church was tilted. The church member in charge during the pastor's absence said that the church, being new, was not damaged but that the old church could not have withstood this earthquake.

Heading toward the area along the shore, we first visited Tajiri Church, pastored by Kokubo Tatsunosuke, which has a new building and rectory, so no particular damage was caused. However, the report from Wakuya Church, served by Iioka Yosuke, was that many staff of the day nursery and others were suffering or missing. Our cellular phones registered "no service" in the Wakuya area. We could move around by car, but people with no means of transportation must be very anxious.

We headed further toward the sea. We must have been good deal of inland, but I suddenly noticed that the roads were whitish and covered with dust from seawater, due to the tsunami. This made us conscious anew that we were in the disaster-stricken area, and we began to feel tense. Driving through a residential area of Ishinomaki City, we were prevented from going any further as the road was flooded with seawater. A signboard with the words "... Christ Church" had fallen from a white building surrounded by water. It was a church of other denomination.

Further down towards the coast in Ishinomaki City, Self-Defense Force vehicles, police cars, and fire engines were coming and going. Where restriction of entry was imposed on general vehicles, we parked the car outside the restricted area and walked to Ishinomaki-Eikou Church. As soon as we crossed a bridge over an embankment, an unbelievable scene appeared before my eyes: countless heaps of rubble and a large number of unusually positioned cars that had fallen on top of one another, some caught on utility poles and others crashed into houses and destroyed buildings—a state of devastation like a city that had suffered an explosion. Many people were walking by in silence, carrying baggage, looking like they did not know where to head. Sometimes, a voice between a scream and a shout of joy was heard. I cannot say that these persons were safe, but they surely met again alive.

There was a lot of general traffic within the regulated areas, besides emergency vehicles, and so many people were walking in the street. But it was unusually quiet. I noticed after a while that none of the moving cars, while avoiding people, ever honked. Although we saw cars running anywhere they possibly could in other stricken areas, we never heard them honk. If people walking along silently prevented cars from moving, the cars stopped and waited quietly for them. It seemed to be an unspoken rule that nobody had made and would have been impossible in daily life in an urban district.

Ishinomaki-Eikou Church, pastored by Kofuna Minoru, barely escaped being flooded with seawater above the floorboards, maybe because its base is somewhat high. We had left the relief items in a car, so I helped myself to a dolly that happened to be at the side of the church and returned to the car to fetch them. Many streets were thinly covered with mud, believed to have been carried from the sea. It was hard to keep pushing the dolly with its load, but I sometimes felt like I was being stared at by the people sitting there in silence and people carrying their belongings to the limit on their bikes. But they were all very quiet.

We borrowed a car from Kofuna, and visited Ishinomaki-Yamashirocho Church. We did not see either Suzuki Jun'ichi or his wife Pae Sun-Hee and could not find out where they were, but felt relieved when neighbors said they had certainly been safe at the time of the earthquake. Leaving a small amount of food and water at their door, we went up the hill of Hiyori-yama Park where we could view the whole city.

Looking toward the sea, we found Ishinomaki completely eroded by the tsunami, with smoke rising up from place

to place. Although we have never surveyed the city before, we instinctively knew that it had been entirely transformed. A helicopter was flying up and down, probably to look for those who were missing. We could only gaze and gaze, wondering whether or not there were still any survivors somewhere in this destroyed city. (Later, on March 20, nine days after the earthquake, an 80-year-old woman and her 16-year-old grandson were found alive just a few hundred meters far from where we had stood.)

Descending Hiyori-yama hill, we saw some familiar people coming up. They were the Suzuki couple. We enjoyed the unexpected reunion, prayed together, left the hill, and went back to Ishinomaki-Eikou Church. There we were asked to take a young man, who was staying at a church member's place, back to his home in Sendai. He had encountered the tsunami while he was driving his company's car back to Sendai. Narrowly escaping onto the roof of a three-storied factory, he endured a freezing, snowy night there. After the water receded, he was rescued from the roof and tried to find his way home, avoiding the routes that were still under seawater. On the way, while helping people carry their luggage or deal with corpses, he came across the church member and stayed at his place.

We drove to Sendai with the young man who survived the tsunami and stopped at two churches on the way. It was already dark when we reached Shiogama-Higashi Church, where we left the last two plastic tanks of water for Pastor Tsumura Masaru. Sendai-Higashi Church opened its sanctuary as a refuge for its members and neighbors. As these people prepared their temporary beds of two benches attached together, we wondered what they were thinking. How many people were feeling helpless that night? With convoluted thoughts passing through our minds, we returned to the car. The young man succeeded in getting in touch with his company by way cellular phone, and said that he would be welcomed by his fellow workers.

Actually, on arriving at the company, he was met by the excited cries and embraces of the delighted people.

The next day, on March 15, we visited some churches in the southern part of Iwate Prefecture, but we could not visit many because of an emergency meeting scheduled at Ichinoseki Church and Iwate is so wide. Heading for Ofunato in the south, we dropped by Senmaya Church, served by pastors Mikawa Yutaka and Yaginuma Sayoko. Along the way, among the low hills from Ichinoseki to Sanriku Coast, vending machines were unexpectedly working normally and shops were open. In those areas, ordinary daily life seemed to continue.

Proceeding awhile, however, we saw a terrible view in front of us. It might have been another village among the mountains, but it had been completely destroyed by the tsunami. The railroad bridge had floated away, and the rails were distorted like candy or had disappeared altogether. We were approaching the city of Rikuzentakata, which was off limits at the time, we entered the city of Ofunato. The church sanctuary and the parsonage of Pastor Tajima Hidenori are both located on a hill near the port and are brand-new, having just been completed a year ago. According to administrative board members there as caretakers, two church members are missing, both of whom are city residents.

Near the port we found that two- or three-storied houses were upside down, and that considering the height of the pile of debris, the tsunami had been more than ten meters high. Rescue parties from many foreign countries were actively searching and rescuing, and foreign television crews were filming their activities. It was a vision of intensity and animation, but nevertheless, strangely silent and calm. There was no sound and no words spoken at all.

Coming back to Ichinoseki, the emergency tripartite meeting of Ou District Moderator Ohara Muneo, Tohoku District Moderator Takahashi Kazuto, and Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo began with prayer. Outside, the snow was beginning to fall. (Tr. SM & AY)

—Fujimori Yuki, executive secretary

Kyodan Taiwanese Churches Trace Roots

Tokyo Taiwan Church

Situated at Ogikubo, Suginami-ku in Tokyo, Tokyo Taiwan Church was established in January 1925, before World War II, and is a congregation of the Kyodan. Christian students from Taiwan, studying in Tokyo at the time, met weekly in the home of Gan Chhun-Hongin in Higashi-Nakano for Bible study and invited Pastor Lau Chin-Hong, who was also a student from Taiwan, to be their leader. In 1927, as the number of students from Taiwan increased, the students began to hold worship services. A classroom of Meiji Gakuin's Theological Studies Department was rented, and the group was named the "Tokyo Taiwan Youth Christian Group.

Between 1934 and 1940 Koeh Ma-Se was called to be the first pastor of the church, and the number of members increased to over 100. Worship services were soon held at several places, by renting rooms in churches at Tsunohazu in Okubo, Kashiwagi, and Asagaya. In 1971 a room was purchased at Sanshin Mansion in Shibuya for use as a sanctuary, in order to end the constant moving here and there and renting parts of church buildings.

The following year, Japan and Taiwan broke off diplomatic relations, and Taiwanese church members saw their Taiwan Embassy taken over by the Chinese government. In order to safeguard its property, it was proposed that the church join the Kyodan. The proposal was approved in July 1975, and Tokyo Taiwan Church officially became a member of the Kyodan. Members increased continuously. With Elder Lu Beng-Thoan as a central figure, a piece of land was purchased in Ogikubo, the present location, and a church building project was begun. A year later, on January 23, 1977, the new church was dedicated. At that time, 120 members attended the church regularly. The generosity of Hijirigaoka Church in Shibuya, which provided the use of its sanctuary during the year prior to construction, was appreciated greatly.

In the 1980s, members continued to increase, and the congregation soon outgrew the capacity of the church building. Therefore, branches of Tokyo Taiwan Church were built in Ikebukuro, Kawagoe, and Chiba. Two factors pose a challenge to the future of the Taiwan Church in Japan. The first is the uncertain status of our country, Taiwan, as an independent, free nation, which consequently places Taiwanese people living in Japan in a comparably uncertain situation regarding such matters as rights to social security. The second is that living within a society of few children and economic instability directly affects future planning for the Taiwan Church. The Taiwan Church seeks God's guidance as well as the concern and prayers of intercession of all of you. (Tr. RK)

—Lee Meng-Jer, pastor

Tokyo Taiwan Church, Nishi-Tokyo District

Osaka Taiwan Church

By the grace of God and the prayer support of Higashi Umeda Church members and many others, Osaka Taiwan Church has held Sunday worship services continuously for 21 years since April 1, 1990. At present, there are 30 members, and we strive for the growth of the church as before. Although a small church, it is somewhat like a large family, as both Taiwanese and Japanese people worship together harmoniously. The worship service is conducted in Taiwanese, but there is simultaneous translation into Japanese. Also, the worship service on the fourth Sunday is in Japanese. Every week after the service, there is a 20-minute Bible study, followed by a church luncheon for everyone, which deepens our fellowship in Christ.

Our path has never been smooth. In the third year of its pioneer evangelistic work, Pastor De Tsuan-Seng and his wife had to leave on account of illness. During the following two years, there was no full-time minister, and the church was supported by short-term ministers. In 1995, Pastor Lu Kim-Tsun came to fill the post and worked to organize the church and various activities. In July 1998, an application to join the Kyodan was accepted. (It is a part of Osaka District.) In November 1998, the name was changed to Kyodan Osaka Taiwan Church. The worship services were held in Higashi Umeda Church. The church always planned to have its own sanctuary, but the living conditions of members in Japan were never stable, and the plan did not progress. However, during the effort to raise funds and search for a site to build, we finally arrived at a two-step method. To implement this plan, members would first locate a small place for worship in the Umeda area and, when membership increased, construct a larger building.

At around that time, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake occurred, and Higashi Umeda Church decided to rebuild. So we had to move out of that church building. Fortunately, we were able to buy a room in a building across the street from Higashi Umeda Church and to remodel it as a sanctuary. It was dedicated in October 1999. We rejoiced greatly, receiving it as gift from God. However, in March 2000, Pastor Lu Kim-Tsun had to leave because of age. Pastor Li Tsong-Hen came and filled the post from April 2000 until the end of February 2001. With further efforts, land was bought in Yodogawa-ku, Osaka, and in April 2007, a new sanctuary was dedicated. In May 2008, Pastor Liu Fu-Ching came from Seattle to take the position. He endeavored to nurture the spiritual growth of the members through Bible study and prayer. Seeing the growth in membership through the leading and grace of God, members cannot help but give thanks. By the grace of God, we hope to continue our evangelistic work for the community. (Tr. RK)

—Sone Kensho, elder

Osaka Taiwan Church

Taught by the Christian Witness of the Marginalized in Brazil

by Koinuma Makiko, Kyodan missionary

Recently, Brazil is attracting the world's attention as a country that is developing economically. Its shadowy areas, however, cannot be easily seen from the outside.

The history of Brazil began in 500 AD when it was "discovered" by the Portuguese. The intrusion of the Europeans resulted in a sharp decrease of the native population and the importation of millions of slaves from Africa. With the collapse of the slave system that had lasted for 300 years, immigrants from approximately 100 countries were introduced, and consequently, a variously mix-blooded, multi-racial, and multi-cultural nation has been formed. Merry, cheerful, and energetic Brazilians are good at living joyfully even with difficulties.

But the negative historical heritage can be seen in the survival of the power structure from the days of colonial control, which is still persistently the basis of society; the existence of a wealthy and powerful class of people who are corrupt and arbitrary; a tremendous gap between the rich and the poor; and the loss of family culture among the innumerable people of poverty. The area of Alto da Bondade in Olinda City in the state of Estado de Pernambuco in the northeastern Brazil, where I have been working since 2009, is one of the places with extremely bad conditions, far removed from the economic development of recent Brazil. In 1987 Pastor Davi Blackburn, a U.S. missionary, built a Methodist church here. Neighboring it is a nursery school, part of a social service to provide free care for the children of poor families. Unfortunately, however, Davi was electrocuted in an unexpected accident in 1992.

I first met Jane Blackburn, the leader of the members of this church, at the meeting of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women in Rio de Janeiro in 1996, and we have been good friends since then. My husband and I worked with the Japanese Church in San Paulo during 1996-2006 as missionaries sent by the Kyodan, using the Japanese language to serve the first generation of Japanese immigrants. In ten years, unexpectedly, we were forced to come back to Japan as my husband was suffering from an incurable disease. He passed away in August of that year. He told me, "You need to accomplish your mission as you want," and left enough inheritance to support my missionary work.

Being left alone, I made up my mind to work with the Brazilian church using no Japanese language since the church has no Japanese members. Moved also by my friend Jane's earnest request, I formally set off for my new missionary post in Metodista em Alto da Bondade in March 2009. The scenery of Olinda is so beautiful that UNESCO designated it as a historical city. I have heard that the name "Olinda" is derived from the first colonist's exclamation and means "How beautiful it is!" But the area of Alto da Bondade, where our church stands, is a place extremely far from "beauty." Along the bumpy roads littered with garbage, in an unsanitary environment without even a sewer, live poor people who are somehow managing their everyday lives on scant income. Youth, having no hope for the future, easily become slaves to drugs, with its consequences of frequent violence and murders.

In this area overflowing with illness, drugs, alcoholism, violence, maltreatment, and domestic troubles, numerous



The Mother's Day Worship Service

churches of various denominations and sizes stand side by side, crying for miracles and the help of Jesus Christ. In fact, most of such churches bind the poor people with sundry rules, get them infatuated with church gatherings, and siphon off a great amount of money from them. Their understanding of Christian belief is that of a super-individualistic desire for miracles that never aims for the formation of a community in order to revive human dignity. Instead, these churches seem to enslave people in the name of Christian belief.

In such an environment, we want our church, which consists of some 25 members, to be the one that testifies about the love of God to the people of the area by loving God, ourselves, and our neighbors and by practicing Christian belief. The minister is compelled to be responsible for another church in a neighboring area, and few church members can take leadership responsibility. There are no material, economic, or intellectual resources at all for the church. The church does have one thing, however, which is the simple and strong belief that "God certainly helps us," and that "Jesus is always with us and gives us strength." We associate with each other with a humane, affectionate heart and walk together, helping each other, honoring God wholeheartedly, enjoying small things, and thanking God. I marvel at the witness of the members, who never fail to donate literally ten percent of their income to the church, however small the amount may be.

I am a missionary, but I always feel that the Brazilian people are teaching me how to believe in God. How happy I am to believe in Jesus Christ! As hard as I can, I am praying and preaching. More than 180 children, youth, and adults gather together for the winter Bible class, held once a year. Usually the fund to support it is somehow endowed from outside of the church. Still insufficient in understanding the Portuguese language, I accomplish very little in the service by the way of words. Every time I preach a sermon in Portuguese, which is once a month, I endure birth pangs as if I were dying, but as soon as it is finished I am filled with gratitude and pleasure, and revive.

I pray and hope that my presence here may result in a religiously, materially, and economically useful relationship of mutual help between the church in Alto da Bondade and the church in Japan. (Tr. AY)

~ On Being Open and Approachable ~

Lessons Gleaned from Involvement in Buraku Liberation Movement and Okinawa-related Issues

An interview with Kataoka Heiwa, member*
Waseda Church, Tokyo District

I grew up in a Christian family, and so Christianity was always right there. I thought that how I should live and relate to people who were close at hand was really important. That changed somewhat when I went to high school. I had grown up in a Kyodan church, but when I went to Keiwa Gakuen High School, a church-related school, and started living in a dormitory, I realized that half of the students were not Christians and even those that were Christian came from many different denominations.

I began to wonder about the idea of “just believing.” Was faith an internal thing? Was it an individual thing? I began reacting against some of the things I had been taught. However, when I went to university, I realized that faith can be open to and expressed in the real world. That has been shown to me most clearly through my active involvement in the two areas of Buraku liberation and Okinawa-related issues.

During my first summer at university, I participated in the Kyodan Buraku Liberation Center’s Youth Seminar, and I learned how great it is to read the Bible and to witness to one’s faith in the context of fighting against discrimination. Through the university’s Peace Research Institute and the Religious Department, I was able to participate in a field trip to Okinawa, where I learned about the history of Okinawa, the present concerns around U.S. military bases, and the activities of Christian networks working for peace.

My faith was changed through these experiences, and during my second year of college, I was baptized. Feeling that I wanted to continue my involvement in these issues after graduation, I did not participate in any club activities at the university because I thought it was important to relate not only to other university students but also to a variety of people of different age groups. For the same reason, when I thought about employment, I did not want just a regular job. I consulted with the minister of my church, and he introduced me to Waseda Hoshien.

The work of Waseda Hoshien is based on Christian values, and a wide range of programs and activities are available to both youth and adults. My work involves setting up courses in Asian languages for adults, as well as working with students. One of the activities with students is creating regular weekend opportunities to meet, play, and deepen relationships with children who have disabilities.

Almost none of the students who come to Waseda Hoshien is Christian. But when I see how passionately these students try to interact with the children in an effort to build authentic relationships, I am often amazed. I experienced that kind of relationship in the church, and it makes me really happy to know that, through my invitation, some people have started attending worship. It makes me feel that I know why I am working here.



The author (at far left), with participants from Waseda Hoshien during a “Student Activities, Global Understanding” field trip to Okinawa, where people in Henoko were protesting the construction of a new U.S. military base

Some of the people who come here have attended church-related kindergartens or schools, and others, even though they have no direct experience of Christianity, are often interested in Christian ideals. But there are also those who are not connected to the church in any way. When I introduce myself to these people, I always mention the church. Is that evangelism? I don’t know. But it is part of my approach to people to let them know who I am.

I am not being pushy about evangelism. Whenever I invite someone to a church event, I always emphasize how much fun it will be. On “Marine Day” in July, we held an event where we did some weeding around Chiyoda Church in the Shinjuku area of Tokyo and then had a barbecue with scallops sent from the Sanriku area, where the minister had previously worked. It was a lot of fun, and that’s what I want to do—namely, to find ways to have fun together.

I believe that Christianity and God can only be communicated through concrete and authentic encounter. To that end, I want to make myself open, approachable, and attractive to all people. (Tr. RW)

From *Shinto no Tomo (Believers’ Friend)*

*Kataoka Heiwa was born in Fukushima Prefecture and is 24 years old. His given name (Heiwa) means “peace.” After graduation from International Christian University with a major in sociology from the Liberal Arts Department’s Division of International Studies, he was employed by Waseda Hoshien in April 2008. Baptized during his second year of college at Waseda Church, where he is still an active member, he has also served on committees involved with youth, Buraku liberation, and Okinawa-related issues in Tokyo District’s Kita (north) Subdistrict.

Variety of Participants Enriches Church Worship Experience

by Edo Kiyoshi, pastor
Oku-nakayama Church, Iwate, Ou District

I believe that the joy of worship in Oku-nakayama Church comes from experiencing the life that each of us receives from God and also from sharing the gifts that God has given to each of us. So looking at our past and present, I will try to introduce the ways in which we have experienced this reality.

First, let me describe the path by which Oku-nakayama Church has become what it is. Located in a pioneer village, the church is situated at an altitude of 450 meters and at a latitude of 40 degrees north. It is at the base of the Ou Mountain Range, where the snow is deep and the temperature reaches minus 15 degrees centigrade. It is about ten minutes by car from the town's ski resort and hot springs, which lie in a beautiful natural setting. The area was famous in the Meiji Period as a producer of war horses.

After World War II, in an effort to increase food production and as part of a national emergency development plan, several Japanese colonists returning from Manchuria were employed in the area. The leader, assistant leader, and secretary of the development group were all Christians, and through their efforts, the church was planted. The church first met in a shed belonging to the group leader. At that time, most of the children of the group, because they were needed to work with their parents or because they had no lunch to bring, were not able to attend school.

Saturday School. There was a request that at least the children should learn to sing some Christian hymns, and so with the help of a missionary and the cooperation of Uchimaruru Church in Morioka City, a Saturday School was started. At first, the church school met outdoors, with the students seated on tree stumps and logs.

As the Saturday School began to grow, older youth began to attend. Bible study began, and through the use of a record player, music appreciation was taught. The next step was the establishment of a new church. At that point, with pastoral leadership provided by the minister of Uchimaruru Church, the new church was founded. Support was provided by offerings from district churches, funds from the Kyodan's Rural Evangelism Department, and money from North American mission boards, and with the material and moral support generated by events like work camps, the first church building was built.

Canaan Gardens. The next significant development was the creation of Canaan Gardens. In 1974 Christians and other volunteers in Oku-nakayama and several churches worked together to establish Canaan Gardens, a care facility for mentally challenged children. On the occasion of its opening, children and staff gathered to worship, filling the building.

The Present Building. With the vision for a new building, money was collected. Knowing the church's situation, people gave large amounts, and the present wonderful building was erected. Along with the growth of Canaan Gardens came the establishment of San Ai Gakusha, a high school for students with disabilities and Chisaki Mure no Sato, a facility for adults. This brought many diverse people together and brought new blessing and joy to our worship.

Our Worship Pattern. For more than 15 years, our worship has been evolving in new patterns as we search for ways to adapt to our new situation. As children and adults worship together in a combined service, we had to find ways in which all could participate. Children were invited to lead the opening and to read scripture. Hymns were selected from a variety of sources, such as the children's songbook, gospel songs, and the old and new hymnals. While singing, we naturally began to clap hands and move our bodies, and some participants would step forward to lead the singing. Staff members of Canaan Gardens transferred their membership, and since they came from various denominations and traditions, elements of their worship were added. The result was a worship experience of depth and breadth. During the worship service, "songs of testimony" began to be offered not only by church members but also by some residents of the care center.

At present, one-third of the members of Oku-nakayama Church are members of Canaan Gardens and have been with us since the founding of Oku-nakayama Gakuen. Worship attendance sometimes exceeds 100 people. I believe that this church has always tried to avoid alienating the least of God's children and instead has placed them at the center. So we have always proceeded by asking, "What is best for the church?" I personally constantly keep in mind that God is continually inviting the least among us, and so I want to serve them.

From last April, our worship service changed. A person who has great difficulty in reading became our liturgist. Since then, five more people with similar limitations have also led our service, and I have come to believe that this is normal. All of these, without pretension, are serving God just as they are. Their speed is slow, sometimes with long pauses. Sometimes an assistant will pronounce the words first, and the liturgist will then read them to us. We hear the scripture slowly and deliberately. For me, each syllable being uttered is both a testimony and an exposition of the text.

Sometimes the reader cannot imitate the assistant's pronunciation. The congregation may hear only the attempted sound, but I experience then that God's word is Spirit. The word is not just mere information. Even in the periods of silence, we feel God's presence.

The Lord's Supper. In these ways, our worship has grown fuller. We can feel God working in various ways. Richness can be felt in things like our prayers of intercession and the prayer for the offering. Half of the people who attend the worship service have not been baptized. During the celebration of communion, the pastor places his hand on the heads of participants who do not receive the elements and recites a prayer of blessing. Some of those who do receive the sacrament also ask for a prayer of blessing. Each time we celebrate communion, there are those who ask for the blessing twice.

Last Christmas, a person was baptized who for 40 years had not only been attending the worship services but also prayer meetings and the early morning Bible study. Although baptism had been desired for a long time, the family situation had delayed it until last year. The person had asked me the simple question, "Why am I not

(Cont'd. on p8)

Indonesia Site of First Japanese Christian Family Camp in Asia

The first Japanese Christian Family Camp in Asia was held Jan. 31-Feb. 2, 2011 at Inna Putri Bali Hotel in Bali, Indonesia, with 70 participants, 30 of whom were from Japan, including myself. At the same time last year, the first Missionary Work Forum in Asia was held in Hong Kong where, during prayers for preparation of a second forum, the plan for this Family Camp was proposed to the members, which led to its being held.

There was no need for any qualifications for participants, but I was a little surprised that some people there were from the “Non-church Movement (Mu-Kyokai).” The other 40 participants were mainly from Japanese Christian churches outside Japan, such as China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and India. What drew my attention concerning the names of these churches are the letters “JCF,” as in Jakarta JCF and Singapore JCF. These letters stand for Japanese Christian Fellowship. Although called a “fellowship,” they are each formally recognized churches in their respective countries in Asia. Interestingly, no approval of the use of the term “JCF” is required from any denomination or group. Each JCF regards itself as an independent ecumenical church. The Kyodan has currently dispatched a missionary, Matsumoto Akihiro, to the Jakarta JCF in Indonesia. The plan and management of this Family Camp could not have been carried out without the selfless efforts of Matsumoto and the members of the Jakarta JCF.

Bali is famous as a tourist resort. The hotel was filled with tourists, and there was a beautiful beach 50 meters away. When I saw the program of the Family Camp, I realized that I had to discard my image of “camping.” With the exception of meal times, we were in some sort of conference from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. For the first time in a long time, the term “working bee” came across my mind. The conference was rich in variety, with reports and discussions.

One of the most memorable things for me was a power point presentation on what was called the “Rembrandt Concert.” I heard that it was originally planned with the collaboration of a travel agency. The presentation is a practical model of missionary work intended for Japanese non-Christians, who

are 99 percent of all Japanese, and provides an opportunity to come in contact with Rembrandt’s faith naturally by visiting the actual places depicted in his paintings and listening to a commentary on what is being portrayed. There was a report at the end of the Camp that a young Chinese woman from the church in Shanghai had decided to be baptized. Considering that the only non-Christian participant was led to baptism, I believe that the significance of this camp was enormous.

Needless to say, missionaries have strong relationships with the church that sent them. So far, however, Japanese Christian Churches in Asia have had a weak relationship with other Japanese churches or JCFs in other countries, even if the church itself uses “JCF” in its name. Perhaps due to the geographical situation, I think I was given the vision of the scattered Japanese Christian churches in each country teaming up to cast a net of our Lord Jesus’ salvation in Asia. This is because missionaries who have been given such visions are already at work. (Tr. SM)

—Kato Makoto, executive secretary

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

Your letters of prayer, from about thirty churches around the world, has touched the people’s hearts and encouraged the Kyodan. It plans to use your relief donations in the best and transparent way. —Naito Tomeyuki, general secretary

The Relief Planning Committee of Kyodan
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Oku-nakayama Church *(Cont'd from p.7)*

permitted to receive the bread?” I had answered many times, but the same question kept coming. Each time I felt that the Lord Jesus was asking the same question. Each time we worship, I feel that I am being asked, “What would Jesus do in this situation?” Through this person’s baptism, the church members and I are being made aware of and taught many things.

Prayer Meeting. Our “Bible and Prayer Meeting” is attended by over 20 people, 70 to 80 percent of whom are residents of or participants at Canaan Gardens. We read one chapter of scripture at a time. Each person reads one verse in turn. Those who are unable to read alone read along with the person next to them. For prayer, the group is divided into smaller groups of three or four persons. Some people repeat the same prayer time after time; others use only

the same petition, “Lord, protect me. Amen.” Others pray long prayers, and all of us wait until everyone finishes. Some who are sick, experience healing. Some who have no words pray in silence. Basically, the prayer meeting is a fellowship of the Spirit more than a class for learning.

In Conclusion. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is near.” In this world, we are waiting and hoping for that kingdom. We must walk and pray together so that no one will stumble and be left behind. The church’s worship and the witness of our prayers together are not something extraordinary. They are simply reporting what is happening in our daily life. Accepting our everyday existence, as it is, provides an occasion to give thanks to God, who gives life for each day. Even when we are troubled, this is the path of joy in living for each one of us. (Tr. GM)

—From *Shinto no Tomo (Believers’ Friend)*