

A Christmas Sermon on Luke 2:1-20

“A Savior who would not Leave Us”

by Sasaki Michio, Kyodan vice-moderator
Pastor, Shizuoka Church, Tokai District

While telling the story of Christ's birth, Luke repeats the phrase “lying in a manger” to reveal the image of the holy infant. This was also the sign by which the angels told the shepherds they would recognize the child. In a world of poverty and hardship, Jesus lays himself down on the earth. In a few words, Luke shows us that the Christ child puts himself in the midst of our actual walk in life. At the same time, Luke shows us that as we walk through our troubled lives, we are also put in the midst of God's love.

As we await Christmas, we live in the reality of this world. In society and in our various lives, there really are not that many occasions of joy. Rather, we go through life carrying with us our pain and sorrow. As long as we are alive, we cannot escape that reality. This is true for any generation. The shepherds who received the angel's news were taking care of their sheep out in the fields. It was a dangerous existence, allowing for little sleep. Daily subsistence in poverty and hardship was their existence. Life was lived while dozing. They had many troubles and sleepless days. But in the midst of that mundane existence, an angel brought them news of great joy. “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” (ESV) This reveals the truth and sign of Christ's birth.

Moreover, the singing of the host of angels right after the announcement was a great contrast to the sign. God's tremendous glory was lying in a poor manger. There was no room, bed, or proper baby clothing. All

that was available were a few cloths, some straw, and a simple manger from which animals fed. There, our Lord Jesus laid himself as a newborn baby and revealed that image of himself to us. If the angel's announcement had not been made, no one would have noticed the birth of this small child. But this is the way the hand of God works to accomplish God's work in our world. God dwells with us in the reality of our pain and poverty and warms us with the warmth of God's life.

The following words come from the scriptures: “For unto you is born this day . . . a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” These words tell us of the work of salvation done through God's hands, and they are the Gospel to be preached from that point on. Also, in the Apostles' Creed, which we as a church confess, the crucifixion and resurrection are confessed, telling of the reality of God's salvation.

In Luke's gospel, where the nativity account is recorded, the word “returned” has many meanings attached to it. The angel Gabriel returned after announcing Jesus' birth to Mary. After Mary stayed with Elizabeth, she returned. The angels who brought the news to the shepherds also returned. And the shepherds returned after beholding the holy infant in the manger. All of them accepted God's will and returned. However, Jesus did not return to his throne but remained in the world with us. That Jesus continues to walk among us until he accomplishes the will of God. The joy of Christmas is to invite this person, Jesus, accept the salvation of God as our own, and give thanks for the joy of living in his love. Through the coming of the Holy Spirit, the reality of Immanuel and peace is manifest in our lives. (Tr. WJ)





My Participation in the Kyodan's Reformation Youth 500 Event (1)

by Sato Misaki, 10th grade student
Soka Church, Kanto District

I took part in the Kyodan's Reformation Youth 500 event at Megumi Chalet in Karuizawa (a Christian campsite in Nagano Prefecture), Aug. 9-11. I spent a meaningful and enjoyable time, which I thought must be God's leading.

For me, the workshops were the best part. I participated in the "worship leaders" group. There, of course, we dealt with the flow of the worship service, considering the contents of prayers, and we also delved into why prayer is really important in the first place, as we participated in developing a worship service. In the midst of that activity, we also dealt with a Bible passage—this time, the story about Jesus and Zaccheus, and we studied this passage through songs, dancing, pictures, plays and messages. While listening to these messages, I thought about how much we have in common with Zaccheus.

I attend a Christian school, but here at this event, there was a freshness in that camp environment as we shared information and ideas with the many pastors and same-age companions who were also Christians—a good environment and a rare opportunity. This was one point that made my attendance at this camp so good. While participating with my companions and the pastors, I realized that in the midst of my busy days I forget to pray; but as I am talking more to God now, it would be good to entrust my concerns to God, and it would be good to put down the burdens I am carrying. I thought that as I pray to God, I need to become more frank with God. It's not that

I am not always frank with God, but I had thought that dealing with my present thoughts and feelings, suffering with the worries that I have now by myself, was a good thing. At times, it is important to reflect on one's worries, but I realized that confiding those things to God and talking about them with Him is also important. When reflecting on my life prior to this camp, I realized how really important this camp was for me.

In addition, while we enjoyed the abundant nature surrounding Karuizawa, we played a game of volleyball in which we were thinking of commemorating the 500th anniversary by trying to keep the volleyball up in the air for 500 volleys. Our group of about 20, which included both male and female pastors together with students from elementary school through high school, had a lot of fun. But we soon realized that we would never get up to 500, so we proceeded by counting each volley as ten. The adults were particularly intense, and we soon forgot time as we played. This was one of the activities, which also included a walk through Kyu Karuizawa, hiking, etc. In the evening, after a delicious dinner, we played such card games as "millionaire" and interacted with our companions. As new ties have been created, I am in contact with these companions even now as we celebrate one another's birthdays and get together. While holding in my heart the sense that all things born from these ties are within God's plan, I want to continue to build up my relationship with God. (Tr. RT)

My Participation in the Kyodan's Reformation Youth 500 Event (2)

by Arai Tomoki, 9th grade student
Natori Church, Tohoku District

About 100 junior high school students took part in the camp this time. Including myself, three students from Tohoku District participated. And among the staff, one of the leaders was from Tohoku District.

At Karuizawa Megumi Chalet, where we stayed this time, the air was fresh; it was a place where any worrisome things would seem to be blown away, a place overflowing with God's grace and seemingly nearest to the "Kingdom of God."

The camp program was mostly of two types: "workshops" and "activities." The "workshops" consisted of groups that focused on being a worship service leader, sign language worship, and doing plays from Bible stories, etc., where we prepared for and practiced the various aspects of the worship service scheduled for the third day. I was in charge of sign language worship, and we enjoyed practicing with the staff leader while learning sign language. At the worship service, we were able to do this in a way that conveyed the feeling of the Japanese hymn, "The Fragrant Breeze on Golgotha's Hill." For the "activity," I chose inside games, but as there were so few of us, we joined the film appreciation group. However, since all the participants other than myself were girls, the content became "making

accessories," which was unfortunate. (Following this, we went for a walk to Kyu Karuizawa, so I was able to get a change in mood.)

In the worship services during the camp, we heard Rev. Shiotani Naoya and Rev. Horioka Makiko's valuable talks, and in the evening, YURIE's songs, which quieted my heart and gave me energy for the next day. In addition, we also discussed a variety of things with the leaders and students in the room where the "group meeting" was held. For the most part, we talked about small concerns as well as deeper concerns, such as whether we desired to receive baptism, and we had a really wonderful time.

Incidentally, the four members from Tohoku District wore Dokugan Ryu* (the One-Eyed Dragon) - Luther t-shirts, which we made. On the back was written "Reformation Youth 500 in Tohoku." During the camp, these t-shirts were very popular with the leaders. I really want to take part in the March Youth Conference. (Tr. RT)

*The One-Eyed Dragon refers to the most famous samurai warrior in Tohoku, Date Masamune, who had a patch over his right eye.

Myanmar Hosts CCA's Asia Mission Conference & Diamond Jubilee

The Christian Conference of Asia's 4th Asia Mission Conference was held Oct. 12-16, 2017 in Yangon, Myanmar. Initially, 400 people were expected to attend, but when the number increased to 600, the venue was quickly changed from Baptist Center to Franc Auditorium. The meeting was last held 23 years ago in Seoul. This time it was convened through the cooperation of the Myanmar Baptist Convention and the Myanmar Council of Churches. The theme of this year's gathering was "Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia," based on the Gospel of John 8:12 and 18:37. In his opening address, CCA General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara warned, "We are facing a number of pertinent challenges and questions... There are competitive forces out there which may undermine the credibility of Christian mission." He noted that in some countries, missionary evangelism has brought on increasing persecution. However, the church in Asia stands secure in its sense of calling, and it is necessary to commit to mission and to witness to Almighty God.

On the afternoon of the second day, a panel discussion was held on the theme "Witness to the Truth and Light: Religious Perspectives." The panelists were Shin Pannajota, a lecturer at International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University in Myanmar, where 88% of the population is Buddhist; Swami Navanama Janana Thapaswi, director of Santhigiri Ashram, Kerala, India, representing Hinduism; and Prof. Siti Musdah Mulia of the Council of Indonesian Ulema, representing Islam. The ensuing discussion examined truth and light from a number of angles. Of particular interest was Prof. Mulia's powerful discussion of the need for different religions to join hands to work for peace and justice.

Each day of the conference the participants were divided into 20 groups for discussion of the Bible study. In my

group, global warming and other environmental pollution problems were discussed in the beginning. We came to the conclusion that we should start with small things we can do in our everyday lives to reduce our carbon footprint, but for some reason there was a strong call for Japan to reduce its radioactive waste. During the second day's discussion, a pastor from Myanmar talked about the fact that in the past, the Christian population of Myanmar reached 5% as a result of the work of a large number of foreign missionaries, but at some point foreign missionaries withdrew completely from the country. At that time, the Myanmar churches had only God to rely on, and as a result, Christians presently make up 8% of the population.

On Sunday, we were recommended to attend a local Baptist church and give the message. In my case, I was able to deliver the sermon at Wuna Kyezudaw Baptist Church, located about an hour's drive away. The church sanctuary was about the size of an elementary school classroom, but it was filled with around 70 people, both children and adults, who participated enthusiastically in the service.

At 3:00 in the afternoon, we participated in a 60th anniversary service with more than 6,000 people, mainly from the Myanmar churches. Among those giving 60th anniversary messages was WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit. From Japan, Rev. Kawakami Naoya, executive director of Tohoku Help, was given time to speak on the theme of "Fukushima"; and on short notice, Rev. Heo Bae Kki of the Korean Christian Church in Japan was asked to lead the communion service during the closing worship. However, due to the time of our return flight to Japan, we were unfortunately unable to stay until the end of the conference. (Tr. DB)

—Kato Makoto, executive secretary

PCK and PROK Convene their Annual General Assemblies

by Kato Makoto, executive secretary

I participated in the general assemblies of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), Sept. 18-21. The annual meetings of the two churches are held at the same time each year, and most guests from overseas begin by participating in PCK's assembly and then, with the accompaniment of PCK staff, move to the PROK location and participate in its assembly. This year, the PCK General Assembly was held in Yangjae Chapel at Onnuri Church in Seoul. Yangjae Chapel is the church's secondary chapel but can hold up to 6,000 people. Considering the size of Japanese churches, we could not help but shake our heads in amazement. The theme of the assembly was "Holy Church: To the World Again," and during the opening worship, I used earphones for the first time in order to hear the English translation.

After spending one night there, we traveled 400 km to Gyeongju to participate in the PROK General Assembly. We traveled by express train, and I was surprised that no

one checked our tickets. The assembly was held at Hyundai Hotel, and the theme was "500 Years of Reformation: Renewing and Empowering the Church in the World of God." As the PROK had elected a new executive secretary the previous year, there was also a change of staff, including the secretarial staff. This caused some slight confusion in carrying out the assembly, and thus it may require time to reaffirm mission cooperation with overseas churches. In the assembly's handbook, the Kyodan representative was the first overseas guest introduced and the second guest to bring greetings to the assembly, following an overseas guest from Africa.

We did not participate in the discussion at the PCK General Assembly, but according to another overseas guest who did, a resolution was passed that recognized children baptized as infants as eligible to receive communion. I thought this was quite a significant resolution for a Presbyterian church in Asia. (Tr. RW)

Naito Tomeyuki: A Send-off to Heaven

Naito Tomeyuki was born in Yokosuka (Kanagawa Prefecture) in 1929. After attending a naval academy, he went on to study philosophy at Gakushuin University. Following graduation from Tokyo Union Theological Seminary in 1958, he became the pastor at Kochi Church (Kochi) then at Zentsuji Church (Kagawa), Banzancho Church (Okayama), Kanazawa Church (Ishikawa), Nogatamachi Church (Tokyo), and Takaido Church (Tokyo). He was general secretary of the Kyodan from 2007 until 2012. During that time, he also served as acting pastor at various churches. He passed away at age 87 on June 30, 2017.



A DAUGHTER'S MEMORIES

by Tsunakawa Megumi, Rev. Naito's oldest daughter
Member, Kyodokita Church, Tokyo

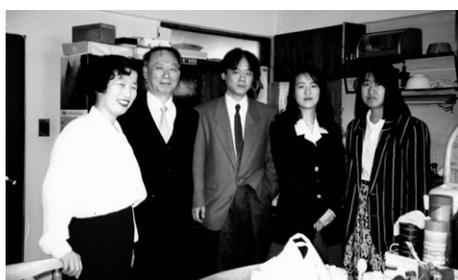
As a small child, I really loved my father because he was so sweet. He was always busy in his study, so having meals together with him was a special time. Before eating, we would all recite together the "scripture of the month" that he had selected. I remember such scriptures as "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for that is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (I Thess. 5:16-18) After all these years, I still remember such scriptures, which have now become a spiritual support for us.

My father didn't drink or smoke; he didn't even drive a car. The only TV channel he watched was NHK, the national public television station.* I remember him playing "ping-pong baseball" with my brother in the yard sometimes, but that's about the only special amusement I remember as a child. My father's interest was his work; ministry was his life.

In their later years, my parents and I lived in the same apartment building, although on different floors. I helped care for my mother, who was beginning to experience dementia, and through this I had more opportunity for time with my father. He and I shared this pain and distress together and experienced the added bond of comrades who were sharing a common mission.

Several years ago my father was diagnosed with cancer, but the cancer was not aggressive, so tranquil days continued. During that time, he began writing for *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend), and I believe that was a great joy for him. Because he wrote of his own sickness and my mother's care, many readers responded. There was a response from someone whom he had baptized many years earlier, and some people visited him from far away. I believe this was a saving grace for him in the midst of his battle with cancer.

About two weeks before my father died, he began to receive medical care at home. He would ask the doctors and nurses for their names and try to remember them. His pastoral care began with remembering people's names, and I felt that he continued that care to the very last.



Naito Tomeyuki's family in Nogatamahi Church
Far right: Tsunakawa Megumi, his oldest daughter

A CHURCH MEMBER'S MEMORIES

by Yachie Junko, member
Kanazawa Church, Ishikawa Prefecture

Just a few weeks before his death, Rev. Naito said to me in a telephone conversation, "Ms. Junko, pray for me." After saying that, he hung up, and those were his last words to me. Rev. Naito came to serve at Kanazawa Church when he was 41 years old. My husband was drawn to the church, and when he was a university freshman he was baptized. Our wedding followed, and then the infant baptism of our two children. Our family was nurtured in the fellowship of the church and the counsel of Rev. Naito.

Right after coming to our church, Rev. Naito spoke of the importance of laity training and planned a seminar for laity. The first seminar was entitled "Principles of a Life of Faith." With his husky voice and smiling face, he spoke to us individually and often wrote cards and letters, urging us to attend worship and various meetings of the church. He visited church members so often that his wife Michiko commented that he would wear out a pair of shoes in just a few months. In comforting us, in his sermons, and in his prayers, we would often hear, "It is written in the Bible," followed by appropriate scripture.

However, there were times before his sermons when we could glimpse his own distress. "Lord, you know that in my prayers I have fervently asked you to speak through me." That is the image of him that really stays with me. Rev. Naito was known for his memory and ability to remember names. But added to this God-given talent was his love for each individual, concern for each family, and constant prayer that made it all possible.

What I learned from Rev. Naito was to trust the Lord from my heart, to never give up, to persevere, and to pray fervently. As one who showed great concern for the future of the church, this is the message that he leaves for all of us. In spite of his own weaknesses, he continued to pray and serve as a messenger of the Gospel. I can hear Rev. Naito, with his voice raised saying, "Let us pray!" (Tr. JS)

—From *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend), October 2017 issue

Summarized by KNL Editor Kawakami Yoshiko

*NHK, Nippon Hoso Kyokai (Japan Broadcasting Corporation), is Japan's only public broadcasting corporation. As a public broadcaster, it is funded by fees received from TV viewers,

The Life and Legacy of Keisen Jogakuen Founder Kawai Michi

Ms. Kawai Michi (1877-1953) often said, "The true principal of Keisen Jogakuen is our loving God." This principle lives on to this day in the educational programs of Keisen Jogakuen Junior and Senior High School and of Keisen Jogakuen University and Graduate School. Keisen Jogakuen is not a mission school that was established by receiving support from an overseas mission organization. It is a Christian school that was founded, based on faith, by Kawai, a Japanese Christian.

In the words of Rev. Isshiki Yoshiko, "Throughout her life, Kawai Michi made church a priority and devoted herself to fervent prayer and to the school's students, teachers and staff, along with the families of students and friends all over the world. She loved those people. She was an educator who could lead women to have independence, autonomy, and self-realization as a person who stands before God." A special counselor at Keisen Jogakuen, Isshiki was educated by and lived with Kawai, just like a family member.

Kawai Michi was born in Mie Prefecture to the family of a Shinto priest at Ise Shrine, the most famous shrine in Japan. As a result of reformation that occurred during the Meiji Restoration, however, her father lost his job and moved to Hokkaido while she was still very young. She met Sarah Smith, a missionary in Hakodate, followed her to Sapporo, and studied at Smith Girls' School, which later became Hokusei Jogakko. It can be said that the guidance provided by Nitobe Inazo and Smith in Sapporo gave Kawai direction for her life. Through a recommendation by Tsuda Umeko, Kawai received scholarship funds and, at the age of 21, traveled with Nitobe Inazo and his wife to the United States. In the autumn of 1904, Kawai graduated from Bryn Mawr College, returned to Japan, and became a teacher at Joshi Eigaku Juku, the school founded by Tsuda Umeko that now became Tsuda University. At the same time, Kawai also became a founding member of the Japan YWCA. When she became the first Japanese person to serve as its national secretary, she was 35 years old. During her 14 years as the national secretary, she traveled not only within Japan but also to Western and Asian countries, attending conferences, investigations, and lectures. She was also extremely busy gathering support for relief efforts after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 as well as holding training sessions and nation-wide conventions.

When Kawai retired from the Japan YWCA and felt called to school education, Watanabe Yuri (later Isshiki Yuri), Morikubo Hisa, and other former students of Kawai at Joshi Eigaku Juku supported her through prayer and by raising money. This group, named "Little Flock Of Disciples," sustained Kawai and eventually led to the work of Keisen Fellowship, which still exists today.

In 1929 Kawai founded Keisen Jogakuen with nine students. A friend from YWCA days, Florence Wells, along with friends from her Hokkaido days, Suemitsu Isao and Hongo Shin, served together with her as teachers. The following is a passage from her autobiography, *My Lantern*, which was published in 1939. The Japanese language version came later, in 1968.

"My school—what kind should it be? Besides giving girls a practical religious education along with their regular curriculum, is there not some way, I wondered, of making international study a practical element in their education? Might not I, through my pupils, make a contribution to the cause of international friendship? Wars will never cease until women interest themselves in world affairs. Then, begin with the young—with girls! From mere curiosity they can be led into appreciation of foreign people and things. If Christianity first teaches us self-respect, it next teaches us respect for others, regardless of race or rank; for all human beings are God's children." (*My Lantern*)



The entrance to the school around 1930



Kawai Michi, founder of Keisen Jogakuen

My Lantern (1939) and *Sliding Doors* (1950), both written in English by Kawai, were widely read in the West. Proceeds from the sale of the books were used as educational funds for Keisen Jogakuen. Bertha Lambert, Esther Nuendorffer and others who were friends of Kawai when she was at Bryn Mawr University, Kawai herself, Bonner Fellers (an a college friend of Isshiki Yuri), John Mott, and Elizabeth Vining joined together to organize the "Michi Kawai Christian Fellowship," which continued to support Keisen Jogakuen even after her death. Uemura Masahisa, the pastor of Fujimicho Church to which she belonged, and Kagawa Toyohiko who relied on her for the education of his children, continued in fellowship with Kawai throughout her entire life. Isshiki Yuri's husband, Isshiki Toraji, strongly supported Kawai by serving as Keisen Jogakuen's chairman of the board. Within Japan, and in other countries all over the world, she had very many friendships that crossed Christian denominational lines!

Kawai attended a worldwide Christian conference held in Madras in 1931. She also visited the US in 1941 as a member of a peace group delegation. Even during World War II, she prayed for peace as she prayed for her friends around the world. She worshiped every morning at Keisen Jogakuen and continued to teach the English language. From the founding of Keisen Jogakuen, horticulture had always been an important subject, but the official authorization granted in March 1945 to establish Keisen Jogakuen as an agricultural school for girls marked the real starting point of horticulture as a part of junior college education. To this day, in Keisen Jogakuen Junior High School and High School and in Keisen Jogakuen University, the subject of horticulture is a required course of study.

In 1946, Kawai became a member of the National Educational Reformation Committee and worked for the passage of the Basic Education Act. In 1950, she was asked to write the English language prayers for the World Day of Prayer of that year. As a representative of the Japan Junior College Association, she went to the US in 1951 and, after finishing her duties, traveled around every part of the US, giving lectures and raising money for the establishment of International Christian University in Japan.

In February 1953, after being hospitalized for five months, Kawai Michi passed away at 75 years of age. Isshiki Yuri and Isshiki Yoshiko were at her bedside. Many people connected with Keisen Jogakuen filled the hospital both inside and outside. As they were praying, she went to be with the Lord. Even now, more than 60 years after Kawai's death, many graduates still refer to her as "my teacher." They say things like, "She taught me to be a person who can say 'Yes', 'No', 'Thank you', and 'I'm sorry.'"

There is a school where the ideas of the founder have been inherited and are still alive in today's education. That school is Keisen Jogakuen. (Tr. KT)

—Matsui Hiroko, member
Keisen Jogakuen Archive

Answering God's Call to Mission in Japan

by Laura Parker, missionary
Hirosaki Gakuin Seiai Junior and Senior High School

Greetings from Aomori, Japan! It has now been almost four years since I started serving at Hirosaki Gakuin Seiai Junior and Senior High School, a school affiliated with Hirosaki Gakuin University, a private Christian school. My time here has had its ups and downs, but it continues to be a great joy to serve in Hirosaki and to share the gospel with Japanese youth.

I first felt God calling me to Japan when I was in high school. I grew up in the State of Maryland in the eastern United States. I knew nothing about Japanese language and culture, but I had always been curious about the different customs and values of other countries. US high schools require students to study one foreign language, and I thought it would be fun to study Japanese because it is the language that is most different from English. Looking back on it now, I know that this was no coincidence. I believe that this was the first of many events in my life that God used to direct me to Japan. While I thought I would only study Japanese for a semester, God had other plans for me. The more time passed, the more and more I fell in love with the Japanese language and culture. My studies continued and became more serious when I attended Hope College in Holland, Michigan. During this time I became involved in ministry to Japanese students on campus and to Japanese people living in Holland. There were times when I pursued other interests, but in the end I always felt God bringing me back to Japan.

After graduation, I felt sure that I loved Japan and that Japan would always have a special place in my heart. I considered coming to Japan as an English teacher because I had also studied English in undergraduate school. However, I wanted to be more involved in sharing the gospel than a full-time teaching job would allow. I made inquiries about openings to work as a missionary at a Japanese high school and learned that a position was available at Hirosaki Gakuin Seiai High School. I felt that this was an ideal opportunity for me to use my English language skills while being involved in ministry to Japanese youth. I felt certain that Hirosaki was where God was calling me to be.

Hirosaki Gakuin Seiai Junior and Senior High School, where I now serve, is a Christian school founded by missionaries in 1886. Although there are few Christian teachers, the school continues to hold daily chapel services, have Bible classes, and celebrate events on the Christian calendar. At the chapel services, students sing hymns, hear a short sermon, and pray together. This is the first exposure most of the students have to a worship service or to the Bible. Not many students are Christians, but the school gives students the opportunity to hear the Gospel message for the first time and to learn about who God is. Many students keep their Bibles after they graduate and graduate with a positive, nostalgic view of Christianity. I pray that seeds are being planted every day at these services, and that if not now, some day in the future students will come to know Jesus as their savior.

My main responsibility at the school is to teach in the English department. Teaching English classes provides me with an excellent way to get to know individual students and to build



An English Worship Service at the junior and senior high school

Laura in a typical classroom setting



relationships with them. When talking to students in the classroom, I can learn about their interests and beliefs, which helps me to understand Japanese culture better and how best to share the Gospel with Japanese people. For many students, I am the first foreign Christian they have had a conversation with, and every day I try to find small ways to share God's love with students, whether that be through giving them positive feedback on an assignment, praying with them, or just listening to what they want to tell me. I know that I am flawed in many ways, but I pray that students can see God's love shining through me in these daily interactions with them. I pray that God will use the words I say to touch their hearts and to show them how much He loves them.

In addition to classes, I also assist with the school's religion department. I help with a variety of tasks, but my main responsibility is to conduct an English chapel service once a month. At these services, I lead the students in an English hymn, deliver a short message in English with Japanese translation, and pray for the school and students. It is my greatest joy each month to tell students about how God is working in my life and about what Jesus has done for them on the cross. Students and teachers have told me that my talks help them relate to the Bible and are easy for them to understand, for which I am so thankful!

Another great joy I have is to teach some girls in a weekly Bible study. Each week a small group of girls comes to chat, sing hymns and praise songs, and read Bible passages together in Japanese and English. This has been a great environment to get to know students, to pray with them, and to look at the Bible more closely with them. Recently, two of these girls have even attended church with me.

Serving in a foreign country has been difficult at times, but I am so grateful to God for bringing me to Hirosaki. I am very thankful for this amazing opportunity that God has given me to share His love and to tell the young people in Japan about Jesus. Please continue to keep the teachers and students of Seiai High School in your prayers. Pray that although it becomes more and more difficult to do so, the Gospel message would still be preached. Please pray that God would work powerfully through the school to reach students and their families.

Special Services Held in MSC-member Schools without Missionaries

The Mission Schools Council is the organization consisting of Christian schools that had historically received missionaries from England and from churches in North America that were members of the former Japan-North American Commission on Cooperative Mission (JNAC). Formerly termed the CoC-related Schools Council (CoC: Council of Cooperation), the MCS was renamed in 2007 when the CoC was dissolved.

Only one-third of the 40 schools affiliated with the Missions Schools Council currently have missionaries. The remaining two-thirds, despite the fact that they have no missionaries, continue to support the Mission Schools Council. Steering Committee Chairperson, Kogure Shuya, chancellor of Meiji Gakuin University, has led discussion many times within the Steering Committee about the desire expressed by some schools to withdraw from the council. In some way, the committee wants to help schools without missionaries also to sense the merit of council participation.

At last year's Steering Committee meeting, committee member David Reedy of Aoyama Gakuin University made a proposal to solicit communication from schools without missionaries. This was the beginning of the current project of arranging for a missionary to visit and hold worship services in schools where no missionaries are presently assigned. The MCS is the sponsor, but the actual coordination has been carried out by Kyodan staff members. The MCS Steering Committee selected the target schools, and after these schools agreed and set the dates for the visitation, Kyodan office staff searched for missionaries willing to give a message.

Actual School Sites for the 2016-2017 School Year:

Keiwa Gakuen High School: Missionary In-Hye Chang
Nijijima Gakuen Senior High School:

Missionary David Reedy

Osaka Jogakuin Junior and Senior High School, University,
College: Missionary Martha Mensendieck

Yamanashi Eiwa Junior High School:

Missionary Mike Sherrill



Toyo Eiwa Jogakuin Junior High School and Senior High School: Missionary Ruth Wahrer



Missionary Devora Umipig-Julian, speaking at J.F. Oberlin High School's worship service and, on the right, Kyodan staff member Takada Teruki (author)

Towanomori Sanai High School:

Missionary Divan Suqluman

Toyo Eiwa Jogakuin Junior High School and

Senior High School: Missionary Ruth Wahrer

J. F. Oberlin Senior High School:

Missionary Devora Umipig-Julian

Seikyo Gakuen High School: Missionary Kim Jong-Hyun

(Korean Christian Church in Japan)

Fukuoka Jo Gakuin Junior and Senior High School:

Missionary Sheila Norris

Among the missionaries listed above, some stayed in a school dormitory and interacted with the students, and some taught a class following their message. These encounters with missionaries gave birth to a response, and the students absorbed their messages. A sense of joy was shared by the missionaries who went and the students who heard the messages. There was a friendly call from many schools saying, "Please come again!" A staff person from the Kyodan Office also went with the missionary going to each school.

Nearly all the schools without missionaries have had no missionaries for over ten years. So naturally, there has been a break in the connection between the schools without missionaries and the Kyodan Office. However, through the accompaniment of the person from the Kyodan Office this time, a face-to-face relationship was restored. Some of the schools that were visited have indicated a desire for new missionaries to be sent to them.

Through the creation and restoration of trust relationships, the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ will move ahead!

(Tr. RT)

—Takada Teruki, staff

Kyodan Commission on Ecumenical Ministries

Acting General Secretary's Report:

Executive Council Elects New General Secretary

It has been a year now since the present 40th General Assembly period began. Even though a general secretary was not selected at that time, I give thanks to God that the work of the Kyodan has proceeded without any major issues during that time. The 3rd Executive Council meeting of this period was held Oct. 16-17. The most notable action was the long-delayed selection of a new general secretary. Rev. Akiyama Toru, chair of the Commission on Ecumenical Ministries and pastor of Ageo Godo Church in the Kanto District, was selected by unanimous vote and will begin his term on April 1, 2018.

As customary at the Executive Council's fall meeting the year after the general assembly, reports were received from the following Kyodan commissions and committees.

Commission on Mission (Committee on Evangelism,
Committee on Education, Committee on Social Concerns)
Commission on Ministry,
Commission on Finance
Commission on Faith and Order
Commission on Ecumenical Ministries
Commission on Ministerial Qualifications

The amount of time allotted to each report was limited, but I endeavored to get a clear understanding of the mission work and situation of the Kyodan as a whole through carefully listening to these reports of the issues each commission and committee is working through at the one-year mark of the present two-year general assembly period and what its vision is for the future.

There are also two subcommittees under the Commission on Mission.

1. The Subcommittee on Dealing with Handicapping Conditions has been in operation for several general assembly periods, endeavoring to develop ways that people with various handicapping conditions can lead fulfilling church lives.

2. The Organizational Committee for the Establishment of an Office for the Support of Pastors and their Families was just established at last year's general assembly, and is preparing to set up an office to help pastors and their families who are facing difficult issues of one sort or another.

Prior to the report of the Task Force of Evangelism Promotion, which is under the Committee on Evangelism, Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo, who heads that office, gave a report on "Specialized Activities in Evangelism." The Research Institute on the Mission of the Church, the

only such independent committee within the Kyodan, reports on its research into all aspects of the mission of the Kyodan. During this period, it is focusing on the themes of "churches and church-related institutions" and "youth evangelism."

The 2018 budget was also on the agenda for this meeting. The operations of the Kyodan as a whole is supported by the apportionments of the 17 districts. Due to the financial situations the districts face, the total apportionments were reduced by 1.34% to 248,523,000 yen. This figure, then, is divided up into the budgets for the various committees and offices, as well as the budget for the general assembly. That leaves a rather limited amount as the difference between expenditures and income of 2,303,000 yen to apply to the contingency fund.

Reports were also made on the two projects instituted at the 39th General Assembly and continued into the present 40th General Assembly Period, namely the Committee on Aid for Reconstruction of Churches Damaged in the Kumamoto Oita Earthquake and the Committee on the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Concern was expressed, however, about the rather weak fund-raising that has been accomplished so far for these projects.

(Tr. TB)

—Acting General Secretary Dohke Norikazu,
Executive Secretary of General Affairs

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year to all KNL Readers

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Editorial Committee: Kofukada Yutaka, Nishio Misao,
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Wayne Jansen, Joe Stroud, Robert Terhune,
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Note: The names of Japanese persons are listed in traditional order, with last names first.