

Missional Planning Conference Held on “Confirming the Kyodan’s Ecclesiology”

The Kyodan’s Missional Planning Conference was held March 1-2 at Fujimicho Church in Tokyo under the theme “Confirming the Kyodan’s Ecclesiology Today.” There were 85 persons in attendance at the beginning of the conference. With the exception of Kyoto District, all 17 Kyodan districts were represented. However, the attendees from the Kyushu and Okinawa districts were not district representatives but members of the Kyodan Commission on Mission.

Koide Nozomi, chairperson of the Kyodan Commission on Mission, mentioned in his opening remarks that in the midst of continuing deep lines of division in the local districts, this conference provided a time of serious study together for consideration of the ideal form for our local districts.

Kyodan General Secretary Naito Tomeyuki gave the key address: “The understanding of the Church reflected in the Kyodan Constitution.” During the question-and-answer session following his address, General Secretary Naito remarked that with the large number of laity in attendance, this was a time to avoid professional terminology and speak in plain words. It was a time to focus on the larger problems of the Kyodan rather than to deal with details.

In his address, he noted that when we look at the recent activities of the Kyodan, there seems to be no sense of a common understanding of what it means to be a “Kyodan” church. What is our common faith? What is our common task? As part of the body of Christ, we are an institutionalized church, and it is important that we grasp and understand the essence of what this means. We say that the Kyodan is a united church. When we look at our history, it is true that over 30 denominations united to form the Kyodan. However, our Constitution states that (these churches) “joined in the fellowship of a holy universal (catholic) church.”

We were not born as a united church. Incidentally, the term “united church” is not used at all in the Constitution of the Kyodan. Being a “united church” does not mean that each local church is “free to do as it likes” or allowed to take ‘any stance without censure.’ Rather, our Constitution clearly indicates that we are a holy universal (catholic) church entrusted with a gospel to proclaim, sacraments to observe, and aspiring to carry out God’s will of salvation while waiting for the second coming of Christ.

Therefore, as a holy universal church based on scripture, we will continue to faithfully profess our faith; and as an

organized church we will uphold the laws of the church (the Constitution, Bylaws, and other rules and regulations) as we endeavor in acts of gospel ministry. In the first place, our Kyodan Constitution is the constitution of our church. In English, the word “constitution” means the “form” of that which is constituted. It reveals the basic “form” of that particular organization. Our Kyodan Constitution reveals the basic form of a Kyodan church. In other words, it reveals what kind of organization or institution we have. The Kyodan is a church that has the order and discipline of the words of Christ.

The Constitution and Bylaws, which are the laws of the church, are important in maintaining the faith and order of the Kyodan. However, the main purpose is not to control or restrain church activities. Rather it is to provide a guide and reference so that the laity may lead a rich and righteous life of faith.

In the first lecture entitled “Worship and Holy Communion,” Haga Tsutomu, a professor at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary and pastor of Higashi Murayama Church in Nishi-Tokyo District, discussed what makes Holy Communion “holy” communion?

According to Haga, the purpose of the lecture was to point out the logic in the execution of Holy Communion while referring to the Kyodan Constitution and Discipline. He also expressed an understanding that adherence to the Kyodan Confession of Faith and Article 8 of the Kyodan Constitution was important.

In the second lecture entitled “Clerical Orders in the Kyodan: The Task and the Prospects,” Okamoto Tomoyuki, pastor of Nishinomiya Church addressed the subject of ministerial qualifications: a proposal for one track.

Okamoto remarked that the future of the Kyodan, with its decreasing numbers and the accompanying financial pressure, can be seen as desperate. He vividly portrayed the church’s situation as well as the fact of the decreasing population of Japan itself and the possibility of financial failure. In particular, Okamoto gave an explanation of the two-track clergy system from a “functional view” that was completely different from the 40 years of ideological criticism of the hierarchy inherent in the system, and proposed a solution to the problem. (Tr. JS)

—Omishima Yoshitaka, executive secretary

Completion of Yearlong Celebration of 150th Anniversary of Protestant Christianity in Japan

With gratitude we come to the end of our celebration of the 150th anniversary of Protestant mission in Japan, which has included over a hundred events of various types and has resulted in two commemorative publications: *Christ, Our Only Salvation: 150 Years of Mission in Japan* and *Commemorative Report: For a New Expansive Vision*.

The first publication, *Christ, Our Only Salvation: 150 Years of Mission in Japan*, focuses on the 150-year history of the Protestant church in Japan, especially reflecting on the past 50 years. Also included is the history of the Christian schools and social welfare facilities, which reflect the core of the present situation of evangelism in Japan. This publication provides a valuable record of the history of Christianity in Japan.

The second publication is in the form of a business report. *Commemorative Report: For a New Expansive Vision* includes a list of all the events and a digest of the content of the sermons and lectures at those events that were determined to be the most valuable as a permanent record. We hope this will provide guidelines for the Kyodan and for each of the local churches. We published these guidelines with the intention of being in touch with the slogan of the National Laity Convention, "Thank you for 150 years, looking toward 200 years with our Lord."

The Commemorative Convention was held on Nov. 23, 2009 at the Aoyama Gakuin Auditorium, with 1600 participants. Three addresses served as the "pillars" of the Convention: "The Foolish Methodist of Mission," a sermon by Former Kyodan Moderator Ojima Seishi; "The Role of the Believer in Evangelism," a lecture by Hashimoto Toru, chair of the Board of Directors of International Christian University; and "Lift High Your Hearts," a lecture by theologian Kato Tsuneaki.

Music was provided by the Yebon Choir from Saemoonan Presbyterian Church in Korea, the Aoyama Gakuin Choir, and the Toyo Eiwa Girls' High School's Handbell Choir, while participants viewed historic slides to give the event an additional nostalgic flavor. The Korean Semnan Church is the oldest church in Korea, and the participation of this church had significant meaning in light of the history between the churches of Japan and Korea. It is not an overstatement to say that a new page in our history has been turned.

The conclusion of the convention was the Convention Declaration. The starting point of mission for the missionaries who came to Japan in 1859 was rooted in the policy of the Evangelical Alliance established in

1846: "Read the Bible, Pray, and Evangelize," which is based on faith and prayer. This fervent expression of faith bore fruit. The Kyodan is a universal church born out of God's working through history. It has a simple creed and inherits the tradition of early Japanese ecumenism, which led to the vow of keeping the five beliefs listed below:

- *I believe that Jesus is the Christ.
- *I believe that the Bible is the Word of God.
- *I believe in the Church, which is the Body of Christ.
- *As one having received the blessing of the Gospel, I will worship, read the Bible, and will live a prayerful, spiritual life of faith
- *As one who has been saved by God, I will work to evangelize Japan.

The final event was the Worship Service of Thanksgiving for 50 Years of Faithful Living held at Tokyo Yamate Church on March 22, 2010. Such a Service of Thanksgiving was not part of the initial preparation for this assembly, but as plans progressed the need for an opportunity to give thanks during a worship service became apparent. Inspired by Ecclesiastes 12:1, "Remember your creator in the days of your youth," 450 believers who have lived lives of faith for 50 years or more gathered together and partook of holy communion together. These people had prayed, worked for, and participated in the 100th anniversary of Protestant mission in Japan and now experienced the double joy of being present to celebrate the 150th anniversary as well. The desire to honor lay people marking 50 years as Christian believers resulted from the special commemoration of 50 years of ministry held for 61 ministers at the Foundation Day Commemoration Service. We believe this was the Lord's leading.

Kyodan Moderator Yamakita Nobuhisa made the following statement to the assembly. "While seeking forgiveness for the sin of not adequately enough obeying the call of the Great Commission and giving thanks for the endeavors of our predecessors, let us work together as an evangelizing Kyodan to produce the fruit of unity in the Lord." Although the Kyodan is not currently in the best condition for celebrating the 150th anniversary of Protestant Christianity, we can be thankful that the past 150 years of history have given us blessings to reflect on and a new determination to move forward.

—Kobayashi Sadao, chair
Committee on Preparations for the 150th
Anniversary of Protestant Evangelism in Japan
Member, Kyodan Executive Council

2nd Christian Education Seminar Convened in Shizuoka

by Hirata Kazuko, member
Committee on Education, Osaka District
Director of Christian Education, Handago Church

Included among the many ministries of the Kyodan Committee on Education is the important work of supporting church school Christian education. A Christian Education Seminar is conducted biannually. The previous one was held in March 2008 in Shikoku District, where those who serve in church school ministry gathered, had fellowship, and prayed for one another. I highly appreciated this year's event, which was hosted by Tokai District at Shizuoka Church on March 9. As the speaker, I was greatly encouraged and strengthened by the presence of the 57 participants who attended, despite the rain, and particularly by their passion for Christian Education.

"The Joy of Being Called by God" (Summary of the seminar presentation)

I serve as the Director of Christian Education at Handago Church, situated at the foot of Kongozan (Mt. Kongo) in Gose City, in the southern part of Nara Prefecture. Although public transportation is not so good, the church sits in a beautiful setting. It was started over 60 years ago by a pastor with physical disabilities. A day nursery stands next to the church, helping the ministry of the church. Children now at this nursery, as well as those who attended in the past, are linked to the church school. Some have become key members of the church. Before I came to serve in my present position five years ago, I was asked to develop the work of church school so that it could contribute further to church growth.

The pastor suddenly passed away three years ago. Even though the church has an interim pastor, in practice, I have been given the task of looking after the church and building it up in the absence of a pastor. There are 20 to 30 children in our church school, which is less than what we had last year. Every Sunday morning, parents drive their children to church to attend church school. Now, parents stay on for the church school service, which is a blessing to us.

Over the past several years, many people have voiced concern about the crisis of church schools in Japan. Kyoshi no Tomo (Teachers' Friend) has published special features on church school training in various parts of Japan. Many seminars have tackled the issue as well. The situation remains unchanged although various attempts have been made. The social situations children face raise various



Hirata Kazuko addressing Christian Education Seminar participants at Shizuoka Church on March 9

challenges for us. Church school is not merely a play group for children. It is where God the Creator meets them--the One who created each one of them and who loves them as his treasures. The church, as well as the church school must communicate this to the outside world.

Some people may lament that there are so few children at church, sometimes none at all. The church has gone through various phases in its history. Sometimes multitudes flocked to it. Other times the light was barely lit. Still the church has remained standing, which brings us to the present. As our Lord Jesus taught in the parable of a mustard seed, a small seed is sowed and grows to become a huge tree. What we can do is to sow these seeds. We do not need to hurry. As we sow them, they will bring a plentiful harvest, for the one who gives the growth is our Creator.

For this purpose, I consider it essential to worship God during church school and to preach the Word of God. On this day the Lord sends us his children. On this day I speak from his word to them. The seeds that I have sowed today will surely bear fruit in the hearts of the children.

Another important aspect is the church calendar. We pass on to the next generation the history of our faith, which has been passed on to us over the years. Rather than being discouraged by what we are unable to do, we need to be more creative and have more fun in our program-making. Church school materials contain many new ideas, but we do not always have to do what others are doing. We can create our own material, as suits each situation, and have fun with it. I feel that the Lord has called me into this type of ministry. Let us be encouraged and walk steadily and unhurriedly with the One who guides us as we serve him. (Tr. YY)

Learning from our Catholic Brethren

“Learning from our Catholic Brethren,” a seminar for laity and clergy sponsored by the Commission on Ecumenical Ministries, was held on Sept. 5, 2009 at the Kichijoji Catholic Church in Tokyo. There, we listened to a presentation on Catholicism by the head priest, Father Miyazaki Yasushi. We often associate Catholicism in Japan with the kakure (hidden) Christians (hiding from persecution during the Edo Period) and how various local customs were adopted into their worship. On the other hand, there were senpuku (laying in waiting) Christians, as Miyazaki prefers to call them, who faithfully passed down Catholic worship. People said he prefers to call them. Miyazaki himself is a descendent of senpuku (laying in waiting) Christians.

Miyazaki carefully explained many things about Catholic history, much of which we thought we knew about but really did not. The two-hours seminar went by very quickly, as he related to us such things as ecumenical relations since Vatican II, the priestly wardrobe and liturgical motions of the mass, and the liturgical hymns that are sung. He invited anyone who wanted to stay for mass later that day to do so, and several of the 70 laity and clergy in attendance were able to do that. (Tr. TB)

—Yoshioka Mitsuhiro, Kichijoji Church pastor
Chair, Commission on Ecumenical Ministries
Nishi Tokyo District
Nishi Tokyo District News

Historical Background

There was a period in Japanese history when the Christian faith was prohibited for 260 years. Prior to prohibition, the Catholic Church was instrumental in spreading the faith. Christians were known as Kirishitan. (This was a Japanese transliteration of the word “Christian” in Portuguese.) In the years since modern Japan opened its doors to Christianity, the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant denominations have built many churches. Last year marked the 150th anniversary of Protestant mission in Japan. With the exception of certain individuals and local churches, it cannot be claimed that these Christian churches have engaged one another in an assertive and continuing way to create fellowship with one another.

Many Protestants may have learned in school about the coming of Christianity to Japan in the 16th century; however, they know very little about the Catholic Church in Japan today. It is important to note, that through the ecumenical movement, Catholics and Protestants worked on a common translation of the Bible, producing the New Common Translation (Shin Kyodoyaku) in 1987. However, for the average Protestant lay person and pastor, even though they are aware of the presence of the Catholic Church, they are provided very few opportunities to encounter the actual Catholic Church of today. For this reason, West Tokyo District planned a gathering entitled “Learning from the Catholics.”

Let us start with the first history of when Christianity was brought to Japan. In 1549 a Basque man from Spain named Francisco Xavier came on a Portuguese ship to bring Christianity to Japan. At that time Japan was in the midst of internal turmoil. This period is known as the Period of Warring States, during which no single power was able to bring Japan under one rule. It was during this half century that many missionaries were able to propagate the faith, bringing the Christian population to 200,000. Some estimates are as high as 400,000 to 700,000. The total population of Japan at this time was estimated to be 20 million.

During this period, wine, Western clocks, eye glasses, and Western printing press technology were introduced

to Japan and also bread. (In Japanese, bread is called pan, which is derived from the Portuguese word for bread.) From the importation of Christian art, indigenous Japanese Christian art developed. The first man to attain supreme power in Japan, Oda Nobunaga, decided to protect and preserve Christianity. He did this not because he valued the faith, but rather because he saw it as a useful part of a strategy to engage the world beyond Japan. However, the man who ruled over Japan after Oda’s death, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, expelled all priests from Japan in 1587. Then in 1597, he executed 6 missionaries and 20 Japanese priests and lay people. These are known today as the 26 Holy Martyrs.

The man who followed Toyotomi, Tokugawa Ieyasu, declared in 1613 that Christianity be prohibited in Japan. The Tokugawa government brainwashed the populace into believing that Christianity was a dangerous religion. Neighborhood groups were set up to spy on one another and to inform the authorities, if necessary. One person’s crime was cause for punishment of the whole collective. Also, everyone was forced to belong to a Buddhist temple. As a result of these policies, the Kirishitan were to have been exterminated.

However, there were people who persevered to carry on the Christian faith. Outwardly they professed being Buddhist, but in secret they protected and passed on the Christian faith. Some were executed because informants told the authorities. It was only later that history proved that the Christian faith survived. Two hundred years after missionaries were expelled from Japan, the Christian faith was preserved by several hundred thousand people of faith. These people, known as the Kakure Kirishitan (hidden Christians), had been cut off from Rome for 250 years and thus have evolved their own form of faith. Our Catholic guest lecturer that day spoke much about these differences. (Tr. JM)

—Kawakami Yoshiko, pastor
Okubo Church, Tokyo District’s North Subdistrict
Chair, KNL Editorial Committee

The Legacy of Missionary Anny Buzzell in Tohoku District

But I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:27)

by Higashi Joshua, professor
Shokei Gakuin University, Sendai

Anny Syrena Buzzell (Aug. 3, 1866–Feb. 5, 1936) was the second daughter born to the Oliver Buzzell family in Lowell, Massachusetts. Later, in 1877, the family settled in the village of Juniata, Nebraska. Both of Anny's parents were descendants of the Huguenots, early French Protestant Calvinists. Her father was engaged in farming and at the same time participated in evangelism, eventually becoming the pastor of the Baptist Church of Juniata. Anny was raised in this family of burning devout faith and pioneer evangelistic fervor. In the fall of 1884, Anny's older sister Minnie was sent as a missionary to Swatow, China, where for three years she engaged in evangelistic work.

Being strongly influenced by her parents and sister, Anny herself resolved to enter overseas missions. Her first step toward that goal was to study and graduate from Gibbon Baptist Seminary. Then in April 1892, after six years of teaching at an elementary school, she was accepted as a missionary by the American Baptist Women's Missionary Society. Anny was 26 years old.

At that time, missionaries of the American Baptist Women's Missionary Society were working in the city of Sendai in the Tohoku district of Japan as English teachers. It was very unusual for people from foreign countries to reside there at that time. Therefore, these missionaries became keenly aware that in order to accomplish their mission, the cooperation of Japanese women who could directly approach other Japanese women and children was essential. So the missionaries undertook the training of "Bible Women." To do this, they adopted the method of home schooling in the form of a "Christian girls' school home." In other words, Japanese girls were invited to live in the missionaries' home, where education and life discipline took place. By August 1892 the home school had developed into a girls' school called Shokei Jogakkai.

The founder of the school was missionary Lavinia Mead (April 26, 1859–October 9, 1941). Anny Buzzell, who arrived in Sendai in November 1892, became Lavinia Mead's close assistant and the administrator of Shokei Jogakkai (girls' school). At the time of her installation the recorded enrollment was only nine students.

It seems that "Shokei", the name of the school, was taken from the same Chinese characters as those used in the traditional Chinese word "ikin-shokei," a phrase from a classic book entitled "Chuyo" (Doctrine of the Mean [middle course between extremes]) in reference to a true gentleman's refined yet principled habit of wearing a plain and modest cloak over fine brocade apparel. When Anny Buzzell learned this, she immediately thought of I Peter 3: 3-4: "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." (NIV) So Anny passionately proposed that this should define the spirit of the school. Thus, this scripture verse came to define the spirit of Shokei Girls' School and has been its guiding principle to this day. In 1899 the Shokei school received



Anny Buzzell, first president of Shokei Jogakuin, now Shokei Gakuin, in Sendai the Oliver Buzzell family in Lowell, Massachusetts. Later, in 1877, the family settled in the village of Juniata, Nebraska.

official authorization and was formally established with the name Shokei Jogakuin. Anny Buzzell became the school's first president.

As president, Anny not only administered the affairs of the school but also did much of the teaching. She especially put her heart and soul into Bible classes and also teaching the history of Christian doctrine. Besides this, she was responsible for English, music, child care, and lectures on weaving. In all she taught classes 28 hours a week, besides her busy work outside the school that included leading a young women's group, leading hymn singing at church and home, directing more than ten Sunday Schools, and establishing and managing a settlement house called Jieikan where poor people could learn self employment and self support (the skills necessary for financial independence).

Anny never took a summer vacation but stayed at the school all summer while doing visitation evangelism and bringing comfort to sick people and to wounded soldiers returning from the wars in China and Russia wars. Thus, she truly put into practice a life of service.

One more thing I want to record about her life concerns a Bible class for high school boys, which Anny led. For 27 years, from 1893 until 1919, Anny Buzzell led a Bible class for the young men studying at Kyusei Niko High School. Beginning with one-to-one Bible study, the number of students increased, and many went on to receive baptism. This Bible class produced many pastors, college professors, Diet members, and other gifted men who influenced the modernization of Japan.

Among these influential men was Yoshino Sakuzo, who became a professor of political science at Tokyo University and whose name was synonymous with Taisho democracy doctrine. He published a thesis in 1916 (year 5 of Japan's Taisho Era), which stated that "Though Japan holds to the emperor system, politics is for the people" and proposed popular elections. Many people supported what he promulgated, and in 1925 Japan's first law establishing universal suffrage was approved and adopted. Clearly the teaching of Anny Buzzell was at the root of the thinking of Yoshino Sakuzo and many of her other students about this issue. In 2003, Shokei Jogakuin became a coeducational institution called Shokei Gakuin University, and it continues to develop in the direction set by Anny Buzzell. (Tr. GM)

My Office Bible Study Group: Encouragement for My Work, Stronghold for My Faith

by Oshikiri Minori, member
Higashi-Nakano Church and
Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office Study Group

Last November, the “Friends of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office” Bible Study Group published a small booklet. A year earlier, Ichijo Hitoshi, a member of the group who had struggled with illness for four years, passed on to his heavenly reward while clutching his beloved Bible close to his heart. He exuded love, always had a smile, and had been a hard worker on behalf of the Bible study group. His death led other members to reflect on his contribution to the group and to declare clearly God’s grace and salvation by publishing the booklet.

My understanding is that this Bible study group was established right after World War II, in 1947, by a small number of Christians who were working for the Tokyo government. Tokyo had been burned to the ground, and these Christians prayed for the restoration of Tokyo as a place of peace and sought to provide comfort and encouragement to coworkers through the words of the Bible. The first leader was Isomura Eiichi who believed “We are civil servants, and as servants who serve God, we seek to serve the people of Tokyo.” This belief was the starting point for the Bible study members. In the beginning, a pastor by the name of Hirai was sent by the Kyodan to assist the group and following him, Pastor Kitamori Kazo became the group’s spiritual guide. Kitamori had been recommended by Watanabe Zenda, a former pastor of my church when it was Futaba Independent Church. I heard that he valued what the Bible study group was trying to do and felt that God had been at work to bring him there.

Later we were guided by Hayashi Tadayoshi, an elder of Fujimicho Church. As time passed, the group went through a low period, with decreasing numbers, but was somehow held together by Higuchi Toshiaki and other members. They kept “a dimly burning wick” alive and prayed for new workers. It was during this time that Ichijo was “given” as God’s gift to the group. Membership started increasing, and the flame began to burn brightly again. Members studied the Bible, shared meals, planned special study programs in summer, and celebrated Christmas together. To me, this Bible study group is an “ecclesia,” an ecumenical gathering, where each person, as



The author and her husband among participants at the 2009 Christmas celebration: she, in the front row and third from the left; he, on the far right

a person of faith, is called to seek who God wants him/her to be in her/his various organizations and workplaces.

My first contact with the group was while I was working at a city-run nursery school. I was invited by my friend Kano Takeshi and started attending a monthly evening meal. Meeting in the Fujimicho Church building, I felt wrapped in history. The meal began with a prayer by Ichijo and then, I recall, people shared how God was working in their various places of employment. People who worked in very different fields shared concretely about their situations. I felt encouraged in my own work, and the group became a stronghold for my faith.

My active church involvement began with this Bible study group, and I was baptized by Kitamura Soji of Higashi Nakano Church. I was busy with work and raising a family, but since retiring four years ago, I have had more time to devote to church activities and find that a source of joy. Thankful for God’s grace, I want to continue to serve God along with my husband and other members of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office Bible Study Group. (Tr. RW)

From Shinto no Tomo (Believers' Friend)

Support for Families Grieving Deaths by Suicide

Ever since 1998, the number of suicide deaths in Japan has continued at the high level of over 30,000 annually. To meet this critical situation, the Japanese government promulgated the "Basic Law against Suicide" in 2006 and took measures to implement it, but to this day the high level has not been reduced. The above number also means that annually more than double or triple that number of bereaved family members in need of care are created.

"Attending to my daily clinical work, I have realized the depth of the suffering of these bereaved families." "One such person said, 'Daily I seem to be sitting on a mat of needles.'" (Support Families of those who commit Suicide, published by M. C. Muse)

Dr. Hirayama Masami* has established Grief Care/Support Plaza to help lessen the suffering of such families. Also, he makes visits throughout Japan as a representative of the Nation-wide Network for the Support of Suicide Survivors' Groups. He explains the situation as follows.

"Most suicides are unexpected. When facing the sudden and shocking death of a family member, the families are left asking, 'Why?' Among all, there is a strong feeling of guilt. They torment themselves thinking, 'We wished we had noticed the problem earlier,' or 'If only we could have done something about it beforehand.'" "If the person who committed suicide was sick, the family may direct anger against the medical care person involved, or at times may even feel somewhat relieved if the care for the person who committed suicide had been felt to be a great burden. The feelings of the bereaved family members are never simple.

"The critical eyes of society intensify the burden of the bereaved family. In Japan, worried about their reputation, the family hesitates to make suicide public. There are cases when some do not even notify their relatives or hold

a funeral service. Moreover, often someone's thoughtless words add to their grief. As a result, the bereaved family loses the chance to receive comfort, the door to healing is closed, or they close themselves to the outside with feelings of guilt. The purpose of Grief Care/Support Plaza is to become a care-giver to such family members so that they can experience healing and have a chance to recover.

"What is healing? Does grief disappear by healing? No, grief may even deepen at times. However, through such grief people may grow spiritually. Still, it is necessary for them to be freed from their feelings of guilt. The root of the suicide problem in Japan is related to Japanese culture. Unfortunately, in traditional Japanese culture, there is no concept or belief in forgiveness of sin. Thus, there is a need for the Christian faith, which shows the way of confession of sin through repentance and the message of forgiveness and sanctification by God in Jesus Christ."

As a youth, Dr. Hirayama himself lost a close friend by suicide. This death of a friend left "a question" in his heart and paved the way for his own life work. He says, "Because of his death, I am what I am now. As the resurrected Christ lives in the hearts of all believers, my friend still lives in my heart." (Tr. RK)

*Hirayama Masami is a neuro-psychiatrist and serves as the director of Grief-care/Support Plaza. Born in 1938 in Tokyo. At present, he is a professor at Seigakuin College Graduate School in the Institute of Human Welfare, president of Kitasenju Asahi Clinic, chair of the Board of Directors of Grief Care/Support Plaza (<http://www12.ocn.ne.jp/~griefcsp/>), and representative of the Nation-wide Network for the Support of Suicide Survivors' Groups.

—From *Kokoro no Tomo (Hearts' Friend)*

"Death and Funerals" Theme of West Tokyo District Pastors' Seminar

A one-day Seminar for Pastors was held at Asagaya Church in Tokyo on Sept. 15, 2009, with 33 people from 30 churches and Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, including 2 lay persons, in attendance. The theme of the seminar was "Death and Funerals Today," and the featured speaker was Kaku Shuichi, director of the Christian Counseling Center. Having served several churches as a pastor of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, as well as having had much experience working with many persons in the medical field, Pastor Kaku lectured with deep insight and a wealth of suggestions.

Recently, the need for providing spiritual care while ministering to a dying patient is beginning to be emphasized. Patients suffering from a serious illness and facing death may question the reason and purpose for their being and ask, "Why me?" Modern society only recognizes the value of a "useful" being. Therefore, the quest for the value of their existence by those now "just existing" is serious. How are we to understand their question in depth? The mistake believers often make is to say simply, "Let's read the Bible and pray," as if ignoring their question. Our Lord Jesus Christ cried out on the cross saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Christ lived in this world of irrationality, which cannot give us fully satisfying answers.

Even though we cannot give a satisfying verbal answer, the sharing of this irrationality in "witness" (togetherness) is important. "What is the purpose of our life?" There is no human answer to such a question. But there is Christ who died on the Cross and was resurrected for us. Here is an answer only the church can give. Therefore, when facing death, which is beyond mere expression in human words, the sacraments of baptism and communion at the death bed are quite meaningful. Also, music, painting, beautiful scenery, human beings, their activity, living space, and lifestyle: all these can provide inspiration.

The speech was rich in content, and the above is only a small part of the lecture given by Kaku. What he said concerning a Christian funeral impressed me deeply. "It is the final summarization of ministering to a church member who has died, showing the answer the church does have for death, and which also serves as a witness to society. (Tr. RK)

—Shichijo Masaaki, pastor
Takaido Church, Nishi Tokyo District
Member, Nishi Tokyo District Pastors' Committee
(From *Nishi Tokyo District News*)

The General Secretary's Diary

Reflections on the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

I recently represented the Kyodan at the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan's 55th Annual General Assembly, which was held at Chang-June Girls High School in Tainan, Taiwan under the theme "Let cultures flourish; Let God's justice take root." The more than 500 delegates in attendance engaged in a lively discussion of the various agenda items, and I sensed their deep commitment to engage actively in evangelism. I was greatly encouraged by their demeanor and would like to give my impressions.

1. In the opening worship, I was very thankful that all of the foreign guests were included in the Holy Communion service. While that may seem obvious, it was an opportunity for me personally to directly experience our oneness as fellow believers in Christ and the lordship of Christ not only in the church but also in the whole world.

2. During the morning worship service and at other times when there were pauses in the deliberations, such as when votes for the officers were being counted, several PCT missionaries to other countries gave moving reports of their work. They described their deep involvement in the issues that face the people they serve. I was particularly impressed by a woman missionary to Ethiopia. She described the situation of Ethiopian women, with their low status and grinding poverty, and how she was working with them to overcome the discrimination and prejudice they face. It was a powerful witness of following Christ in service to all the poor and oppressed.

The PCT has approximately the same numerical strength as the Kyodan, and so it was a great encouragement for me to see how the church is involved not only in outreach to Taiwanese living overseas but also in sending PCT missionaries to other lands. In fact, several missionaries have been sent to work in Japan to found churches for Taiwanese living in Japan. Some of these churches are affiliated with the Kyodan. The prospects are good that the number of these churches will continue to increase.

3. Among the various agenda items were such topics as elimination of the death penalty, the homosexual issue, and gender discrimination issues--all of which are likewise being debated within the Kyodan. I was very impressed by the level of awareness of human

rights and the value of human life. However, the topic that stimulated me most was the "New 'Doubling' Church Growth Plan," which is firmly grounded in the evangelical heritage the PCT received from its reformed Presbyterian roots. As the PCT stands on the doctrinal foundations of the Presbyterian Church, it has a clear picture of the roles each level of the church structure has in carrying out its evangelistic mandate.

Structurally, the denomination consists of a general assembly, which is analogous to the Kyodan as a whole, districts, and local churches (in terms that translate literally as "large assembly," "medium assembly," and "small assembly"). Each level works in close cooperation with the others in both evangelistic outreach and social outreach through educational institutions and social welfare institutions, such as hospitals and homes for elderly persons. I think PCT has a well designed plan that encompasses "human salvation" in every aspect. The New "Doubling" Church Growth Plan" is a continuation of the first "Doubling" Church Growth Plan that was instituted 20 years ago, and so I salute them for this vision. I also dream of the time when the Kyodan will be able to discuss a similar plan in its general assembly and initiate its own "Doubling" Church Growth Plan. (Tr. TB)

—Naito Tomeyuki, general secretary

KNL Corner

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