

## Mission Planning Conference Highlights Evangelism

The 17th Kyodan Mission Planning Conference was held at Fujimicho Church, March 7-8, 2016, under the sponsorship of the Committee on Evangelism. The theme of the conference was "How will the Kyodan Promote Evangelism?" In addition to representatives of each committee of the Kyodan, the 83 participants included representatives from the districts and related schools as well as the top four Kyodan officers. After the opening worship, led by Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo, there were presentations by four participants, a panel discussion, a lecture followed by small-group discussion, and then a concluding discussion by the entire assemblage.

The first presenter, Pastor Kita Kiyoshi of Matsuzawa Church, stated: "Evangelism was once thought of as an evil that infringed on personal thought and belief, but today, by giving God his sovereign place and through service, the individual and the church can both fulfill the mission of evangelism." Next, Pastor Shibata Moyuru of Hakodate Chitose Church expressed "resistance to the mixing of talk about evangelism with the issue of church membership and church attendance. There is a tendency to see things in a unitary way when we use the word evangelism, but does that not leave out regional issues? Now the starting point needs to be the acknowledgment of our differences."

Tokyo Christian University Professor Yamaguchi Yoichi spoke about the need to define more clearly the revision of the church's Basic Theory of Mission from an evangelical Protestant perspective, saying: "The fundamental point is the importance of promoting cooperation in evangelism between the Kyodan and other denominations. However, the appreciation of historical context since World War II has been weak. In particular, the right to resist (in regard to religious observance in the political realm) needs to be clarified.\*"

The final speaker, Kyodan missionary Nag Woon-hae spoke about "the need to engage in domestic

evangelism also from the perspective of world mission and to have a sound faith based on the Holy Spirit and a holistic understanding. I recommend a major prayer assembly where the Kyodan as a whole can repent of the current situation."

Among the opinions expressed from the floor during the panel discussion was the following by the Reverend Gushiken Atsushi from Okinawa, who said: "The anger surrounding the issue of U.S. military bases in Okinawa can only be addressed through prayer, and this anger makes the Okinawa problem hard to see."

On the second day of the conference, Tsukuba University Professor Emeritus Ohama Tetsuya delivered the main address entitled "What is Japanese Christianity? A Historical Perspective." Ohama suggested that history be interpreted from the point of view of Jesus' identification with "the least of these." He argued that we should recall and interpret history from this perspective. Early Japanese Protestant leaders accepted Christianity during the "expel the barbarians" period. Anti-foreigner, jingoistic tendencies were strong, and these early leaders were probably loyal servants of the nation. (This is a kind of analogy of early Japanese Protestant leaders.) It is necessary to review the history of the emperor system to find out what it is, for example. In the pronouncements of the church nowadays, how often do they ask about our faithful existence as Christians? Ohama spoke of the need for the church to identify with and speak on behalf of church members living and struggling in the world, while at the same time being understanding of the faith of others. (Tr. DB)

—Kato Makoto, executive secretary

\*"Religious observance in the political realm" in this context refers to the attendance of public figures, in their official capacities, at Shinto religious ceremonies, which Japanese Christians and others have protested is contrary to Japan's Constitution.

## Reflections on the 2016 Kyodan-related Missionary Conference

by Timothy Boyle, missionary

The 2016 Kyodan-related Missionary Conference was held March 28-30 at Emmaus Center in Sendai. Being shortly after the fifth anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami along the Tohoku coast, much of the conference focused on the aftermath of that great disaster. The conference theme was, in fact, "Emmaus—Walk along with the Wounded." The "wounded" from that triple disaster were not only those directly assaulted by the quake and the giant tsunami that immediately followed but also those who suffered more "slowly" from the radiation spewed from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, which was disabled by the tsunami and later went into meltdown. As this is an ongoing issue that will continue to haunt the region long after the direct damage from the quake and tsunami has been repaired, it was this aspect that was the focus of study at the conference.

Kataoka Terumi, who heads the Aizu Radioactivity Information Center in Aizu Wakamatsu in Fukushima, gave a lecture on the problems faced by those affected by the greatly increased radiation. She described how these "wounded" face so many uncertainties from this invisible enemy and how the ongoing damage is not only the increased risk of cancer from direct radiation exposure but also the psychological strain it puts on people. The ministry of Emmaus Center was transformed by the needs of the "wounded" from a student ministry to one focused on relief and recovery, and so it has served as a coordinating center for volunteers to literally "walk along with the wounded." It was thus a very appropriate location for this year's missionary conference. And being the day after Easter Sunday, it was also a fitting time to commemorate that original encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus.

I was one of two retiring missionaries who were present at the conference. Both David Murchie and myself received recognition from the Kyodan for our years of service in Japan, along with our wives. I was also asked to give the message at the closing worship service, and so I would like to close this article with a brief synopsis of what I said. I entitled the message "Blessed To Be A Blessing," a concept that comes from God's calling of Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 12. God says to Abraham that he will be a blessing and that through him and his seed, all peoples on earth will be blessed. As missionaries called to Japan or as Japanese church leaders called to serve your people, that promise God made to Abraham some 4,000 years ago has been passed on to us and still applies. We have been blessed for a purpose, and that is to be a blessing in Christ's name to others.

This theme of the Abrahamic Covenant is the central theme of the entire Bible and is referred to in hundreds of passages throughout both the Old and New Testaments. This is particularly so in Paul's letters, where he stresses that the blessings of Christ are an extension of the blessing given to Abraham. Paul summarizes this biblical basis for mission in his letter to the Galatians. "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." (Gal. 3:8-9)



3d floor at Emmaus, author 1st row, 4th from the right

Jumping a few verses ahead, verse 14 says, "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

This all-important Galatians 3 ends with one of my favorite verses, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." And what is this promise to which we are heirs? It is that we are blessed in order to be a blessing to others. In these verses, Paul is referring back to Genesis chapter 12, where the history of God's chosen people begins. There were hints of what God was going to do to solve the dilemma of sin and evil described earlier in the text, but it is in this Abrahamic Covenant that God begins to make plain his great plan. This Abrahamic Covenant, then, forms the central theme that runs throughout the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. God blessed Abraham and then by extension, he also blesses all those who follow Abraham's lead and place their trust in God. But the purpose of that blessing is that we are to pass it on. We are blessed in order to be a blessing, and this is the essence of the purpose for which the church of Jesus Christ exists in the first place.

I also referred to another biblical theme, that of reconciliation, along with the need for civility in our dialog across theological divides, particularly that between social action/justice ministries and evangelism. Within the context of the Church, these two broad categories of social action and evangelism need each other and must be kept together. Most ministries will focus on one or the other, but whichever ministries we are involved in, we all need to work together instead of at cross-purposes. I am reminded of the illustration attributed to E. Stanley Jones, a well-known Methodist missionary to India. He said that the relationship between the two should be like that of the body and soul. Social action without evangelism is like a corpse, while evangelism divorced from social action ends up being a ghost. In order to have a living being, they have to go together.

So that is my appeal to all of you and particularly to our Japanese brothers and sisters in the Kyodan. Remember that you are to be ambassadors for Christ and are called to the ministry of reconciliation. Remember that you have been blessed for a purpose, and that is to be a blessing to others—even those you disagree with.

## Tohoku Nuclear Disaster Relief Focuses on Recuperation

The Kyodan Tohoku District Nuclear Disaster Relief Task Force, “IZUMI,” was formed in October 2013, in accordance with a resolution passed at the 68th Tohoku District Annual Assembly in May of that same year.

Presently, this task force is comprised of a director, an adviser, and a steering committee of five members, including the director, who work with four active full-time staff and a number of volunteers. The office is located in the annex of the Tohoku District Center in Sendai. This was previously a two-story missionary residence called “Maggie House,” which was renovated for our use through funding from the Kyodan and Tohoku District. The steering committee meets once a month, and a staff meeting is held every week. At these meetings there are detailed accounts of the work being done, and ample time is taken in planning future steps. This is because engaging with the problems of radioactive contamination calls for a variety of approaches. Our activities focus on health consultation and examinations, recuperative programming, visitation, and listening. From our first month of activity, we developed programs for recuperation. In December 2013, the physician who performed the first thyroid examinations also gave a lecture. This lecture, as well as five others that followed by other lecturers, was about radioactivity. In the beginning, Dr. Yamazaki Tomoyuki came to us from Airin Church in Osaka District to provide health consultation every month. This was very important for the care of families of children attending church-related kindergartens and nurseries in Fukushima Prefecture. It is impossible to talk about the cooperative relationship we have with the Information Center for Radioactivity in Aizu, located in Wakamatsu Sakaemachi Church in Fukushima Prefecture, without mentioning Dr. Yamazaki.

The first thyroid examinations were given in December 2013. The 24th series of examinations was held in January of this year. Over 1,000 children have been examined. Recently, examinations are being performed every month without fail. Children under 18 at the time of the disaster in Fukushima, who are now living in Miyagi Prefecture, have been the main focus of the examinations that we have arranged. For a brief period, we rented an echo machine, but with full funding from the Kyodan, we were able to obtain our own echo machine. We are extremely grateful for this. Since obtaining our own equipment, we have been able to take it throughout Miyagi Prefecture as well as to places close to us in southern Fukushima Prefecture, such

as Marumori-machi, Kakuda City, and Shiroishi City. We were also able to take it to Kurihara City in the northern part of Fukushima Prefecture, which was said to have a high degree of radioactivity.

When visiting areas throughout Japan and reporting on our work, we are asked why we are working only in Miyagi Prefecture and not in Fukushima Prefecture. There has been no decision not to go to Fukushima Prefecture. We have visited the Kawatani Church kindergarten in the southern part of Fukushima Prefecture twice for thyroid examinations. One of the reasons we do so much work in Miyagi Prefecture is that the prefectural government has decided there is no danger of radioactivity and sees no need for thyroid examinations. However, at the local level, there is a different understanding. For example, due to the cooperation of the town of Ogawaramachi, we did thyroid examinations in that community. When a notice of our examinations was posted on the official town site, there was a flood of applications. The same thing happened in Shiraishi. In Ogawaramachi, the local government provided its facilities for the examinations, and the mayor came to observe. In one day, about 100 children received examinations. Normally, about 50 are seen in one day. The challenge of continuing thyroid examinations is finding doctors who will volunteer for only a travel subsidy. This year we were concerned because the doctor who had helped us was transferred, but we are thankful that suitable help has been provided.

There are two recuperative programs: one short-term and one long-term. The long-term program is held in Hokkaido during the summer and in Okinawa during the spring. It is a five-night, six-day program, with much cooperation from Hokkaido and Okinawa districts. In March we are planning to have our ninth long-term program at Amami Oshima in Kyushu District. It has been five years since the Great East Japan Disaster. The work of “IZUMI” began as an effort to protect the lives of children who, through God’s creative activity and providential guidance, are living here. This is an ethical issue about life. When compared to the enormity of the nuclear disaster, this is a very small effort. However, for me, it is an effort I hope to continue. Please support us with your prayers. (Tr. JS)

From *Kyodan Shinpo (The Kyodan Times)*, No. 4835

—Hoshina Takashi, pastor  
Fukushima Church, Tohoku District

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## “Kohitsuji Camp in Taiwan”: 3-year, 6-camp Series Concludes Successfully

The Kohitsuji (Little Lambs) Camp in Taiwan series, which began in January 2014 with an invitation from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) and an offer of support from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), held its sixth and final camp in Chaghua County, southern Taiwan, April 2-5.

The six camps were attended by a total 195 people: 161 children and parents residing in Fukushima, who were seeking an opportunity to spend even a short time away from their radiation-contaminated environment, plus 34

staff persons. The first camp was held in Chiayi County (hosted by PCT’s Chiayi District), the second in Yilan County (Qixing District), the third in Tainan County (Tainan District), the fourth in Taitung County (Tungbu District), the fifth in Hsinchu County (Hsinchu District) and this time in Changhua County.

At each event, the campers received from the host district and churches a wonderful welcome that far exceeded their expectations and were able to play with abandon in

(Cont'd on p. 8)

## The Beginnings of Shunan Church

by Ando Akiyoshi, pastor  
Shunan Church, Ou District

Martin Mosser Smyser (1875-1955), who came from Pennsylvania and had been invited by Yokote Middle School to be an English teacher, began the evangelistic work of Shunan Church, starting with an English Bible class for neighborhood children in his home. Smyser, who believed that “evangelism in Japan should be done by Japanese,” chose two baptized youth from that class and sent them to Meiji Gakuin High School, then on to the seminary there. Following graduation, these two men, Seya Shigeji and Suzuki Kozo became as Smyser’s right and left hands. They moved ahead to promote the evangelization of southern Akita Prefecture. The unique characteristic of Smyser’s evangelistic work was his non-affiliation with any denominational body. Smyser’s support of the two young men covered not only their educational expenses but all their living expenses as well. To do that, he continued his work as a missionary, receiving financial support from his friends in his homeland.

As a band of believers was born in one region, they extended their work to another region. Spreading the gospel through the southern area of the prefecture was their priority. When there was no pastor present, the believers maintained the meetings with testimonies. The meetings did not have any particular building but continued their existence as “house churches.” This method of evangelism also appeared among those that were called the “Fukuin Kyodan” (Gospel Band). Before the band became a “church,” they identified themselves by saying, “We are a brotherhood led by the Reverend Smyser.” I think this style was a breakthrough for rural evangelism in Japan, which had been frustrated so many other attempts by various churches.

However, in this brotherhood, the waves of history beat upon the shore. Under the “Religious Organizations Law”(enacted in 1940), the Smyser band, as a religious association, changed its name to “Shunan Christ Church,” and in the midst of these difficulties, it became a part of the Kyodan. Concurrently, the church itself was also making decisions that were greatly changing its character, namely, Smyser’s retirement. He had initially resisted returning to his country, but the thought-control police made that a precondition. Seya Shigeji was ordained and became the head pastor. At the same time, Suzuki Kozo left Shunan Church.

Seya was sent to Indonesia during World War II. When he returned to Japan, the meetings in the region were reopened and new churches in the bands formed after the war were also added, but the “house church” base did not change. The Reverend Murakami Eiji was invited



Attendees at the 100th anniversary worship service in 2014

as Seya's successor, and the gatherings planned to build meeting halls in each area respectively. All the believers gave offerings, and in turn six meeting halls were dedicated. Formerly, there were more home meetings but only six remain that were able to construct meeting halls and one place where a house meeting is still being continued. This is Shunan Church at present.

Missionary Choi Jang-Soo and I are partnering and serving in rotation. Worship services at Yokote sanctuary and Asamai sanctuary are on Sunday from 10:30 a.m.; Uenodai sanctuary and Obonai sanctuary worship services are on Sunday afternoon from 2:00 p.m. Worship at Kakumagawa sanctuary is from 7:30 p.m. on Monday, and Omonogawa sanctuary worship is held twice a month at 7:00 in the evening. The house meeting is held in the home of a believer in Kakunodate on the third Friday afternoon of every month at 1:30. The board of trustees meeting is held each month on the second Sunday from 2:00 p.m. at Yokote sanctuary. Yokote was Smyser’s beginning base of evangelism and continues presently as the center. Naturally, in order for the minister and the missionary to be present at the board of trustees meeting, the afternoon worship services are held with the support of neighboring area pastors.

As a matter of principle, both Choi Jang-Soo and I attend worship services together on days other than Sunday. The meeting halls are shelters for the protection of the believers’ faith, but as believers age, maintenance of the meeting halls is presently becoming a burden for Shunan Church. But even so, believing that our active evangelism will contribute to a revitalization of the evangelization of our nation, we continue to move forward. (Tr. RT)

## Called to Ministry to Japanese in Paraguay

by Chibana Sugako, pastor  
Paraguay Pirapo Free Methodist Church

The country of Paraguay is located on the continent of South America, surrounded by Brazil, Bolivia, and Argentina, and is roughly 1.1 times larger than Japan. Its climate is subtropical, and as of the year 2015, its population is approximately seven million people. The main industries are agriculture (wheat and soybeans), cattle breeding (for meat), and forestry. The capital is Asuncion, the center of the country's government and economy. The Gross Domestic Product per capita is about 4,368 dollars. It is certainly not a wealthy country, but the citizens are cheerful and generous.

The native people of Paraguay are the Guaranis. However, in 1535 Paraguay was colonized by Spain and was under Spanish rule for 276 years until it became independent in 1811. During that period, due to intermarriage with Spaniards, the number of native Guarani people continued to decrease, and at present they account for less than two percent of the total population. It was the Spanish Jesuit monks who introduced Christianity to Paraguay in the latter half of the 16th century. Now, 90% of the country is Catholic, and 6% is Protestant, which means that 96% of the people are Christians.

In Paraguay there are six settlements for people of Japanese ancestry. The immigration from Japan to Paraguay began in 1936, and this year marks the 80th anniversary. Immigration to Pirapo (where Pirapo Methodist Church is located) happened in 1960. At present, the population of Pirapo is about 10,000 people, about 1,300 of Japanese ancestry. The farmland averaged 30 hectares per field at the time of immigration, but it has since increased tenfold, so now the average field is 300 hectares. The land yields abundant crops of food, like soybeans and wheat. Generally speaking, people of Japanese ancestry have a wealthy lifestyle. Japanese language and culture have been taught and passed down very well.

Two evangelists, Sakai Kotaro and his wife, lit the fire of the gospel in this land in 1960. The following year, 1961, Pastor Tsukamoto Noboru was sent by Brazil Free Methodist Church, and Pirapo Free Methodist Church was founded. In 1962 the church building was built, and many people from the village were led to the church.

Settlements were pioneered not only in Pirapo but also in Encarnacion, Iguazu, and Lapaz. The first pastor to those areas was Tsukamoto, and he traveled frequently to the churches, providing pastoral care. The second pastor, Sugiyama Hoshinori, resided at Pirapo Church for four years and endeavored to build up the church. Pastor Sugiyama also worked as a teacher at the Japanese language school. He built a dormitory at the side of the church building for the Japanese-language elementary school children who came from far away and looked after them. He contributed greatly to the education of the children in the settlement.



Rev. Chibana Sugako (2nd row, far right)

Around 1975, Sugiyama accepted a position in Brazil. For 40 years, from that time until last year, there was no pastor at this church. The church members, praying desperately that the flames of their faith not be extinguished, observed Sunday worship every week. Fortunately, while there was no pastor at the church, other pastors, such as Pastor Arihara Shigeru and Pastor Nowada Mitsuteru came from churches in Encarnacion and Asuncion once a month, serving God by preaching the Word. This was certainly very encouraging for the members of the church in Pirapo, for which they gave thanks.

I had been given a vision for mission to Paraguay. In February 2015, I went to Paraguay. As I was looking for a place to work as a missionary, through the wondrous leading of God, I arrived at the church in Pirapo. I have since been formally sent by the Kyodan to serve there. I have been given by God everything that I need for missionary work, including health. Every day I live in thankfulness to God.

Now the church has 12 members, and the attendance at worship is a small flock of 4 to 6 elderly people, worshipping in Japanese. Church activities include Sunday worship, Wednesday meetings, evangelistic visitation, and meetings once a month in the homes of brothers and sisters who have immigrated to Asuncion.

On March 27, two elementary school students and their grandmother attended Easter worship for the first time. For us, it was a very joyful occurrence. We pray and ask the Lord that not only these three people but also many more citizens of Pirapo may be led to the church from now on, and that God will raise up a harvest of many people whose souls have been saved.

Please pray that the Lord will bless this church and use it.

(Tr. KT)

## Ministry of Reconciliation: Dialog that Brings about True Reconciliation

*In the midst of a never-ending conflict between Israelis and Palestinians that seems to have no solution, one Japanese woman shares her work for reconciliation through "Musalaha," a NGO working to build mutual understanding and trust across the divides of ethnicity and religious worldview.*

*Musalaha is a non-profit organization founded in 1990 by Professor Salim Munayer, an Arab Israeli Christian, to work for reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Following the principles of reconciliation taught in the Bible, it strives to implement various programs to build bridges across the several chasms that have developed between Israeli and Palestinian societies.*



Gatherings of mothers and children

### Overcoming the Wall of Separation between Israel and Palestine

—Onoyama Midori, NGO Intern in Musalaha  
Israel and Palestine

Standing between Peoples in Conflict. When many Japanese Christians hear the words “Israel” or “Palestine,” they imagine a biblical setting. However, for others, the impression of an unending conflict may be the strongest. In reality, of course, a complicated conflict continues unabated and at the same time, a small community of Christians continues to live there.

Presently I am serving in Musalaha, which means “reconciliation” in Arabic, working to promote reconciliation between Israeli Christians and Palestinian Christians. We are also trying to help to build bridges between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in many ways. For example, we assist with camping that welcomes both Israeli and Palestinian children, with gatherings of older youth in the desert or national parks, with gatherings of mothers and children, and with leadership training. In addition, there are some trips for Palestinian and Israeli young people. They have traveled to Germany, Ireland or Cyprus and it helped them to learn about the conflict in a more neutral place since it is outside of their homeland.

“Reconciliation”—A Topic Close to Home. My great grandmother, grandmother, and mother were Christians, and from early childhood, I read the Bible. One of my favorite passages is Matt. 5: 9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

As a small child, I thought “I want to be a child of God!” The church I attended was the one which was planted in Fukui Prefecture by missionaries from Norway and there were opportunities to join a mission trip from there. While visiting places like Mongolia, India, the Philippines, and Myanmar, my small world was enlarged and I started to have a dream to serve God by going out into the world to learn and work if God leads me.

While in college, I used my holidays to carry a backpack and travel to various places. One such trip took me to Israel and Palestine. When I actually saw the region and talked with local people, I realized that what I had learned about this place and my impression from newspapers and media in Japan was only a small part of the story. The experience overseas was the occasion for nurturing my concern for reconciliation. But there was another reason for my growing interest and concern for reconciliation.

After the Second World War, my grandfather became an alcoholic. I think he drank to ease the pain of his wounds and to forget all the terrible memories of experiences in the battle. Drinking led to his death. I believe that the issue of alcohol caused a separation between my grandfather and my father. With that cloud over our family, my father did not fulfill his role in the family, and I failed to bond with him. For a long time, I suffered with the inability to forgive my father. I was troubled because I could not say the simple words “I forgive you.” Through this experience, I came to realize that in my own strength—without God’s help—I could not forgive.

Later, I went to a graduate school in England and while pursuing conflict resolution and peace studies, a classmate introduced Musalaha to me. I was surprised to hear that there are Christians who try to bring reconciliation to a place that is deeply troubled and divided! I started to think that I would like to participate if it is possible and I applied to be an intern. Presently, I am in Jerusalem working on the organization’s website, translating for its publications, and doing publicity. I also help with various other projects as well.

Building Trust Begins with Encounter. I have learned many things from my participation in Musalaha. Perhaps the most important of these is the need for providing a place where the two parties can meet. In many cases, the impression people have about the opposing side is negative. The opinions learned in the family or at school are very strong. As there is actually almost no opportunity to meet the other side and get to know each other, there are many misunderstandings and prejudices.

As mentioned before, Musalaha plans various programs to promote trust between the parties. Through Musalaha, many Palestinians get their first chance to meet Israelis who are not soldiers. One participant at a women’s meeting made a deep impression on me when she said, “I had held such bad opinions about these people, but for the first time, I realized that she is a woman just like me: a wife, a mother, a real human being.”

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## Church Executives Visit Kumamoto Earthquake Site

The day after receiving news of the Kumamoto earthquake on April 14, the Kyodan formed the Kumamoto Earthquake Relief Committee, headed by General Affairs Executive Secretary Dohke Norikazu. Following discussion, the committee decided to dispatch Commission on Ecumenical Ministries Executive Secretary Kato Makoto to the affected area to assess the situation.

Flying immediately to Kumamoto, Kato joined Kyushu District Secretary Niihori Masayuki and traveled to Omuta Shozanmachi Church, where he delivered a message of condolence from the Kyodan. From there, Niihori and Kato headed to Yamaga Onsen, where they joined Kyushu District Vice-moderator Kusakabe Kenji. Hotels within Kumamoto City had suspended operations because of the earthquake. In the early hours of April 16, the strongest earthquake struck Kumamoto. The tremor was also severe in Yamaga, which is 20 kilometers to the north.

The first place visited was Yamaga Church. As it is currently without a minister, staff members of adjacent Reizen Kindergarten were consulted about the damage experienced. The church executives met Kyushu District Moderator Umezaki Koji at Kumamoto Kusabacho Church, and together they paid visits to the Kyodan's Nishikigaoka Church, Musashigaoka Church, Kumamoto Shirakawa Church, and Kumamoto Joto Church, as well as to Kumamoto Church of the Korean Christian Church in Japan.

Among these churches, the most striking exterior damage was at Kumamoto Shirakawa Church, where many roof tiles had fallen and broken. Interior damage was most pronounced at Kumamoto Kusabacho Church and Nishikigaoka Church, which suffered damage to their pipe organs as well as to many of their dishes. In most of the churches, printed materials and furnishings were scattered



Pastor Nanba Nobuyoshi of Kumamoto Kusabacho Church, explaining the damage to the organ

around the meeting rooms and ministers' offices. Amid this situation, every minister was busily trying to confirm the safety of church members. In addition, Kumamoto Shirakawa Church and Nishikigaoka Church were providing overnight accommodations and meals to church members and neighbors who came for shelter.

On April 17 Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo joined the other executive, and together they delivered most of the relief materials to Musashigaoka Church because it had been opened to provide food to anyone. On April 18, some of the broken water lines were restored, and relief materials were carried into the city with great speed. That night, while staying in Fukuoka City, they noticed the swaying, back and forth, which must have been due to the constant aftershocks. This caused them to consider again how much stress the people in affected are facing. (Tr. DM)

—Kato Makoto, executive secretary

(Cont'd from p. 6)

At a camp in 2014, the year when Israeli troops invaded the Gaza Strip, an Israeli counselor had a relative who was in the fighting and one of the campers was a Palestinian child whose grandparents were in Gaza. This counselor was taking good care of the Palestinian child in the same room.

Sometimes warning sirens would sound. Then everyone had to go to a shelter, get down on the floor, and cover their heads with their hands. However, afterward one camper wrote about this experience. "At first we were very tense. Then when everyone in the shelter began to sing "Jesus loves me this I know" and we came to the line "We are weak but He is strong," we remembered that God was watching over us and began to relax."

I think that campers of opposing groups living together and singing to the same Lord in times of danger was an experience of a lifetime.

All in the Cross of Christ. When I first participated in the work of Musalaha, I wondered how it would be possible for hands of friendship to reach out to each other in the midst of continuing confrontation and tension to join in mutual prayer. The answer I heard from a participant was:

"We have many mixed feelings and go back and forth. Forgiveness is difficult by ourselves. However, we know that we have been forgiven and reconciled with God. Now we have received a new relationship with God and with other people." Everything is joined together through the cross of Christ.

We did not choose the nation or place or family we would be born into, but we believe that all of it was within God's plan. So then, as an outsider, how should I relate to these people?

I recognized that God has equal concern for each of us and I pray for both with love. I listen to both sides and think it is important to support each of them as much as I am able. I pray that I may walk the path that is pleasing to God by reading scripture attentively and putting into practice what I learn. Day by day I would like to be remade in the image of God.

Happily, each time I return to my own country, I am slowly able to enjoy talking with my father, and our relationship is being restored.

I remember what Christ once did for me and pray for faith to stand firm and to act as I should. (Tr. GM)

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

## Message from the General Secretary

### A Call for Quick Action on “Hate Speech” Legislation

The Japanese Diet is presently working on legislation to outlaw “hate speech,” which is defined as the use of hateful expressions or speech designed to incite discrimination. In 2014, the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination both issued a recommendation to Japan to make hate speech and other discriminatory practices illegal. This has increased the demands from both inside and outside Japan to expedite efforts to pass such legislation, which would be in line with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and on par with legislation on the status of foreign residents of Japan. Representative of this effort is the International Conference held in the fall of 2015 by The Korean Christian Church in Japan.

The Kyodan relocated its headquarters to a temporary site from June 2014 until March 2016 while the Japan Christian Center in Nishi Waseda was being retrofitted for earthquake safety, and the location of those temporary offices was in a building in Okubo Dori 1-Chome in Shinjuku, exactly where the largest demonstrations concerning hate speech have taken

place. It was also right at this time that the district court in Kyoto issued a ruling against a group that calls itself “The Citizen’s Group to Deny Special Privileges to Koreans in Japan,” which had held an inflammatory demonstration in front of the Kyoto Korean Elementary School in 2010. The final verdict against this group took place in October 2014, when they were ordered to pay compensation of 12,260,000 yen (about \$110,000). Thus, fortunately, we did not have to witness such hate speech ourselves. The part of Tokyo where we were temporarily located had been referred to as “Korea Town,” since so many Korean restaurants and other businesses are there. However, it has now become very multicultural, with some 30 languages being used by people in the area.

Our country has been calling for internationalization, so we need to ensure that our actions match our words by quickly passing this legislation. It will be a disgrace if we do not. (Tr. TB)

—Nagasaki Tetsuo, general secretary

(Cont’d from p. 3)

#### “Kohitsuji Camp in Taiwan”

the unspoiled splendor of nature. On the second day of the final camp in Changhua, the Kyodan hosted a special thanksgiving service at Yongfu Church, at which Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo delivered a message of thanks and PCT General Secretary Lim Hontiong offered warm words of response.

This program, which arose in response to the East Japan Disaster, became an important support activity for survivors of that catastrophe, which transcended the boundaries of Taiwan, the U.S. and Japan.

Also, at the PCT General Assembly that preceded the final camp, Kyodan General Secretary Nagasaki Tetsuo included in his message some words of gratitude on behalf of the parents and children who attended the camps and presented a certificate of appreciation to the PCT. This heartwarming scene was immediately uploaded to the PCT website, together with a detailed commentary.

The Kyodan extends sincere thanks to the PCT and UMCOR for the partnership and support that made this three-year, six-camp program possible, and we pray that the collaborative three-way relationship nurtured through this project may be strengthened even more in the days ahead. (Tr. DM)

—Iijima Makoto, executive secretary  
East Japan Disaster Relief Projects  
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Kohitsuji Camp participants and their Taiwanese hosts following the worship service at Yongfu Church

#### KNL Corner

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