

Executive Council Prepares for the 38th General Assembly

The 6th Executive Council meeting of the 2011-12 General Assembly biennium was held at the Kyodan headquarters, July 9-10, and was attended by 27 of the 30 members. The opening worship service, led by Furuya Haruo, was followed by the report of General Secretary Naito Tomeyuki. He explained that the initial hearing of the law suit filed by Kitamura Jiro against the Kyodan was held on April 26, with presentations of the lawyers before the judge to be made this fall. (The suit stems from Kyodan action to revoke Kitamura's ordination for not adhering to Kyodan regulations related to persons qualified to take communion while he was serving as pastor of Momijizaka Church in Yokohama. He is filing suit to have the revocation overturned as well as seeking damages of 10 million yen.) Naito also reported that ordained clergy not appointed to a local church and for whom a current address is unknown are being dropped from the rolls, in accordance with Article 128 of the Kyodan's Bylaws.

With the exception of Okinawa District, the district assembly reports from the other 16 districts were received, and for the first time, the Kyodan representative who had attended each district assembly gave a brief report on what had been observed. Kyoto District had refused to seat the Kyodan representative at its assembly, so an explanation was requested. District Moderator Inoue Yuichi explained the peculiarities of Kyoto District and described the process behind the standing committee's inability to approve the request, although it had been proposed by the district executive committee (moderator, vice-moderator, and secretary).

The proposal to establish an Evangelism Promotion Office, which had generated a great deal of interest, was formally adopted, and the fact that it was proposed by Kyodan Moderator Ishibashi Hideo is particularly noteworthy. The proposed organizational structure is that of an office director and a promotion committee of three members, with an executive secretary assigned to oversee it. The budget calls for one million yen for holding meetings and from three to five million yen for operational expenses, all to be funded from offerings. The program will consist of the planning and implementation of "evangelistic caravans," the production of evangelistic tracts, the sending of speakers to evangelistic meetings, the advising of local churches about their own evangelistic programs, and the training of clergy and laity through such activities as seminars. Ishibashi Hideo was elected to chair the Implementation Committee, which will function until the next General Assembly in 2014, with Iwata Masamichi, Kita Kiyoshi, and Sugahara Tsutomu as members.

The committee examining the system of Kyodan subsidies for district activities proposed that the present system be terminated and a new system of "evangelism subsidies" be established to encourage local church evangelism. After discussion, it was moved that deliberations be continued for the next two years, with a decision to be made at the 2014 General Assembly. The motion was passed with the approval of 15 of the 24 members.

As the term of General Secretary Naito Tomoyuki will end soon, the Kyodan Executive Committee nominated Nagasaki Tetsuo as the candidate to replace him. The standing committee will present him for approval at the upcoming 38th General Assembly.

Higashitani Makoto, chair of the management committee for the Buraku Liberation Center, reported the deliberations since the previous Executive Council meeting on the proposal to change the regulations governing the BLC, and the proposal was approved for presentation to the General Assembly.

Concerning the Commission on Mission's proposal to establish a counseling office for clergy and their families, there was considerable discussion on the issues of providing an appropriate place and insuring confidentiality. Based on the various opinions expressed, it was moved to return the matter to the committee for further development of the plan and presentation of a more detailed proposal.

The organizing committee for the 2014 General Assembly reported on its preparations, including the schedule, use of the facilities, and personnel to serve in various capacities. Elections are to be carried out in accordance with Articles 7 to 9 of the Kyodan's Bylaws, without holding preliminary elections. Executive Council members are likewise to be elected without preliminary elections, but instead by secret ballot with multiple choices.

The final two topics of discussion were 1) the issue of achieving reconciliation between the Kyodan and Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, based on the importance of promoting evangelism and the training of clergy, and 2) the issue of consistency and order in regards to the sacraments of baptism and communion, as delineated in the Kyodan's Constitution and Bylaws. These motions were approved by majority vote to be presented to the upcoming 38th General Assembly as agenda items from the Executive Council. (Tr. TB)

—Kato Makoto, executive secretary

Restoration of Disaster-affected Communities in Ishinomaki: a First-hand Account

by Robert K. Fujimura, coordinator from the U.S.

Ishinomaki was the city most severely damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the Kyodan Emmaus Support Center in Sendai established a center in Ishinomaki to assist survivors of the disaster. I was hired by the Kyodan, through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), to work at Ishinomaki Center for four months, around the first anniversary of the disaster. I learned about the operation of the center by working together with the staff and volunteers and translated work reports in Emmaus blogs from Japanese to English.

At Ishinomaki Center, a staff member nicknamed “boss” is in charge of selecting the work for volunteers each day from the list of projects. Each week new volunteers arrived on Monday and left on Friday evening, but many repeated. During the cold weather we often painted private houses, mostly outside, and cleaned the first floor, removing damaged walls, floors, and mud. As the weather improved, we removed weeds and roots of dead bushes from gardens in order to plant vegetables and flowers. We also helped restore small businesses by removing their damaged machines, for replacement with new models, and by cleaning shops.

Most of the volunteers were college and high school students and young adults. We were back by four o’clock and had a meeting to report on the day’s work. We usually had enough volunteers to do two projects, and each group reported on what they had accomplished. After the meeting, the volunteers had a period of sharing. Each volunteer reported on his/her experiences and thoughts. The volunteers were mostly non-Christians and from all over Japan. The sharing of views on the effects of the disaster and on participation as a volunteer induced each to think about the future course of his/her life. It was a good chance for me to learn the thoughts of Japanese young people. At the end of these sessions, I often prodded them to think further.

Generally, I gave the prayers at the meetings prior to and after the work, and at the dinner. Unlike traditional Christian prayers, I gave a short prayer to the God who is in each of us. Occasionally, when there was a pastor among the volunteers, we asked him to offer a prayer. A Korean pastor who is fluent in Japanese came to Emmaus frequently. He worked as hard as the younger volunteers and shared his experiences and Christian belief.

During my stay, two groups from the U.S. and a lone U.S. citizen came at different times. One group was from the Japanese-American UMC in Sacramento, California. An immigrant from Japan fluent in both English and Japanese was among them. Another group was from First UMC in Cedar Park, Texas. These were mostly high school students, led by a few adults. They earned the travel expense in part by cleaning a football stadium. The lone U.S. citizen was an Iranian-American who came to Japan for a few weeks and wanted to do volunteer work at the disaster area prior to leaving. She found she has a cousin who is a UMC missionary in Kobe. That missionary had visited Emmaus Center and called me to introduce her. It was only a few days prior to her coming, but we accepted her. She was friendly and once cooked Iranian dishes.



Two rainbows over a damaged vacant house

All of the U.S. volunteers were cheerful and enthusiastic workers. They became friends with the Japanese volunteers instantly. Some Japanese were happy to have a chance to speak English.

The hosts of the houses where we worked were very sociable and spoke to us about their experiences during and after the disaster. They were grateful to us for working diligently and cheerfully; they served us drinks and snacks during the breaks, which we had at least twice a day. Often they even served us hot meals for lunch. Some of them worked with us and talked while we worked.

The boss is an excellent cook and made a variety of dishes for dinner each evening, Monday through Thursday, for the volunteers and staff. For the last two months, I also volunteered to cook once a week. I made dishes that were on the menu at my grandparents’ restaurant for laborers, where I worked more than 60 years ago. Boss found a meat market downtown that had large chunks of beef and pork. I cooked a different one each week. I also cooked a large portion of fresh corn beef that my wife Shigeko brought over from America.

We had not been successful in holding regular programs for our neighbors and the people in temporary housing projects. When Shigeko came, she interacted with people in three temporary housing projects and gatherings of neighbors near our apartment, but she was able to participate in their programs only as a neighbor and not as a member from Emmaus. Near the end of my appointment, two young women were added to the staff. They were assigned to interact with people in the temporary housing projects. Rev. Sato of Sendai Emmaus, who is in charge of the affairs of Ishinomaki Center, had identified a temporary housing project where Emmaus could participate in their activities, and these two women established a program there. They had the concert in early July by the same singer who had performed at the Center previously, and it was well received.

The goal of Emmaus is to revive and maintain the communities that existed before the disaster. Most of these people are elder citizens, and they will need the continued support of the volunteers. I jogged regularly by the vacant lots and rows of houses. One morning I saw two rainbows over a damaged vacant house. The rainbows were a symbol of hope that the survivors of the disaster would revive their communities and that the volunteers will keep on coming to assist and encourage the people.

Missionary Conference Attendees Visit Tsunami Devastation

The annual Kyodan Missionary Conference was held July 14-16 at Shidodaira Hot Springs Hotel near the city of Hanamaki in southern Iwate Prefecture in the Tohoku (northeastern) region of Japan. Traditionally held in late March, the conference this year was held over a three-day weekend in July to see if the timing was better for participants. Being only about 16 months after the Great East Japan Earthquake and the devastating tsunami that immediately followed, it was a time for many who had only seen images on television screens to see for themselves the aftermath of this combined natural and man-made disaster. It was likewise a time to show our solidarity with the people who are struggling to put their lives back together in the face of the overwhelming challenges facing the communities along the coast.

Early Sunday morning, we boarded a bus for a 90-minute drive to the coastal city of Kamaishi, first to attend the worship service of the local Kyodan church and then to drive along the coast. Shinsei Kamaishi Church is located about half a mile inland, but even there, the water level from the tsunami rose to about eight feet inside the church, completely destroying all that was on the ground floor. The inside walls of the church are still just a framework of pillars and studs, but the congregation expressed a resurrection hope for the future. Appropriately, the name “Shinsei” means “New Life,” and while this was intended in the spiritual sense or the word, it is also now symbolic of the physical rebuilding going on. We were inspired by the stories and resolve. One particularly memorable story was that of a neighbor trying to escape the oncoming torrent, only to be swept into the church by the rushing waters. As the swirling current filled up the ground floor, the man was washed up against the balcony railing, where he was able to grab hold and pull himself over onto the second-floor balcony overlooking the sanctuary. He and several other survivors have now become part of the church family, as the church reaches out to serve the local people and communicate to them the gospel message of God’s love and salvation.



The Tsunami damage



Shinsei Kamaishi Church

After lunch, we went to a neighborhood community center closer to the shoreline that had served as an evacuation center. Being a large concrete structure with high ceilings and a second floor, it was thought to be safe from any tsunami generated by the earthquake. Dozens of people climbed to the second story to wait out the crisis, but the 30-foot tsunami was far higher than expected, and as it rose above the top of the building, it washed away everyone there to their deaths. Almost all of the other buildings in the area were completely destroyed, but this building survived and serves today as a memorial to all of those who lost their lives. As we stood among the ruins, we remembered the victims in prayer and sang a hymn in their memory.

While the March 2011 disaster was a “natural disaster” in regards to the earthquake and tsunami, it was also very much a “man-made disaster,” as human error made it far worse. This is particularly true, of course, of the nuclear meltdown and the radiation it produced, but it is also true from the standpoint of failing to recognize that a tsunami of this magnitude could occur and thus being unprepared. A similarly powerful earthquake is expected to generate a tsunami of similar size off the coast of western Japan sometime in the near future (according to geologists). As the population density is greater there than in the Tohoku region, one concern is how well the people will be able to protect themselves. The people of Tohoku were fortunate that the quake happened during the day, as the toll would have been far greater if the tsunami had hit in the blackness of night with the electric grid down due to the earthquake. We can only pray that if such a disaster is to strike again, it will likewise happen during daylight hours. Nevertheless, we know that God is in control, and that nothing will happen that he cannot use for his purposes and our good.

Please continue to remember the people of Tohoku in your prayers.

—Timothy Boyle, missionary
Kwansei Gakuin, Nishinomiya

Harriet Brittan, a Great Missionary and Founder of Yokohama Eiwa Gakuin

The Overseas Missions of the Methodist Protestant Church

Yokohama Eiwa Gakuin began as Brittan Girls' School, founded in 1880 by the Methodist Protestant Church in the U.S. This denomination, known in Japan as the *Mifu* church, was a small denomination that had separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church and become independent in 1828. In contrast to the Methodist Episcopal Church, where all the rights of church government and legislation belonged to the clergy, the Methodist Protestant Church was formed as a denomination in which clergy and laity were equal when it came to church government, and there were no bishops or lay leaders.

The Methodist Protestant Church was too small to have its own independent organization for overseas evangelism but participated in the work of the Woman's Union Missionary Society (WUMS). One example of such cooperation is Elizabeth Guthrie, who was sent to India by WUMS in 1868. Guthrie's father was a minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, but she herself was a member of the Methodist Protestant Church. She worked alongside Harriet Gertrude Brittan in the Calcutta Mission Home, but her health was badly affected by the climate, and in 1872, she set off to return to the United States. However, on the way home, she stopped off in Japan and became involved in Yokohama Mission Home's work of caring for mixed-race children. She finally went back to the United States in 1878.

After her return, Guthrie made a report about her activities to the General Assembly of the Methodist Protestant Church. As a result, the Methodist Protestant Church established a Women's Overseas Evangelism Society, and the decision was made for the Methodist Protestant Church to send missionaries independently and not through WUMS. Guthrie was appointed and sent to Japan, but in May 1880, as she was setting out, she suddenly died of pneumonia while still in San Francisco. This was a great shock to the Methodist Protestant Church. At this point Brittan, who had been working at the WUMS Calcutta Mission Home since 1861 and who had worked with Guthrie for several years, became involved. Guthrie had trusted Brittan and thought of her as a fellow worker, and Brittan was now sent to Japan as Guthrie's successor.

The Founder of Yokohama Eiwa, Harriet Gertrude Brittan(1822-1897)

Brittan was born in Great Britain but moved to Brooklyn in New York with her parents as a small child. When she was ten years old, she had the misfortune of falling from the third floor, and lost her mobility as a result. She was then confined to bed until she was 18, but after that she recovered her health, although she did not regain full use of her legs. In spite of this disability, she determined to volunteer for overseas mission work. In 1854 the American Episcopal (Anglican) Church sent her as a missionary to Liberia in West Africa, but she was sent back to the U.S. after contracting tropical fever.

Undaunted by these bad experiences, Brittan next went to India as a missionary in 1861 through WUMS. She was active there for 18 years, teaching needlework and the Bible to Indian women and children, and was acclaimed as a heroic



Harriet Brittan
(1822-1897)

pioneer woman missionary. However, in 1879, she left WUMS, after a difference of opinion with Mrs. Drimmer, a central figure at the WUMS headquarters. Back in the U.S., she worked at St. Luke's hospital in New York and received medical training in preparation for her next missionary activity. She was then 57 years old. When Guthrie died in 1880, the Methodist Protestant Church decided to send Brittan to Yokohama as the missionary to replace her.

Brittan's school was born at lot 48 in the foreign settlement in the Yamate section of Yokohama. The school opened in a small, one-story wooden building, with four students. Harada Ryoko, a graduate of Ferris Jogakuin, was the first interpreter and assistant, and Nezu Eiko joined from WUMS. The building was owned by missionary James Hamilton Ballagh, and it was Ballagh's decision to appoint Harada. Brittan Girls' School grew steadily, and by 1882 there were 64 students, so a larger school building became necessary. In 1883, Brittan used her own savings to purchase lot 120 in the Yamate Foreign Settlement to build a residence hall. All of the classes except Japanese language and writing were taught in English. Brittan conducted catechism drills and lectured on the Old Testament.

In the early days, Brittan Girls' School was actually coeducational, with boys making up about one-third of the student body, and mixed-race children were also among the student body. Arishima Takeo (who later became a novelist) entered the school in September 1884, at age seven, and transferred to Gakushuin (which educated the children of the Imperial family and the nobility) in 1887.

In 1882 a young missionary, Frederick Charles Klein (1857-1926), was sent to Japan as the overall supervisor of the Methodist Protestant Church's work, and Brittan, now in her 60s, found herself working under a 26-year-old who was new to the field. Klein found fault with Brittan's educational policy and her financial management, was unhappy about the presence of boys and mixed-race children, and criticized the religious education of the school because although it was evangelical, he found it too much influenced by Anglican practices. In fact, Brittan remained a member of the Anglican Church all her life and had no formal high school education or theological training. Because of the bad relationship with Klein, Brittan resigned in 1885. She remained in Japan until ill health forced her to return to the U.S. but died in a hotel in San Francisco the day after she landed. Yokohama Eiwa Gakuin regards Brittan, our founder, as a great missionary. (Tr. SN)

—Nagai Teruo, chairman
Yokohama Eiwa Gakuin Board of Directors

Serving the Kuala Lumpur Japanese Christian Fellowship

by Aiura Kazuo, retired pastor
Kuala Lumpur Japanese Christian Fellowship
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

On the recommendation of the Kyodan's Commission on Ecumenical Ministries, I have been serving as a volunteer pastor at the Kuala Lumpur Japanese Christian Fellowship, with my wife Keiko, since April 1 of this year. Our contract is for four months.

Let me briefly introduce the work of KLJCF. In September 1983, the first women's group meeting was held at the home of Matsumoto Shigeo. At that time, it was decided to hold a women's meeting every week on Wednesday mornings and to have an evening worship service every month on the third Sunday at 6:30 p.m. The meetings would be held at Matsumoto's home. The group named themselves the Kuala Lumpur Japanese Christian Fellowship. The core group was made up of Christian families, nine adults and three children, with the pastor of a local church, Phillip Koh, serving as adviser.

In the beginning, the pastor from the Singapore Japanese Christian Fellowship was invited to conduct the worship service. Two years later, in 1985, worship was held in Japanese once a month. Through the kindness of Petaling Jaya Gospel Hall (a large Church of the Brethren congregation), we began to use its facilities for KLJCF gatherings.

We continue to use these facilities, and we have used the name Kuala Lumpur Japanese Christian Fellowship since worshipping here. Since 2002, KLJCF has been jointly served by Pastor Kato Naohiro and Cooperating Pastor Koh. With the decision of the church annual conference in 2005, Kato was installed on July 10 as the first full-

time pastor of KLJCF. Kato resigned in March of this year. During his ministry here, there were 27 baptisms.

During my ministry in Japan, I never experienced some of the special characteristics of KLJCF, such as not having one's own sanctuary, an ecumenical membership made up of various denominations as well as Roman Catholics, and frequent changes in membership due to changing assignments to and from Malaysia.

The members of KLJCF are people who have experienced international life in Malaysia and around the world. They are independent, and they speak up and act on everything. Currently we have a worshipping community of around 20 people. Our Sunday School membership is made up of church members' children, with as many as ten children on some occasions, though we currently have three.

I never dreamed of living in Kuala Lumpur. It is our first experience abroad, so new experiences continue in all aspects of our lives. Currently we are living in the area of Taman Danau Desa, residing in a one-room unit of a large condominium named Danau Idaman. We could easily live the rest of our lives here. The cost of living is about one-third or one-fourth that of Japan. I am experiencing what I had heard as a rumor in Japan: "Malaysia is the place for your second life."

There are many other gatherings besides the worship service, but using the intervals in between, I am enjoying worshipping in other churches in the city as well as seeing the many sights of Malaysia. (Tr. JS)

Training for Teachers in Christian Schools held in Kyoto

The training session for new teachers in Kansai District was held Oct. 8-9 2011 in beautiful autumn weather, with an overnight stay. In total, 44 members—31 new teachers and 13 experienced teachers from as far away as Nagoya and Hiroshima—gathered at the Japan Christian Academy's Kansai Seminar House in Ichijoji, Kyoto.

The participants, including staff, first introduced themselves by showing a piece of paper on which they had written their names and subjects taught, along with statements on such themes as: "My school days"; "If I compared myself to an animal (or a plant) it would be..."; and "In ten years time, the color that would represent me is...." All made memorable self-introductions, using these key phrases. Perhaps because of the power of these impressive introductions, a harmonious atmosphere was created during meals and chats throughout the session.

Next, an Osaka Jogakuin Junior and Senior High school teacher named Inoue Masato introduced six inevitable problems that arise in the field of teaching, such as: "How strict should we be with students?" "Coping with both home and work"; "Developing mutual understanding with guardians who have different values." Later, during group sessions, we discussed things like what was good about becoming a teacher and what was troubling, putting the answers in various categories. Most were related to such topics as subjects, classes, management of classes,

but the experienced teachers brought forward other issues, including school management, facilities, personal relationships between teachers, and separation of work and private matters, from the viewpoint of the whole school and education as a whole, which new teachers barely realized, thus pointing out their narrow field of vision. We had the new teachers' training session's first "nabe" (pot) cuisine for dinner, which helped us have a good time talking to one another and exchanging information about schoolwork and club activities.

On the second day, we began with a Sunday morning worship service and then continued the discussion in the same groups as the previous day. The themes were varied, and the group I took part in focused on two topics: "Guidelines for suspending students from school" and "Keeping work and home separate." Opinions were divided, especially on the subject of "Guidelines for suspending students from school," but there was a good discussion from various standpoints. Among those opinions expressed was that of a teacher from Kinjo Gakuin Junior High School named Gotoda Noriko, whose words left a deep impression on me. "It is important to stay close to students' lives not only during their junior and high school days but also thereafter."

During the last session, we sat in a circle, with each of us telling about what we had learned and felt over the

(Cont'd on p.8)

“Why is Christianity Unsuccessful in Japan?”

Hashizume Daisaburo, author of the best-selling book *Fushigina Kirisutokyo (Wonders In Christianity)* lectured at a meeting held on Jan. 14 at the Japan Christian Center in Tokyo, under the auspices of the Kanto Program Center, Nippon Christian Academy. In his book Hashizume, a professor at Tokyo Institute of Technology, presents Christian doctrine and history from a sociologist's viewpoint in an easily understandable way. To the Japanese church, the growth of which has come to a halt at one percent of the population, Hashizume offered frank advice in his lecture about the church's way of doing things and proposed the strategy to increase the number of Christians as follows.

Become a more open church

The reason my co-author Osawa Masachi and I chose the title “*Wonders*” in *Christianity* was to attract the attention of the 99 percent of the Japanese people who are thinking, “What is Christianity doing?” and “Even so, I would not go to any place like a church.” Average Japanese people who are not Christian arbitrarily keep their distance from Christianity, have no understanding of it, and are on guard against it.

First of all, an issue at point on the Christian side is the sense of the church as being closed from within. Churches in North America and other places operate under the clear principles that anyone may come to church; no church registration is required; and no name is asked for, even on the first visit. Also, anyone may enter at will and listen to the sermon. Japanese people consider the church building a kind of “house,” and this type of thinking creates the perception that some persons are “inside” and some “outside.” For those “outside,” the church becomes a very difficult place to enter.

Make a study of rival religions

My next thought is that believers do not use enough general vocabulary words. It is necessary to stand in the place of the unbeliever and converse first by using the vocabulary of the person being addressed. Believers must put their own beliefs in parentheses and, in their minds, assume the state of the unbeliever. Thus, the unbeliever will want to come to church; and with this kind of approach, the unbeliever will want to read the Bible. Next in order, doubts will be settled, and then it may develop that a person might even want to be baptized. This is the course that must be considered and tried.

Among the Japanese population, 99 percent may be unbelievers, but no one is completely unrelated to faith. Each has a type of religious life. To engage in mission work in Japan, it is necessary to study the rival religions of Japan and develop a roadmap of the kind of words that if used, will acquaint unbelievers with the church.¹

Understand different situations in China and Korea

Currently, there is a surge in the number of Christian believers in Korea and China. For the people on the Korean Peninsula who have been intimately accustomed to the Confucian worship of their ancestors, grandfathers, and fathers, the advancement of city life has caused a breakdown of traditional society as well as a weakening of Confucian culture. Into the wide-open space in those empty hearts, the worship of the “Father in Heaven” of Christianity has entered. It is said that at present, 30 to 50 percent of Korean people have become Christians. Currently in China, “house churches” are spreading rapidly, and even conservatively estimated, the number of Christian believers is said to be over 100 million people. Confucianism is China's national religion, and with the demise of the eminent father Mao Tsedong, there was a need to make up for that loss.²

On the contrary, Japan is the country of the eminent mother. So even if there is a gaping hole in their hearts, it is hard for the Christian faith to become the faith that fits “just right.” What is to be done about the part that does not fit? This relates to the most important point of the strategy. In Japan, Christian events have been accepted as part of its annual activities. Wedding ceremonies are held at churches (or Christian-style wedding chapels) and is where the largest number of weddings takes place. Its kindergartens and schools are

making inroads, as are the specialty areas of Christianity, like hospitals and hospices.

First increase the number of those who sympathize with Christianity rather than focusing on the laity

The first thing to be considered, even by Christianity, is increasing its groups of supporters. Supporters may be persons who have not been baptized, although they comfortably go in and out of the church and even participate in its outside activities. These supporters would have a broader network of persons and could widen the church's ties: going from church members to supporters and then on to the supporters' friends, who ordinarily relate to and do not ignore even Buddhist believers and persons in Soka Gakkai. Traditionally, many festivals and other annual events have played an important part in village life that helping everyone get along well together. However, the shrines and temples at the center of these events are becoming hard to maintain. As a cooperative body in an area where there is aging and a shortage of workers, I can envision, as a strategy, a widened structure of outreach. For example, Christian churches could conduct such functions as funerals, which they could not do if Christianity was not a religion.

Make more use of the Bible

It is an advantage that the Bible can be easily understood by anyone who reads it. Outside the church building, for example at a public hall or gathering place, a kind of Bible study could be offered that is aimed at persons who, following retirement, want to better understand life and the world situation. Anyone would be welcome and, while consulting commentaries, everyone would read the Bible together.

Another advantage of the church is that it is an international organization with translations of the Bible in English, French, Chinese, and other languages, thus enabling the study of those languages. So persons like children or housewives could be included. Reading the Bible and studying it in English would also be helpful.

So my proposal is that we consider many of these new types of strategies. In the blogs of people who have read *Wonders In Christianity*, I read the comment by many people that they would like to try something. The number of people reading the Bible has increased, and so I think this has been helpful in propagation and evangelism. The seeds have been planted. Following this, how the harvest will be done is left up to each one of you. (Tr. RMT)

—Summarized by Nishio Misao, member
Suginami Church, West Tokyo District and
KNL Editorial Committee member
Based on an article in *Shinto no Tomo*
(Believers' Friend), April 2012 issue

*Editor's notes:

1. The number of Japanese people registered as believers throughout the country by Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, and Christian churches are: Shintoists, 52 percent (106,498,381 persons); Buddhists, 43 percent (89,674,535 persons); Christians, 1 percent (2,121,956 persons); and various other faiths, 4 percent (9,010,048 persons). These statistics were issued by the National Cultural Agency in Dec. 31, 2009. [As methods of calculation vary among the religious bodies, the combined number of believers exceeds the total population of Japan.]

2. Statistics quoted are from sources used by Hashizume.

SCF: Where My Questions and Rebellious Spirit are Accepted

by Yamazaki Masato, participant
Student Christian Fellowship, Tokyo

I take part in the activities at SCF, but I am not a Christian. At the moment I am not thinking of being baptized. Nor do I attend church services on a regular basis. Yet, I love Christianity. To be more precise, I love the values I have come to know through Christianity: to trust and love people, to be kind, and to respect one another. These are some of the many values that I have learned from the Christians I have encountered. And yet, at the same time, there is something about Christianity that keeps me at a distance. At present, I maintain a healthy distance in my relationship with Christianity.

I had my first encounter with Christianity in kindergarten. Even after I entered elementary school, I continued to attend church school services on Sunday mornings. As I grew older I gradually stopped going. The main reasons were that I did not want to get up early on Sunday and I preferred to play with my friends. I think many young people go through a similar phase.

For most people the relationship with Christianity might end at this point. However, in my case, I just happened to attend a Christmas worship service when I was a high school student. After worship I met a friend of my older brother who invited me to the Student Christian Fellowship (SCF). Through SCF I also came to know about the Nishi Tokyo District Youth Group for teenagers. Through both of these groups, I was afforded wonderful new encounters with people. I discovered friends to whom I could confide my deepest doubts and friends who would open their hearts to me in trust. There were pastors and church women who prayed for me. Even to this day I am in touch with many of the people I came to know through the district youth group. After taking part in the activities of the youth group, and following graduation from high school, I again started to go to SCF.

Just recently I have come to understand the Christian faith that is at the center of SCF's activities. At first I joined the activities at SCF because they were fun. I would not say that I am pursuing Christianity in a conscientious manner. It is much more natural for me to join fun events organized in the evenings, rather than to get up early on Sunday mornings. I think the reason I have come to think deeply about the Christian faith is precisely because of the "flexibility" of the Christian faith at SCF. At first glance, the Christian faith at SCF seems to be too easygoing and relaxed, and yet I would say that SCF is able to open the door wider, in a sense, for youth who are considering their relationship with the Christian faith.

Activities at SCF are quite different from those at local churches. In my mind, the greatest difference is that at church gatherings faith comes first, whereas at SCF there is no emphasis on the Christian faith – faith will follow later. At gatherings organized by SCF, besides occasional prayers and songs we sing from Taize, there is very little that directly concerns the Christian faith. Emphasis is placed on getting to know one another deeply, opening our hearts to one another, and trusting each other. Through this,



Ski/snowboard Camp, where participants handle all play, service, and worship by themselves

we mature together. At times we shed tears together and walk closely with one another along life's pathway. But the basis of all of those activities at SCF is the Christian philosophy of love for one another.

At the Bible study sessions on Thursday nights, sometimes our doubts and criticisms are expressed in a direct manner. At times our conversations go off on tangents, and at other times we express the kinds of questions we could never ask a local church pastor, such as, "Are we supposed to love the enemy even when our family is persecuted?" and "Do Buddhists go to hell?" But even when we express our deepest and most critical questions, our interaction is focused on what is at the core of the Bible message for us, and we discover finally a message that values life and calls for love. In this way, SCF is open to our criticisms and doubts. And in fact, this openness has provided me a way to come closer to Christianity.

I would not say that I have a deep understanding of Christianity. I have doubts and questions about many places in the Bible. Any yet I am committed to following something that I have come to know as good. Whatever is not good, I will doubt. By so doing I want to persevere until I know in my own way what it means to believe in God. Faith is not something that can be forced on others; nor is it something that you brainwash yourself into. In my searching I may one day be baptized, or maybe not. As I said in the beginning, "I love the way Christians think." At this point, that is the one sure thing I can say. (Tr. JM)

Ed. note: Student Christian Fellowship is a Kyodan-related youth center where many of the young people who have come to study or work in the large metropolis of Tokyo gather, irrespective of the status of their faith. Here they learn to respect and care for one another, and through these encounters, some are led to read the Bible. As a faith-based community for young people, SCF serves to connect the young people to the local churches. The author, a 23 year-old first-year employee of a company, is among the participants at SCF.

A Message from the General Secretary

Promoting youth evangelism: Thoughts about the future of evangelism in Japan

I am constantly thinking that the future of evangelism in Japan is tied to youth evangelism. Reaching and nurturing young people as committed evangelists is a most vital concern, and to accomplish this, the seminaries have an important function as well as a heavy responsibility.

As a pastor for 50 years, I have put great effort into evangelizing youth. In various regions of Japan, I have engaged in youth evangelism and student evangelism in six churches while serving as pastor. Being young myself, I spoke directly and sincerely about the meaning of life and continually spoke about faith and eternal truth and about the joy of salvation in Christ the Lord. The young people listened well to this, applying it to their own life problems. One after another, they confessed the Lord Christ and began living as part of the church. Among those I baptized during my 50 years as a pastor, many were young people. (Together, the high school students, college students, and working young people totaled around 300 persons.) Among those young people, some answered the call to become pastors and now are engaged as pastors and evangelists in various parts of Japan. Many others have central roles as active lay Christians, serving as elders and deacons in various churches.

Sadly, there has been trouble in the Kyodan for 40 years, and the word “evangelism” has become a dead word. The weakness of evangelistic effort and the indifference to it has been serious. However, at the Kyodan General Assembly in October 2000, Agenda 55 proposed that as it entered the 21st century, the Kyodan should put more effort into its mission of youth evangelism. This proposal was officially adopted.

Approaching the 2000th year since the coming of Christ and looking ahead to the 21st century, it was made clear that all of the Kyodan churches should cooperate in youth evangelism. “As we approach the 21st century, the Kyodan should put all its energy into evangelism”; this goal had been already proposed and passed by the November 1998 General Assembly of the Kyodan. Around the same time, church young people in the Tokyo metropolitan area appealed for a gathering to support 21st century evangelism in Japan, and this was held with the cooperation of Tokyo Union Theological Seminary. I was one of the promoters of this gathering, which continues to be held every year on the last Saturday of September at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, with about 200 in attendance. This year, 2012, will mark the 14th gathering. From these gatherings, many have made commitments to evangelism, with as many as ten young people making such a commitment at one time.

This year, approximately 200 young people from all over the country were expected to respond to an invitation to meet in Karuizawa in the summer with the theme “For Evangelism in Japan—Calling and Sending.”* This gathering joins together various groups in a nationwide summer youth-training meeting. Young pastors are cooperating to plan and bring it together. Through the persistent effort of these gatherings, we hope that young people will receive a call from God and, as committed people, will give their lives to Christ the Lord. We will continue to long for them to proclaim faithfully the gospel of salvation, following the path of an evangelist. (Tr. GM)

—Naito Tomeyuki, general secretary

*“Calling” as in God’s call to service and “sending” as in the church sending to serve those who have received God’s call.

Training for Teachers in Christian Schools

(Cont’d from p.5)

past 24 hours, as a time of conclusion. Finally, a teacher named Sugiyama Shuichi, from Poole Gakuin Junior and Senior High School, led a commissioning ceremony during which individual teachers were commissioned as a teacher to each school. It was a powerful message that “a life of perseverance and dedication based on the message of the Bible and modeled by Jesus” is at the heart of what it means to be a teacher at a mission school. Through this seminar, Sugiyama expressed through actions the “prepared heart of a teacher.”

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the teachers who served as advisors and to the many other people whose cooperation enabled us to have a productive time of learning. (Tr. SM)

Kirisutokyo Gakko Kyoiku(Christian Schools and Education) No. 649

—Tabata Ayumi, teacher

Hiroshima Jogakuin Junior and Senior High School

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

◆ The Kyodan website has a new address ◆
The new URL of the revamped English page of the Kyodan website is now located at: <http://uccj-e.org>