

Sharing the Christmas Message of Hope with Prisoners in Song

by Jin'nouchi Taizo, pastor
Tobi Church, Nishi Tokyo District
Professional Musician

It was the Christmas season. With church concerts and other responsibilities, I was busy going back and forth between Yamaguchi and Fukuoka prefectures. In the midst of these activities came a request from a pastor who was serving as a prison chaplain. "When you have an opening in your schedule, could you come as a volunteer and sing at our prison? Please help us."

It just so happened that I was on my way from one place to another at that time and was able to stop at Yamaguchi Prison on my way. Since I am from Yamaguchi, I knew of the prison, but this was the first time I had gone inside. It was a Christmas program, and the prisoners who wanted to were allowed to attend. A street performer and I were the entertainment.

I asked the chaplain if it would be all right to have the prisoners sing with me and keep the rhythm by clapping their hands. I was told that when such requests are made before performances, they are sometimes refused. I guess that is because music can raise people's emotions. But then he said, "However, Pastor Jin'nouchi, if while you are singing it seems natural to ask the prisoners to sing along with you or to ask them to clap in rhythm, I think that would be permissible." This response, however, did leave me a bit uneasy.

Close to 500 prisoners gathered that day in the gymnasium. To be honest, when I first stood on the stage, I was a bit intimidated. Everyone's head was shaved, and everyone was wearing a gray work uniform. I felt "frozen," like a deer caught in a car's headlights.

Since I had been raised in Yamaguchi, I even imagined someone I might know calling, "Hey, Jin'nouchi!" My mind was racing, and I was off to a poor start. However, after I had sung a few songs, I noticed that instead of the prisoners staring at me with folded arms, they were enjoying the music. It seemed that everyone had that same

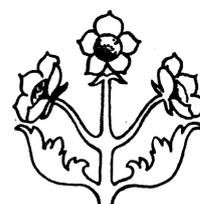
kind of facial expression, and I could sense an overflow of warmth and emotion.

"Hey, if you like, why not sing with me? Let me hear the rhythm with your hands, and let's have a good time!" I asked for requests. When that happened, everyone smiled and participated. Just imagine 500 adult men singing together and keeping perfect rhythm by clapping. With all that energy, I was overwhelmed on the stage. It felt so good, and I sang my heart out.

Then I noticed some strange movement beyond the crowd of prisoners. The prisoners were not noticing it, but the guards seemed to be moving into a defensive position. I could see this happening from the stage. Suddenly I began to wonder if the enthusiastic response to our concert was causing concern. The two groups were certainly focused on different things, but that was how much energy and excitement were in the gymnasium that night.

Afterwards, I received letters from some of the prisoners, and it was a priceless experience for all of us. If another situation like this arises, I hope to respond. These are the times in which we live. But at least at Christmas, when so many people are dealing with cold, pain, sadness, and loneliness, I pray that we can make it a season when they can feel warmth, hope, and light. (Tr. JS)

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



37th Kyodan General Assembly Elects New Slate of Officers

The 37th Kyodan General Assembly was held at the Metropolitan Hotel in Tokyo, Oct. 26-28, 2010 under the theme "Where is the Unity of the Kyodan? Thirsting After the Leading of the Holy Spirit." At the opening worship service, Hikita Kunimaro, pastor of Omiya Church, preached a sermon entitled, "I will build my church on this rock," using Isaiah 53:4-6 and Matthew 16:13-20 as Scripture readings. The main points of the message were that the confession of faith that Peter gave, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God," has been the confession of the church for 2000 years, and it is that which is asked of every person. It was on the "rock" of that confession that the Lord Jesus gave his commission to build his church, and it is from that confession that the church began. Christ conquered the power of death and sin, and built his church. We may lament the present situation of the church, but it's not really ours to begin with. The Lord declared that the power of sin and death would not prevail against his church. Thus, as long as it's the Lord Jesus who builds his church, the church will last forever, because it is his promise that he will prevail against even death.

The elections for moderator, vice-moderator and secretary brought three new faces to the positions. Ishibashi Hideo, pastor of Koshigaya Church, was elected to replace four-term moderator Yamakita Nobuhisa. In his acceptance speech, he stated that the visible church is based in the actualization of three pillars: the confession of faith, the sacraments, and church standards, and that it is through the maintenance of these three pillars that the church exists. He further stated that if one of these pillars becomes deformed, it weakens the other two as well. He pledged to work for the strengthening of these pillars and for the encouragement of preaching and study of the scripture so that its power might increase within the congregations. He appealed for support in guiding the Kyodan into a future that is focused on evangelism.

Okamoto Tomoyuki, pastor of Nishinomiya Church, was elected as vice-moderator, and in his greetings stressed that God alone can view things impartially. Thus, since we humans are limited by our partiality, in order to discuss issues fairly, we must follow parliamentary rules when debating the issues before us. Maintaining parliamentary procedure, he said, is the calling of the officers as they take on their new roles as executive roles.

Traditionally, the selection of the secretary has been left to the discretion of the moderator and vice-moderator, and accordingly, they chose Kumoshikari Toshimi, pastor of Akita Sakura Church. In his greetings, the new secretary stated that he had been involved in pioneer evangelism for 22 of the 27 years he was in Ou District. He described the efforts of churches in outlying districts as they have



Lft.-rt.: Newly elected Vice-moderator Okamoto Tomoyuki, Moderator Ishibashi Hideo and Secretary Kumoshikari Toshimi with General Secretary Naito Tomeyuki

labored in difficult situations. While increasing the evangelistic efforts of local churches is important, he stressed the need for mutual support in mission.

The topic that generated the most interest at this assembly involved the various proposals put forth to deal with the issue of clergy admonition. With respect to these proposals, Moderator Yamakita explained that according to rule 6 of the admonition enforcement procedures, "The judicial committee's decision is the final decision," and so each of these proposals was either defeated or withdrawn.

On the afternoon of the second day, there was debate on the method of electing members of the new Executive Council. The recommendation of the outgoing Executive Council had been to have spaces on the ballot for the entire number of members to be elected, but a motion was presented to allow only seven names to be written on each ballot, which was, incidentally, how the election had been handled at the previous general assembly. After a heated debate, the final decision was to allow delegates to enter names for the entire slate of 27 members to be elected. The new council consists of 14 clergy, 13 lay persons, and the 4 Kyodan executives, including the General Secretary. About 10 of these are new members.

A memorial service is held during each General Assembly for those who have passed away during the two years since the previous assembly. Ohara Muneo, moderator of Ou District, presided over this year's service, during which 86 clergy and 9 missionaries were honored for their service. The title of the message was "God now lives with people, and they will be his people," based on Revelations 21:1-4.

Of the 44 items on the agenda, 2 were not deliberated due to time constraints and were scrapped, which was a disappointment to the new executive officers. (Tr. TB)

—Kato Makoto, executive secretary

“Youth Evangelism” Topic of Education Committee Consultation

The first consultation between the Kyodan’s Committee on Education and missionaries serving in Japan was held on May 18, 2010 in the Kyodan’s conference room in Tokyo.

In his opening greetings, Chairman Kuroda explained the purpose of the meeting: “Since this is our first meeting together, I would like to hear from each of you about your work and any suggestions you may have.” Missionaries who engage the younger generation on a day-to-day basis offered various suggestions. Evangelization of the younger generation was the main concern for discussion brought by the Committee on Education.

One way of approaching students is through activities like art and sports. With young children who cannot understand spiritual things through words, the Montessori method of using wooden toys or tangible objects as a means of communication, in place of words, is being used to draw out their innate spirituality. Missionaries working with older youth explained how they employ songs and dances popular with young people and offered other such examples.

In response, committee members pointed out that these approaches are difficult to continue for very long. They also questioned how these kinds of fun activities could lead to church involvement or foster faith. The missionaries replied that with young people who reject the direct presentation of the gospel, the creation of a joyful setting is important for them to willingly accept faith. The Green House project in Yokohama was introduced as an example of how this is being done.

To the missionaries who have come to work with the church in Japan and are asking what the church requests and expects of them, we say: “With deep appreciation for the great work you do, there are many districts in Japan where there is almost no contact with missionaries. If you could travel through these outlying areas, it would be much appreciated.” There is a request that missionaries come to lecture at district education seminars. The consultation adjourned with the assurance that such discussions would continue. (Tr. GM) *Shinpo (The Kyodan Times)*

Japanese-Taiwanese Youth Mission Event held in Taiwan

Eight young people from Japan participated in a youth mission event held Aug. 10-23 in Taiwan. For the first four days we stayed in Taipei, where we participated in the opening worship, visited the national office of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT), and heard about the activities of the church’s youth. Also, we learned about the “228 incident”¹ and people’s lives under martial law following that incident.

On the third day, at the International Japanese Church, the people shared with us their experiences during the 228 incident and during the period of martial law. I was moved most when one elderly person, who had experienced the loss of a stepfather in the suppression and barely escaped, finished sharing the experience by saying, “However, Taiwan is now at peace and we should forget the past. Let’s love peace. I forgive the 228 incident.” Those words helped me sense the greatness of forgiveness.

From the fifth day, we went into the Alishan Mountains and stayed for a time. At a memorial service marking the rebuilding after a typhoon, these people who had suffered greatly sang praises with so much feeling that I could feel the power of their worship. At Lalauya Church’s Sunday worship service, Japanese words were used frequently, and I was amazed at the deep connection between the Tsou Tribe and Japan.

On the eighth day, we came down from the Alishan Mountain and traveled to Tainan, where we visited the Taiwan Church Press, Chang Jung Middle School, Tainan Theological College and Seminary, Chang Jung Christian University, and the Taiwan Blackfoot Disease Socio-medical Service Memorial House, along with other institutions. We were especially impressed with the work of Dr. Wang King-ho at the Taiwan Blackfoot Disease Socio-medical Service Memorial House. We felt his strong faith in God when he said, “Without faith and love we are

nothing,” and “There is nothing more joyous than service, with no expectation of reward.”

On the eleventh day, we returned once more to Taipei. We attended Gikong Church on our second Sunday in Taiwan. This church was built at the site of murders related to what is called the “White Terror.”² To this day the assailant has not been caught. Once more, at the end of our travels, we felt the weight of the government’s involvement both in this atrocity and in the cover-up that followed. However, as in the case of the elderly person in the International Japanese Church, it was most surprising that the relatives of the murdered family members³ also declared that they forgave the killer. Again I felt the greatness of forgiveness. Indeed, without forgiveness there can be no peace. Once again on this trip, I was impressed with the importance of forgiveness.

We were able to spend fourteen full and wonderful days. We cannot fully express our gratitude to the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan. We learned a great deal from the dedication of the youth of Taiwan. Even after we return to Japan, we will continue to learn from them and to be encouraged in our studies in school and our service in church. (Tr. GM)

— Umetsu Shizuko, member
Honda Memorial Church, Tokyo
Shinpo (The Kyodan Times)

Ed. Note:

¹ The 228 Incident began on Feb. 28, 1947 as the new arrivals from mainland China—the Chinese Nationalist Party and army—began a violent suppression of the indigenous Taiwanese throughout Taiwan, which the indigenous people call “the great massacre.”

² The “White Terror” refers to the violence perpetrated against the people at the order of government leaders.

³ Three members of the Lin Yihsung family were killed on Feb. 28, 1947.

"A Message of Peace" for Peace Sunday, Aug. 1, 2010

by Yamakita Nobuhisa, former Kyodan moderator and
Choi Young Shin, Korean Christian Church in Japan moderator

100th Anniversary of the Annexation of Korea. This year of 2010 marks the 100th anniversary of the forcible annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910.

The annexation of Korea brought to fruition the imperial ambitions of Japan, which were based on the emperor system, and ushered in a cruel period of colonialism known as the "36 years of imperial rule." This forced annexation and colonial rule resulted in the confiscation of the Korean Peninsula's resources, including its property and labor of its people. In addition, use of the Korean language and Korean names was banned, and the people's pride as well as their freedom of religion were taken from them. Due to the economic realities of this colonial period, many Koreans had little choice but to come to Japan to work, and in 1939 the policy of forcibly bringing Koreans to Japan as laborers was instituted, which intensified the persecution and oppression of Koreans in Japan.

We must not forget the deep wounds caused by the Korean Annexation in 1910 and the pain that still endures to this day.

60th Anniversary of the Korean War. The year 2010 also marks the 60th Anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War.

In 1950, the struggle for supremacy over the Korean Peninsula between the fledgling powers of the Republic of Korea in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north began in earnest. The battlefield extended over the entire peninsula, which had already been laid waste, with the result that the divided peninsula remained that way. While a ceasefire has been maintained, there have been skirmishes, and the military standoff continues to this day. Families have been torn apart, and the tragedy of one ethnic group fighting among itself continues. We must never forget that it was the annexation by Japan that set the stage for all of this, and that Japan utilized this tragedy to spur its own recovery after World War II.

Immigration Law and Fingerprinting Issues. As a preventative measure against "terrorism," new immigration regulations have been put into effect. The main change is the requirement that all foreign nationals 16 years of age or older be fingerprinted and photographed when entering or reentering Japan, with the exception of "special permanent residents" (basically Koreans and Chinese who were born and raised in Japan) and persons with diplomatic immunity. In addition, the government passed a new provision to go into effect in 2012 that is a complete revision of the Alien Registration System. This system, which has been in effect for 62 years, will be replaced with a new "residence card" that is designed for the maintenance of strict control over all foreign residents in Japan. It will basically divide all foreign residents into low-paid foreign workers useful to the economy and irregular sojourners subject to expulsion.

Needless to say, this kind of oversimplified categorization will lead to violations of human rights.

As we contemplate the meaning of the cross of Jesus, we, as followers of Jesus, must take a stand against the "building up of walls of separation" that forced fingerprinting entails as well as the upcoming residence card system, which will further intensify the regulation of long-term foreign residents.

It is our firm conviction that in a world where more and more people are traveling internationally, and in a Japanese society in which foreign nationals are increasingly settling down to live, we should be aiming to create a multiethnic, multicultural society in which we can all live together in harmony. We believe that to realize such a goal, what we need is not fingerprinting but efforts to break down walls of separation between Japanese and foreign nationals.

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." (Ephesians 2:14-16)

During this year in which we observe both the 100th anniversary of the annexation of Korea by Japan and the 60th anniversary of the start of the Korean War, the Kyodan and the Korean Christian Church in Japan stand together as we jointly pray for and work together for the following points:

- * There should be a full disclosure of the illegal acts involved in the forced annexation of Korea and where the responsibility for those acts lie.
- * All who were harmed by Japanese colonial rule should be justly compensated and have their human rights restored.
- * Japan should do all that it can to encourage the reconciliation and reunification of the Korean Peninsula as soon as possible, especially since it was indirectly involved in the outbreak of the Korean War and benefited directly from the demand for war supplies.
- * The new Immigration Act designed to control and eliminate foreign nationals should be revised.
- * Japan should enact a "Basic Law for Foreign Residents of Japan" that strives for a society in which foreign nationals can feel at ease in putting down their in a local Japanese community.

It is within an atmosphere of renewed nationalism under the banner of "patriotism" that we covenant together to work for these goals as we continue in a spirit of prayer to our Lord. We believe that it is our calling, as ones sent by the Lord of righteousness and peace into Japanese society, to work and pray together for peace in the country in which we live. (Tr. TB)

Shinpo (The Kyodan Times)

Founder of Fukuoka Jogakuin – Jennie Margaret Gheer (1846-1910)

by Matsuda Hiroyuki, archivist
Fukuoka Jogakuin

Fukuoka Jogakuin's history has its origins in the missionary work of the American Episcopal Methodist Church in Japan. The school was founded in 1885, seven years after the signs banning Christianity were removed in 1873.

In 1873 the American Episcopal Methodist Church sent John Davidson to Nagasaki, with other missionaries being sent to Yokohama, Tokyo, and Hakodate, where they built churches and founded schools based on Christianity. Especially because there was very little education for women in Japan, they founded schools for girls through which to conduct Christian evangelistic work and thus were at the forefront of women's education.

In 1884 the first church was established in Fukuoka. This was the Fukuoka Miimi Church. (The Chinese characters read "miimi" where those used in Chinese to mean the American Episcopal Methodist Church.) Gradually there were calls for the establishment of a girls' school and as these became stronger, the request was communicated to Nagasaki, which at that time was the base of the American Episcopal Church in Kyushu. As a result, on April 23, 1885, Jennie Margaret Gheer, who at that time was teaching at Kwassui Girls' School in Nagasaki, came to Fukuoka for a six-day visit, accompanied by Oshima Saki, a Kwassui seminary student. Gheer then came back to Fukuoka on May 28 with Davidson and Oshima and on June 15, Fukuoka Eiwa Girls' School, a Christian school for girls, was opened in borrowed space: the temporary hall of Fukuoka Miimi Church.

Jennie Margaret Gheer was born on Nov. 13, 1846 in Bellwood, in Blair County, Pennsylvania. She attended Pennsylvania State Teachers' College, and after graduating, taught in public schools in the Anties, Tyrone, and Altoona districts.

Around that time, she heard about the overseas evangelistic work of the American Episcopal Methodist Church's Women's Foreign Mission Society (WFMS), felt called, and offered herself to serve. The WFMS recognized her calling and accepted her to be sent out by its New York branch. She was appointed to work cooperatively with missionary Elizabeth Russell, who was being sent by the Cincinnati branch, and sailed for Japan, arriving in Nagasaki on Nov. 13, 1879. Gheer was 33 years old.

In Nagasaki, she assisted Russell in the founding of Kwassui Girls' School and was then involved in directing the Theology Department. As she was also an accomplished musician, she helped set up the Music Department as well, giving distinguished service in Kwassui's early days. She also widened her activities to the local area, setting up a Sunday School and striving diligently to direct women's work. She is also known for her pioneering efforts in music in the region.

On June 15, 1885, Gheer became Fukuoka Eiwa Girls' School's first principal. She also was heavily involved in activities outside her own school, earnestly guiding students who came from Fukuoka Teachers' College to study the Bible and English and going out to teach English classes when so requested.

In particular, the effort she poured into raising up women evangelists was introduced in the March 1885 issue of the



Right: Missionaries Gheer (front right) and Russell (back left) on June 15, 1885, when Fukuoka Girls' School was founded

Heathen Women's Friend, in an article entitled "A letter from Jean Gheer, the first women's evangelist in Nagasaki." In her free time, she learned Japanese tea ceremony and tried hard to get to know the local townspeople, coming to be trusted as a school principal who devoted herself with integrity to education and evangelism both inside and outside the school.

However in June 1887, after just two years of service as the school principal, ill health forced Gheer to resign and go back to the United States. She was later able to return to Japan and undertake extremely valuable work in evangelism, repeatedly travelling around on evangelistic tours and preaching the gospel enthusiastically. She often came to Fukuoka and was of great service to our school, which at that time was still called Eiwa Girls' School. In 1891, she undertook the direction of classes for the development of women's evangelism at Kwassui Girls' School. However, her health again deteriorated, and in June 1894, she returned to the U.S. for a period of recuperation. Back in Japan from 1896 to 1907, she had overall responsibility for training women evangelists in Kyushu.

While on the voyage back to Japan after a period of furlough in the U.S. from July 1907 to May 1909, Gheer was among the many passengers became ill with food poisoning. Because she went straight back to her evangelistic work in Kagoshima, without taking time for proper recuperation, in February 1910 she ended up being hospitalized at St. Bernard's Hospital in Nagasaki. On May 17, she again left Japan for the U.S. and arrived at her sister Anna's home in Bellwood on June 13. In spite of the tender care she received, she died just a week later on June 20, 1910. She was 63 years old. She was buried beside her parents in Logan Valley in Bellwood. Although in Japan she was mainly known as Jennie (or Jenny), the name on her gravestone is Jean.

The Bible that Gheer used during her 30 years of preaching the gospel in Japan was later given to Fukuoka Jogakuin by a former minister and his wife from Gheer's home church in Bellwood, and a ceremony was held on May 29, 1985 to mark the receipt of this gift, at the time of our 100th anniversary celebration.

In July 1984, Gheer's outstanding achievements were introduced at the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church's Altoona District in Pennsylvania. It was reported that as she neared death, she spoke the following words to the minister of her church: "It doesn't matter if my name is forgotten. Let everything be to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Tr. SN)

Makiba's Challenge as a Home for Elderly Persons

Makiba (meaning “pasture”), which is operated by Chubu District in Nisshin City, Aichi Prefecture, is a Kyodan-related home for elderly persons that provides nursing care and is included in the category of facilities that charge fees. The institution was founded in 1997 to support the spiritual life of retired pastors and believers. Now, 13 years later, 52 persons ranging in age from 63 to 99 are living at Makiba, including five couples. The ratio of men to women is one to three. Twenty of the residents need nursing care, and all the rooms are full. A total of 50 staff persons, including part-time workers, assist the residents. They are 11 nurses and 12 caregivers at the core of the home, along with physical rehabilitation trainers, a care-support manager, life counselors, and additional staff. The number of Christians among the residents and staff is 50 percent.

The home has a close, cooperative relationship with Minamiyama Church, which is located in the same area, and a large number of persons from Makiba attend the worship service, Bible study, and prayer meeting there. Oshima Sumio, pastor of Minamiyama Church, also conducts a monthly worship service, with communion, and a weekly Bible gathering at Makiba. In addition, members of Minamiyama Church do various kinds of volunteer work there, and the head of the institution, Makiba Director Suzuki Takuya, is a believer at Minamiyama Church.

Makiba's Journey Since Its Founding

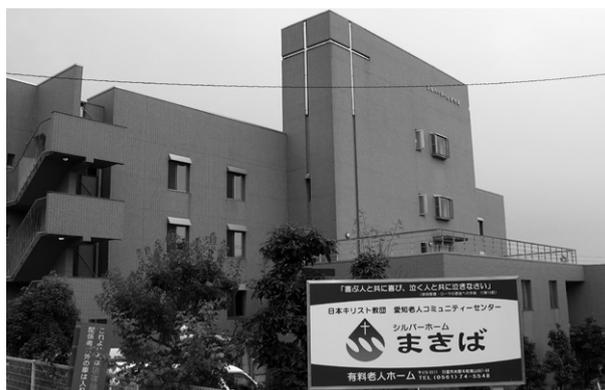
Pastor Toda Isuke, who strongly promoted the building of a residence for retired pastors, gained the cooperation of Chubu District and established the home with the sanction of the Kyodan. However, the task of getting the operation of the home on track has not been a smooth one.

When the Public Nursing Care Insurance System was introduced in the year 2000, management of the home became easier, to some extent, but there were still many problems related to operation. Suzuki Takuya, who has outstanding business expertise, became the director in 2004 and took complete responsibility for operations. As a result of his continued efforts, full occupancy has been maintained for the last four years, and from the end of March 2010 the home has operated without borrowing funds.

The need for a nursing care facility developed because of the aging of the residents. For several years various plans had been devised but not realized. Then three years ago, through anonymous gifts that can only be thought of as God's provision, an addition specifically designed as a nursing care facility was constructed. The chapel within the building enables residents who can no longer go to the nearby church to attend worship services for the rest of their lives.

Daily Life at Makiba

At Makiba, every morning begins with an employees' worship service, including hymns, Bible reading, an exposition of a Bible passage by Director Suzuki, and prayer. This is followed by reports of the residents' conditions, et cetera.



Miwata Yoshiko, currently a subleader of the care-workers team, made up her mind at age 50 to become qualified to serve as a helper, then entered Makiba as a part-time worker. For Miwata, who had been baptized 30 years earlier, serving at a Christian place of work had been an aspiration. “Is this a church? Oh, it's an institution!” she recalls thinking, and she is grateful daily for the home's work environment. Resident Yasui Teruo, who had seemed stubborn and demanding to her in the beginning, was baptized at the age of 91. Perhaps Miwata's prayers reached him. Now, it is a routine for the two of them to join hands and pray each morning.

Kozaki Hiroo, a retired pastor, has some happy news. Machida Yoko, who serves as a care-support manager and a nurse, will be baptized soon. A participant in the employee worship each morning, she was later inspired by an experience she had while nursing a resident who, although facing death, repeatedly said “Thank you” and had complete assurance that she was going to go to be with Jesus. Seeing her, Machida was forced to consider the kind of death she was likely to experience. The institution has had six persons from among the residents and staff who have been baptized since its establishment.

“Respect for the Dignity of Each Person's Character” as the Home's Philosophy

An article entitled “Private Homes for Elderly Persons in the 24 Prefectures: Best Ranking of the 1,556 Institutions,” published in the weekly magazine *Diamond's* May 20, 2009 special issue on Nursing Care, ranked Makiba as number one in Aichi Prefecture in the nursing care, private institution division. This shows that Makiba is the best home in Aichi Prefecture.

Presently, there are 40 persons who want to live at Makiba and are waiting for the opportunity. However, there is no plan to enlarge the facility to increase the number of residents. “We can care for each resident's specific needs because there are just 50 persons. We want to send the message to society that we can provide this kind of care because we are a religious corporation and our institution's philosophy is to ‘always have the same respect for the dignity of each person's character.’” (Tr. RT)

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

Faith Journey of the New Japanese Church in Brussels

by Okada Naotake, Kyodan missionary

As a missionary from the Kyodan, I started a Japanese church in Brussels, capital of Belgium, in the spring of 2006. Before I came, the people there had been gathering for worship one Saturday a month for 24 years. I studied in Trier, Germany from 2000 to 2005. Sasaki Satoshi, who had been helping with this gathering, became ill in October 2004 and asked me to take over his responsibilities. Sasaki was the pastor of Cologne Bonn Japanese Church from 1987 to 1992 and had remained in Germany after that. Around Easter in March 2005, Sasaki was called to heaven. In the belief that my calling is to share the Good News with the 4,000 Japanese people living in Brussels, I decided to help build a church. I had a chance to see Sasaki one last time, two weeks before Easter, in a hospital in Bonn.

When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Sasaki, who was stationed at the Naval Academy in Edajima, witnessed the mushroom cloud from afar. After the war, he saw the ruins of Hiroshima before returning home. Sasaki said to me, "I will leave everything up to you," and prayed fervently for my wife and me. I still remember his smile as he gave me a firm handshake. At Bonn Station, I felt strongly that the Lord was calling my wife and me into ministry with Japanese people in Brussels.

I contacted an evangelical organization, the Belgian Evangelical Mission (BEM). Following an examination of my documents and an interview, I was given provisional status under the auspices of that organization. After passing a French language test two years later, I was officially admitted to the BEM, which lent me the use of their chapel, and I started to hold services on Sunday afternoons in Brussels. As with most Japanese churches in Europe, our church sought support from Japan. I had an opportunity to meet Tanabe Masataka, an evangelical pastor of the Liebenzeller Mission, who served not only the Japanese Church in Frankfurt but also the Japanese Church in Switzerland. From him I learned about missionary work and the formation of Japanese churches in Europe as well as practical things, like newsletters and support groups.

I spent six months in Japan preparing for this assignment, making presentations in about 20 different churches on reaching out to the Japanese people in Brussels. I was a bit anxious, wondering if I would receive the necessary support. Through God's grace, I was given all that I needed. In the beginning there were only ten people who came to our service, but in 2007 two women, a scholar and a student studying music, were baptized on Christmas Day. In 2009, two men, bankers located in the area, were baptized on Pentecost Sunday. Now, we have about twenty people attending our services, ten people attending Sunday school, and three or four seekers. I have gone back to Japan twice, making presentations in 40 to 50 churches and giving reports for eight to ten weeks each time, something I will continue to do every second year. It was a joy to be able to meet with people from different denominational backgrounds, regardless of whether or not they were



Celebration of the church's fourth anniversary on Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2010

members of the Kyodan. During that time I experienced diversity and rich companionship.

Our church is the only interdenominational Protestant Japanese church in Belgium. As we have comparatively large numbers from both evangelical backgrounds and those who have not yet made a commitment, from the beginning of this ministry I have placed great importance on keeping balance and flexibility. Also, since this church has been functioning as a gathering for a long time, I have been careful to refer back to the traditions of evangelical Protestant churches with respect to confession, doctrine, and orders in order for it not to just be a community center. Later we established our own confession and bylaws. Our church pursues the Reformed doctrine, yet our ministry aims at a balance between the Kyodan and evangelical denominations. Once a month, we have the youth lead our worship. In addition, we have what is called family worship, when we use a picture-story show. In our services, we regularly sing worship songs.

There are about 30 Japanese churches and gatherings in Europe. The majority of these are of evangelical denominations. I believe their piety, views on the Bible, devotions, testimonies, and worship have had quite an influence on the spirituality of this church. Yamakita Nobuhisa, the former Kyodan moderator, has mentioned the importance of interdenominational cooperation between the Kyodan and local evangelical churches. As long as these churches can maintain balance and flexibility while respecting each other's traditions, I believe they will create a new way to minister to the Japanese. I am certain that the tradition of evangelical Protestant churches will play an important role in the Kyodan and interdenominational churches.

For the first time, our church had an overnight retreat near Brussels this September. In October, three people will be getting baptized: a woman who is a musician and a couple in the medicine profession. I would like to ask you to continue to pray for and support this Japanese ministry in Brussels. (Tr. DV)

The General Secretary's Diary

Those of us in the Kyodan who are eager to see progress in evangelism should keep an eye on two books published recently by the Kyodan Board of Publications. One is *Our Evangelism*, edited by the Committee on Evangelism, and the other is *Believers' Guide*, edited by the Research Institute on the Mission of the Church. I was asked to give brief reviews on each of them.

Our Evangelism is a collection of talks given at a series of evangelism seminars that were conducted from the fall of 2007 through the fall of 2008 at various locations across Japan. Commemorating the 150th anniversary of Protestantism in Japan, the book was published through the strong support of the Kyodan Board of Publications. It records testimonies of four pastors who fought for God over several decades, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus at the risk of their lives. Evangelism is about building up the church of Christ in this land that we love. We who belong to the Kyodan are called to this purpose, and this book strongly asks readers to commit to that. I feel that it should be read by Kyodan believers as well.

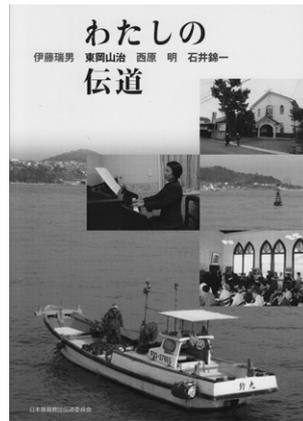
Believers' Guide is a timely publication produced through the good efforts of the Research Institute on the Mission of the Church. At the recent 37th General Assembly a decision was made regarding one of the sacraments, namely communion, so the Kyodan is now at the point when it ought to have its own common ground of faith and truth. In question and answer form, *Believers' Guide* clearly explains the basis of Christianity as derived from the Kyodan Confession of Faith, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. Therefore, it clarifies the beliefs on which the Kyodan stands.

It is said that the foundations of the Christian church are the Bible (canon), the creed (credo), and order and organization (ordo). The Kyodan has indeed inherited the traditions of the Christian church and recognizes the Bible as the canon and professes the Kyodan's Confession of Faith, which is mainly based on the Apostles' Creed and is the result of trials and efforts of faith. This Confession of Faith has produced an institutional church with a clergy system, as an embodiment of biblical order, as well as a constitution and bylaws by which church governance is conducted.

It is desired that the Kyodan will proactively engage in evangelism, standing on this foundation of faith, and that it will be further equipped as an organization and as an institution. In this sense, it is my sincere hope as general secretary that Kyodan believers read these books and make the most of them so that each one will be nurtured in faith and be equipped as faithful witnesses of Christ. (Tr. YY)

—Naito Tomeyuki, general secretary

Reviews of Recent Publications



Left: *Our Evangelism* Right: *Believers' Guide*

- *Publisher:* Naito Tomeyuki
- *Editor:* Kawakami Yoshiko *Copy Editor:* Hazel Terhune
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- Tokuta Makoto
- *Translators:* Timothy Boyle, George Magee, Sheila Norris,
- Joe Stroud, Robert Terhune, Donald Van Antwerpen,
- Yokoyama Yoshie
- *Note:* The names of Japanese persons are listed in traditional order, with last names first.

**Merry Christmas
&
Happy New Year
to all
KNL Readers**



- Corrections, with apologies, of the "Hokusei Gakuen" article in KNL#359, p.6, right column. In the section entitled "Elizabeth M. Evans," the first paragraph:
- 1. The middle initial "M" was omitted in the first mention of her name.
- 2. The word "Hokuriku" should replace "Hokusei" in the last sentence.