

Executive Council Focuses on Evangelism and Earthquake-related Issues

The 4th Executive Council meeting of the 37th General Assembly Period (10/2010-10/2012) was held at the Kyodan headquarters in Tokyo, Oct. 17-18, with all 30 members present. Council members include representatives from 16 of the 17 districts nationwide. The meeting was opened with worship led by Nagasaki Tetsuo, who spoke about the close relationship between evangelism and fundraising/relief operations, both in the past and in the present, based on II Cor. 8:9.

General Secretary Naito Tomeyuki's report generated considerable discussion concerning the issue of earthquake retrofitting of the Japan Christian Center building, and a proposal was made concerning that issue. As a result of the, preliminary examination of the building done recently, various questions and opinions continued to be raised in regards to future options, such as rebuilding or moving to a different site, and a task force was established to continue the deliberations. The names of the six members of this task force were announced on the second day, and the committee is to be called the "Subcommittee on the Issues Surrounding the Japan Christian Center Building."

It was reported that the joint conference of financial officers from each district and executives from the Kyodan headquarters had deliberated the reduction or temporary elimination of annual assessments for the districts affected by the March 11 earthquake, as well as the establishment of a council on the distribution of support funding for district activities. With respect to the National Christian Council in Japan, there were many questions concerning the fundamental issues of its activities, its relationship to the Kyodan, and the financial assessments it is requesting. There were strong criticisms leveled against the way the NCCJ operates.

The following motion came from the Committee on Evangelism. "In response to requests from numerous Kyodan churches, we propose that a Board of Evangelism be established within the Kyodan structure. This is based on the need to have a budget for evangelism and a full-time position that would take responsibility for ongoing research and planning for evangelism within the Kyodan as a whole. Thus we propose two motions: first, to continue looking into the possibilities of establishing a Board of Evangelism, and second, to move towards restructuring the Kyodan so that the Committee on Examining Evangelistic Strategies would become the new Board of Evangelism."

As this relates to the Kyodan's annual income and expenditures budget, the moderator of Kyoto District expressed the need to "keep the total budget for salaries of the secretaries, etc., as low as possible." To this, Ito Mizuo, chairperson of the Commission for the Examination of Financial Reports, replied, "It is not easy to cut into the salary budget, as it cannot be handled with flexibility."

The Research Institute on the Mission of the Church reported that work on rethinking the "Basic Principles of Mission," that had been temporarily interrupted by the need to finish the publication *Handbook of Faith*, has now been restarted. At present, the process of establishing the table of contents, writing the guidelines, and deciding the basic outline of the basic principles of mission has been finished, and the completion of content is underway. Questions were asked about the guidelines, and the discussion focused on the semantics of the terms "mission" and "evangelism" as well as on issues surrounding the concrete applications of the basic principles.

On the second day, deliberations centered on the report from the Disaster Relief Planning Headquarters and the items related to dealing with the earthquake and tsunami damage. With respect to the Disaster Relief Planning Headquarters, vice-chairperson Okamoto Tomoyuki reported on the Symposium Preparation Committee and the 11246* Prayer Meeting, as well as on the damages suffered within the four affected districts, the steps being taken, budgets, etc. Executive Secretary Kato Makoto also reported on relief efforts, including the volunteer activities of the Tohoku District Relief Center (Emmaus), the increasing number of requests for volunteers in Ishinomaki Tsukiyama, support activities for the Tono Suicide Prevention Center, and steps being taken to support those affected by radiation resulting from the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant accident. The damages suffered within the four affected districts were spelled out in a summary list. Those in Kanto District were particularly detailed, with total damages to all the churches and related kindergartens, together with Asian Rural Institute, totaling 1.8 billion yen (\$23 million). The total number of churches damaged in the four districts was 66. (Tr. TB)

—Kato Makoto, executive secretary

*Editor's note. The numbers 11246 refer to the date and time of the earthquake: March 11 at 2:46 p.m.

Relief Work after the Great East Japan Earthquake

It has been eight months since the great earthquake and tsunami that occurred along the length of eastern Japan on March 11. Restoration following the unprecedented destruction in the various areas, and especially with the additional accident at Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant, has been extremely difficult. People are in pain and despair and are struggling to see the light of future prospects ahead in the midst of their grief.

God has sent his Son Jesus Christ as the Savior to be the light of true hope shining in the darkness, precisely in the places where we are suffering in sadness in that world of darkness. He has shown us the way to live together and share love. At this time, in response to this Christmas message, let us see how we as Christians will ask again what we can do and how we can relate to the people who are now in the midst of this troubled situation. Many persons, in various ways, have done what they could. From their reports, I want to share the following two specific ones. (Tr. RT)

—Nishio Misao, member
Suginami Church, Nishi Tokyo District

I Was a Volunteer

by Miyahara Yu, teacher of
Musashino Soai Kindergarten, Nishi Tokyo District

I experienced the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake [1995] when I was a third-year elementary school pupil, and that became the impetus for me to be a volunteer.

Since the day of the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, even if no earthquake was happening, I always carried that fear in my heart: "An earthquake may occur." However, I remember that due to the occurrence of that earthquake, relief came from not only inside the country but also from overseas. Many temporary housing units were provided in the parks, and emergency food services were provided at such places as schools and other institutions. As much as an elementary school pupil could, I felt that both my mind and body were being saved.

February 2011. At a worship service at the kindergarten where I now work, I spoke to the children about this actual experience and about the many things God gives us that are not just a matter of course but are things we should be grateful for and take care of. Exactly one month after the day I gave that talk, the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred. "I want to help in some way." With only that thought, I decided to take part in the volunteer effort.

The House where I was in Charge. The entire inside of that house was filled with mud, and none of the furniture could be used. Dishes, writing materials, pictures, clothing, hangers, books, pieces of wood—various things were drawn out of the mud. The fact that the house itself survived was a miracle. Throughout the area are the remains of houses that were destroyed, and through the work of the Self-Defense Forces, at last a road appeared. I worked to separate the unusable broken furniture that had been removed from the mud and put them in the designated disposal areas.

An Elderly Man's Words. This Arahama is the place where it was first reported that 300 bodies had been washed up ashore. A husband here tells about being so caught up in saving his own life that his wife and child were swallowed by the tsunami right before his own eyes, and he was unable to save them. Even if survivors went to the place where the bodies were being cremated, it was impossible to distinguish one from another. No one could tell who had died. Even tears would not come. "If I were to try to clean up this house by myself, I think it would have taken me half a year. You have saved the day. Thank you."

His said that after the earthquake, an elderly woman would not even go outside and made no effort to get into the

ofuro (Japanese bath). One day, as a result of a volunteer calling to her, she began to go outside a little and got even to the point where she said to him, with a smiling face, "Maybe we could try to plant some tomato seedlings."

Throughout the town there was mud, sand, and rubble. But in an area where no grass was growing, dandelions silently bloomed. I noticed as I looked around that they were blooming here and there. From a town where people and vegetation had given up hope, they were looking forward and were trying to move ahead. A person cannot move ahead very easily alone, but people relating to one another, with support, can look ahead and go on living.

It was a five-day period of being touched by the warmth of the volunteers all over Japan as well as by the warmth of the people in the area. I am praying that as soon as possible the hearts of the victims may be healed and that they may be able to live a peaceful life. (Tr. RT)

From *Nishi Tokyo Kyoku Dayori*
(Nishi Tokyo District News)

Urayasu Church School Children Find Ways to Help A desire to help someone leads to action

by Ohno Toshiko, church school teacher
Urayasu Church, Chiba Subdistrict, Tokyo

I believe that the desire to be helpful is an important gift that God has given to each of us to equip us for living together. The disasters of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the tsunami and the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant have caused even children to consider what they can do to help. For the Church School children of Urayasu Church, the answer was for them to pray for those affected, to continue remembering them, and to give of their time and efforts to help. After further consideration, they came up with the idea of making bookmarks and picture post cards. They would then sell them and send the profit as aid to the disaster areas.

By cutting paper, using tweezers to set and glue the paper, opening a hole and putting the ribbon through, and then putting it in an envelope, the children were able to make bookmarks. To make the picture post cards, the children made a design for the pictures they had drawn. They then made prints and put them in envelopes as sets. Every child in the Church School was involved in the project, and they are now hoping that many people will purchase these items so they can send the proceeds as aid to the disaster areas. (Tr. JS)

From *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend)

First Missionaries at Iai Gakuin

In January 2011, Iai Gakuin celebrated its 137th anniversary, making it the oldest girls' junior high and senior high school in Hokkaido. The first missionaries to work here were Merriman Colbert Harris and his wife Flora Lydia Best Harris. They were sent by the American Methodist Episcopal Church and arrived in Hakodate on January 26, 1874. Flora Harris quickly gathered a group of young girls together and began Hibi Gakko (Day School) where she taught English, the Bible, sewing, and manners. There were only five girls at first, but this group was an unforgettable source of joy to Harris.

The students at Day School continued to study at Aiku School, which was started somewhat later, but Harris felt teaching only daily life skills was inadequate and desired to start a formal school for girls that would include a dormitory. She prayed and wrote an article about it in the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society's (WFMS) magazine *Heathen Woman's Friend*.

After reading the article, a woman named Caroline R. Wright, who had just lost her daughter to illness, was deeply moved. She had been living in Germany as wife of the American Legate to Germany, but she was informed that her daughter, who had been left back in the US, had become seriously ill and was in a critical state. She went back to the States in hopes of nursing her child for even one day. Meanwhile, her daughter, who was lying ill in bed, prayed that she could see her mother again. The prayers were answered. She was able to nurse her daughter and to embrace her with a thankful heart as her daughter was called to heaven.

Wright wanted to express her deeply felt gratitude to God by being of service in some way, and when she read Harris' article and saw that girls the same age as her deceased daughter were learning in another country, she felt a call to contribute to that mission. She contributed to the school in Hakodate the savings she had set aside for her daughter's education, money raised from selling knitted and embroidered items sold at church bazaars, and money she raised by calling upon friends. In total amounted to \$1,800.

In October 1878, Mary A. Priest was sent to Hakodate as an educational missionary. In 1879 the school was formally opened with an enrollment of 12 students, but on December 6 of the same year, the school and the adjacent church were both destroyed in a great fire. Priest continued to teach, using her bedroom as a classroom, but perhaps the shock of the great fire had overwhelmed her. By 1880 she was having health problems and left Japan to return home.

However, once again prayers were answered, and in February 1882, the school was officially recognized by the Ministry of Education and formally incorporated as the Caroline Wright Memorial School. The first principal was Kate Woodworth. The school began with an enrollment of 6 students, but by September of that year there was a total of 16 girls living in the dormitory as well as several others who commuted to school each day.

Although the initial name of the school had been Caroline Wright Memorial School, because resistance to using the alphabet at the time was negatively affecting enrollment, the school changed its name to Iai Girls' School in its third year. Iai means "a remembrance of love."

The first principal, Kate Woodworth, left after only one year to get married and was replaced by Mary S. Hampton. Hampton had been like a mother to the students, embracing them with her kindness, but when she became principal, she had to struggle to improve the facilities and to increase enrollment. She went from door to door in Hakodate and even went as far as Hirosaki in northern Honshu. She was kept very busy and when she asked for assistance from the U.S., a missionary by the name of Florence N. Hamisfar, who was also a medical doctor, was sent to the school in 1883. Hamisfar was the first female doctor in Hokkaido. She saw patients in Hakodate from 6 a.m., taught at Iai in between and also taught an English class for one hour each day at Hakodate Teachers' School. In part due to Hampton's efforts, by 1887 enrollment was up to 94 students. In this year, Ella J. Hewett became the third principal of the school and Hampton returned temporarily to the U.S. Returning to Japan in 1888, she was assigned to Hirosaki Iai Girls' School for a brief time before finally returning to Iai Girls' School in Hakodate. She assisted the fourth principal, Augusta Dickerson, and together they worked to acquire the present campus and to improve the school and kindergarten buildings. In total, Hampton gave 34 years of her life to education at Iai.

More than any other person, it was the missionary named Dickerson who laid the foundation for the education carried out at Iai and who nurtured a tradition of service. She became principal in 1890, began a preparatory school in 1891, and in the following year, a kindergarten program. A sister school named Raitoku was established in Hirosaki, and Hampton and Dickerson were sent there to teach from May 1889 to March 1891. Dickerson was principal for 35 years, and she was the one who made "Faith, Sacrifice, Service" the motto for Iai. For girls living in the dormitory, she established a "Princess Group" and, with the young girls, engaged in a number of social service activities. They helped out at church school, provided assistance for people living in poverty, visited the sick, and taught young children.

In 1918 they took flowers to the sick in hospital, and they sent money earned by selling knitted and embroidered items to children in Siberia who were suffering during the state of confusion that followed the Russian Revolution. In 1923, at the time of the Great Kanto Earthquake, both teachers and students made and sent clothing, along with financial contributions, for people in the affected areas, and when there was serious flooding in the Korean Peninsula in 1925, they sent clothing and accessories.

Dickerson was also closely associated with the Hakodate School for the Blind and Deaf. The predecessor to the school had been established in 1895 by Charlotte Pinkney-Draper of the Methodist Church, and Dickerson had supported this school both financially and by assisting with the instruction. For a short time Iai even took over the management of the school, and graduates were hired by the school as staff.

Iai Gakuin now has 23,591 graduates, and the spirit of the first missionaries who gave us the motto "Faith, Sacrifice, Service" remains the sure and firm foundation of Iai's educational philosophy. (Tr. RW)

—Fukushima Mototeru, principal of Iai Gakuin
Hakodate, Hokkaido

Ministry to Japanese Expands in the Metropolitan New York Area

by Sagara Masahiko, Kyodan missionary pastor

I was sent to New York to work in Japanese Ministry for three years, from the spring of 2008 to 2011. I served as program director of the Special Ministries to the Japanese and as the pastor of the Union Japanese Church of Westchester. SMJ is an outreach program for Japanese families and people with care and love in Christ. SMJ has been supported in the Tri-State Area by the Kyodan, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Methodist Church for over 30 years. Programs and services have been supported by such individual churches as, in New York, the Japanese American United Church in Manhattan as well as the Union Japanese Church of Westchester and Hitchcock Presbyterian Church, both in Scarsdale; in Connecticut, Long Hill UMC in Long Hill and Golden Hill UMC in Bridgeport; and in New Jersey, the Church of the Good Shepherd in Bergenfield and Tenafly Presbyterian Church in Tenafly. There have always been prayers and support for the outreach of this Japanese ministry.

As one of the main SMJ programs, a two-week bilingual summer camp is held every year at Camp Quinipet, Long Island, in the UMC's New York Annual Conference. As a result of the summer camp, a youth Bible gathering in Tenafly and the Bergen County area in New Jersey was begun to help nurture the growth of the junior counselors who attended the summer camp. There are several cultural programs, such as Japanese classical art performances and lectures about U.S. history and religion, which hopefully will serve as a bridge between the two cultures in U.S. and Japanese society.

SMJ's summer camp is named "the Discovery Camp." We hope that the campers will discover or find something important for them. But the truth is that each of them are found and embraced by our Lord there. We have the good news for all people to tell, live out, and share—that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ, our Lord. As we gathered amongst our own uniqueness and special talents for helping each other, we became one family before the Lord. During the camp, we experienced cooperating and complementing each other with our abilities as well as with our inabilities. From there, we experienced praising and worshipping the Lord every moment in our camp. The camp is a good opportunity to be nurtured and grow in the presence of the Lord, especially for the parents and family of the campers but also for the counselors and the campers. For those who have not heard the good news, the camp is an experience of Christian fellowship full of joy and the richness in living our daily lives as praise and worship before the Lord. This photo was taken in the dining hall during the 2009 camp. Even in the midst of the noisy lunchtime preparations, this camper was intensely reading the New Testament. It was the first time he had ever held a Bible in his hands. The Word of God had been given to him. The encounter with Jesus Christ in our daily lives has surely started here at this wonderful place.

According to the mission statement of the Union Japanese Church of Westchester (founded in 1989 out of an SMJ

worship group), where I served as pastor, the church was at first a particular congregation of the Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Methodist Church. The purposes of this church are to worship God, to help Japanese-speaking people study the Bible, and to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people around us. To this end the church aims to be joined firmly together with Christ as our sole head, to be one in prayer, to love our God, and to serve our neighbors. Also, as a church planted in the U.S., the church strongly desires to have Christian fellowship with its brothers and sisters here and to serve our neighbors in the U.S.

The programs held at UJCW include a weekly Japanese prayer meeting and a monthly English book club that is intended to help and to support young mothers with small children by introducing good books for them to read to their children, as well as by introducing life in the U.S., such as enjoying the change of seasons and festivals.

There are also programs and meetings held outside the church building. In New York City, there is a home worship service in Manhattan, with a communion service for members in need, another home meeting at a parsonage in the Bronx. In Connecticut there is a multi-lingual worship service in Ansonia, a home meeting in Greenwich, a home gathering and prayer meetings in Trumbull, and as requested by members of the Trumbull meeting, a family Bible gathering was started at Bridgeport with the cooperation of Golden Hill UMC.

We are given a different and unique faith as we are all unique in the eyes of the Lord. What we need to see in each of us is whether our faith in the Lord is alive in us. The important and blessed truth within us is that when we truly love our Lord and God, we can understand that our faith is sufficiently genuine before the Lord. That love makes us people of worship and one family of God. We want to continue to hold worship services and to celebrate the Lord's Day here because of this love. We pray that we may love our Lord more as we continue to walk in the Lord's presence and as we experience the grace of our Lord day-by-day.

"So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Luke 15:1-7

As long as there are people waiting for the Good news of the Lord, our ministry continues there. After my return to Tokyo this Spring, Rev. Takako Terrino serves SMJ as program director and Rev. Yoko Asada serves again as UJCW pastor.

Post-earthquake Situation at 2 Churches near Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant

The coastal area of Fukushima along the Pacific Ocean, called *hamadori*, is reeling from the triple disasters of the Great East Japan Earthquake, a tsunami, and nuclear radiation from the damaged nuclear power plant. Staff of the Kyodan's monthly magazine *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend) visited the eight churches located near the power plant and shared with their readers the following testimonies of two of those churches.

Odaka Church and Kindergarten, located within the 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima nuclear power plant

When the earthquake struck on March 11, five kindergarten children working on their yearbook album and their parents and ten other children were in the church and kindergarten buildings. As soon as the shaking stopped and all were confirmed safe, everyone evacuated the area. Seeing that conditions were beginning to stabilize, all agreed to return again the following Monday. However, the next day a hydrogen explosion occurred at the nuclear power plant, and an evacuation recommendation was issued.

"Almost everyone expected to return home quickly. People had gone to a variety of places of refuge, and many had not taken their cell phones. At first, there was no way to contact church members or related people. While I was out in a car, searching for people, one member spotted my car by chance in Iwaki City. We were then able to connect with others, one by one. Now I have a list of where our members are located," reports Oshimo Masato, pastor of Odaka Church.

Because, like the kindergarten staff, the kindergarten children and their families were all widely scattered and it was no longer possible to continue administration of the kindergarten, Oshimo himself also returned to his parents' home in Chiba until he received communication from Seifu Kindergarten in Iwaki City, a sister kindergarten under the same license, which is part of the same Christian kindergarten association. Regretfully, from May 1 the staff had to be dismissed. However, one of the teachers was employed by Seifu Kindergarten in Iwaki City.

Regarding the church, requests for transfer of membership have come from some of the members. "We really need to call a congregational meeting, but that is now impossible with our members so widely scattered. Our thought is to convene an emergency meeting with our subdistrict and district moderators and as many members of the church board who can attend. The real desire of our members and myself is to return to Odaka and reopen the church and kindergarten, but we are stuck in a position of uncertainty, not being able to foresee our future. For Odaka, time has stopped since the earthquake. We are unable to do anything. To be honest, when people say, 'Just keep trying,' I think, 'What can I do to keep going?' Still, when I am stuck in this mood I am thankful for prayer. Somehow, keep praying with us. In this situation of not knowing what to do or how to do it, I can only try to see God's purpose in all of this," says Oshimo.

Iwaki Church, damaged by the tsunami

According to a later report, things have quieted down, but people are still not able to look ahead. In the disaster,

Iwaki City sustained damage from the tsunami that left sunken fishing vessels in the harbor and homes washed away. Also, the ground under the city has liquefied, or changed in other ways. The ground under the parsonage of Iwaki Church is tilting. The new pastor, Uetake Yuko, was called to the church from Kanagawa Prefecture in April. Despite changes in the level of the ground in Iwaki City, the restoration of electric and water supply was relatively fast. However, here too, the radiation from the damaged nuclear power plants has caused widespread anxiety among citizens, especially those raising small children, and many families have evacuated. It is the same with church members. Fortunately, the city, being south of the power plants, has experienced relatively low levels of radiation, so people are becoming calmer, and from April some began to return. In a later report at the beginning of June, most of the church members had returned. Still, their feelings about the radiation issue are varied, especially for families with small children, and the decision to stay or evacuate is complicated. Some are staying and others are leaving. A few children are attending church school, but the church kindergarten teachers are in a state of anxiety about reopening, reports Uetake.

Later, Seifu Kindergarten, adjoining Iwaki Church, was able to accept children and on May 9 began its new school year. The building was damaged by the earthquake, but repairs are being made. Also, to ease the concerns of the staff about radiation, all the top soil of the kindergarten playground was removed, and now the whole kindergarten grounds are lower.

Because Seifu Kindergarten and Odaka Church Kindergarten share the same license and are part of the same Soso (soh-soh) Christian Kindergarten Association, Seifu Kindergarten is supporting Odaka Kindergarten and is offering free admission to children younger than kindergarten age whose families had evacuated from Odaka to Iwaki and remained close enough for them to attend. There were some cancellations of enrollment for the new school year, but not as many as was feared.

So Uetake is gratefully welcomed for accepting a call to the disaster area. "My own regret is that I was not present during the crisis immediately after the disaster. Among those members who have evacuated and those who have remained, I sense an ambivalent feeling," she mentioned. "Now, members of Odaka Church and Pastor Oshimo are worshipping together with Iwaki Church. The spirits of all are reviving, with some now able to look ahead while others still see no way forward. The heavy responsibility of bringing God's word to these people in this difficult situation continues." (Tr. GM)

From *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend)

Experiencing the Incarnation at Asian Rural Institute

by Jonathan McCurley, UMC missionary
Asian Rural Institute
Nasu-shiobara, Tochigi Prefecture

As we move into Advent and the Christmas season, we are reminded of the new things that God promises in the incarnation. The promises of God being with us, of a new way of life, and of new birth is not only something that happened 2,000 years ago but also has been the experience this past year for us here at Asian Rural Institute. We thank all of you who have supported us with your words, prayers, and financial help through this difficult year.

As many of you already know, we were hit rather hard by the earthquake that happened on March 11 of this year and continue to be affected by the radiation fallout that came in the aftermath of the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster. The destruction from the earthquake, while affecting the entire campus, severely damaged our two most central buildings to the school, Koinonia House and the Main Building. Koinonia House is where fellowship, or koinonia, happens in our community as we cook, eat, worship, sing, dance, and converse with one another about life. The Main Building has held our offices, library, and classrooms since the inception of ARI. Both of these became very unstable after the earthquake, and quickly we realized that one floor of Koinonia would no longer be usable. The Main building also became increasingly dangerous, so much so that we were recommended to rebuild as soon as possible as the aftershocks would further weaken both buildings. Cracks, falling ceilings, broken glass, dangerous walls were found in those buildings and throughout the campus. Yet in contrast to the chaos around us, on the evening of March 11, in the cold, without electricity or gas and with busted water pipes, we gathered to eat, sing, pray, and comfort each other and our neighbors. Looking back, I can say that we understood the incarnation to be real, and although much had happened that day, this experience of the incarnation was the real experience of the evening.

From March until now, I must say that this has continued to be our witness. We have watched as so many people have lent their strength and time as they volunteered with us, given us their finances, and have given us their minds and hearts as they have continued to share about and pray for us. However, it was a struggle for us even to decide to continue with the training program this year. At the time we needed to make a decision, we did not know very much about how safe our structures really were nor the effects of the radioactive fallout from the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant accident. So, as we struggled and discussed about our future at the end of March, it was very difficult to make any decision because of so many unknown factors. Yet through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, we were given a vision, and soon we were able to decide to begin our training, making an extraordinary request to begin our training at the Theological Seminary for Rural Mission located in Machida, west of Tokyo. This step would bring us the courage to go forward but also sent us into a frenzy as we continued cleanup and research in Tochigi and prepared in Machida for the incoming class of 2011, which would represent 14 countries from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the Caribbean.

Being in Machida for the first three months of the training brought many challenges as well as fresh blessings. How to communicate smoothly between campuses, the reduced area for the campus and vegetable fields, and the lack of space for livestock—all these made it necessary to be creative and flexible in the training. Yet there were fewer participants in comparison to previous years, which meant that we were able to create a close-knit community very quickly. This would prove to be another blessing as we dealt with so many unknowns throughout the year. Soon, people began to open

up about their lives and their fears of not knowing enough about radiation and what effects there might be. This led both the staff and participants to study, talk, and struggle together about our future and to seek guidance for the right decision to make for our training. Through many prayers and words of encouragement I believe that God then guided us to make the decision to return to the Tochigi campus at the end of July, taking a new step in the training.

Returning to Tochigi took weeks to get used to as the community now readjusted to all of the changes around us. Because half of the staff had remained at the Tochigi campus and the other half had been in Machida with the participants, this now was a time of getting to know one another again and of learning a new daily schedule as we had many fields, livestock, and upkeep to do. It was also at this time that the reality of the situation at ARI in Tochigi became more understood by all. We knew now that while our buildings were unsafe for continual use, they would get us through the year. Learning to use more limited space also created opportunities for learning patience throughout the community. As months had passed since the disaster, we also had much more understanding about the effects of radiation on campus. We learned that we were in a low contamination area, which meant that there had been fall-out from the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant accident, but it was not something that would prevent us from continuing on with our lives. We do need to take caution as we plow, plant, and harvest, but life could and would continue.

This reality also created a new opportunity for us to face the challenges in front of us. Would we ignore what was happening and wish it would go away, or would we actively work toward seeing transformation take place not only at ARI but also in the community where we live. We decided the latter, joining with local citizens in the *Kibou no Toride* project to measure and work at cleaning up our land and making our area literally a “fortress of hope.” In that strain, this year we have decided to take extraordinary precautions to keep contamination risks to a minimum. I believe this shows how much ARI values the mission God has given us to help create a healthy, just, and peaceful world. By “government standards,” ARI is considered a safe area for growing food—food that could be sold in any supermarket throughout Japan. Yet the commitment of ARI to fulfilling the mission that God has given us means that we believe we have a responsibility to create healthy food and a healthy environment. This is how we are witnessing to our desire to fulfill the call God has given us. So what came to us as a challenge, we are seeking to turn into a blessing.

What has been the highlight of the year so far has been the holding of the 39th Harvest Thanksgiving Festival (HTC) this past October. HTC is an event that we have held every year since ARI was founded and is a time we set aside each year to give thanks to God for the harvest, to witness to our faith and mission, and to welcome our supporters and the surrounding community to celebrate with us the life and community of ARI. This is a busy but joyous time and, as part of the curriculum, is the largest event that the participants lead, prepare, and create during their training. Although after the earthquake, and even at the early parts of the training, we thought it would be impossible to hold this event, the grace of God gave us courage to go forward and to celebrate. Through the voices of our community we learned that this year would not only be a celebration and time of thanksgiving for the harvest. It would partly be that, but it would also be a time to proclaim the grace of God that helped us to overcome our challenges and calls us to be transformed. It would

(Cont'd on p.7)

Boarding the World Mission Ship, Carrying knowledge, support and hope – my experience on the Logos

by Oshima Yuko, member
Minami-yama Church near Nagoya, Chubu District

I returned to Japan last autumn after two years of experience on the Logos Hope, the world mission ship operated by Operation Mobilization (OM Ships International), an ecumenical ministry. I had never dreamed that I would have an opportunity to take part in such missionary activity, in which I went around the world as a volunteer, managing the onboard bookstore with around 400 Christians from over 50 countries. We travelled to about 26 countries in Europe, Caribbean and Africa, which was so inspiring.

We spent time not only making the full trip but also going for short trips for a week or so to various places where we ran evangelistic programs and worked with local people. I felt grateful that I encountered four opportunities, among which the most unforgettable was to stay in a small village in Dominica, a Caribbean country with abundant nature. There, four of us were stayed as a group in a woman minister's house and helped at the church. Her nephew Joel was a quiet, 16-year-old school boy.

Although our conversation was not that deep, we had a wonderful time making origami together. A week later, as we were going back to the ship, I pondered, "I did what I could, but what did I do for God?" After that, unexpectedly, I received an email from Joel. He shared that he could not forget our testimonies and drama performances, and above all, he realized that he was empty without God. He revealed that meeting us was the happiest thing in his life. He cried for the first time in years as he made up his mind to follow God seriously. He thinks of me as if I were his sister and still keeps sending me emails. I thank God for granting me this opportunity to strengthen my faith through this encounter.

Undoubtedly, things cannot be always pleasant. For example, while in Jamaica, every day was like a storm. Thousands of people visited our onboard bookstore from the time it opened at 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. The shop was so packed that we could hardly move. Every night after the shop closed, it was such a total mess that we needed to tidy up and restock the books from the back store room to the bookshelves until midnight.

Under such circumstances, I found it difficult to understand the attitude and behavior of the people there. I prayed to the God: "God, I can't do this. It's impossible for me to act like Jesus--to be kind and patient with a crowd of people



Members of Operation Mobilization (OM Ships International), aboard the Logos Ship

like this." Then I heard God's voice, "Love them anyway." That moment my perspective was broadened.

I realized that God requires us to love not only when we feel delighted and loved by many persons. God Himself loves me unconditionally, in any circumstance. God touched me through the scripture verses of 1 Cor. 13.4-7: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Through this, He presents the way to each of us, so that we can put it into practice. (Tr. SM)

Introduction of the author

Oshima Yuko has studied English since high school and went to the U.S. as an exchange student while attending a university in Japan. After graduation, she worked in Aichi Kokusai Hospital as an administrative officer. From 2008, she took part in an international missionary trip on the Logos for two years. Also serving on the ship was her future husband who comes from Switzerland, where she will move after their marriage this August.

From *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend)

(Cont'd from p.6)

also be a time to demonstrate our thankfulness to our many supporters who have worked so hard and given so much to our community.

This year we invited Dr. Joseph Ozawa to come and give the opening address. and his words would set the stage for the rest of the weekend. He spoke to us of the good world that God had created and how that contrasts to the many difficulties and evil things around us. Yet in the middle of it, we are called to keep going to the end, knowing that God has promised to bring us through into a new and transformed future. We were to continue in our pursuit, *saigo made* (to the last minute). These words of encouragement gave us strength as we sang and danced, ate, and celebrated with many people. Over that weekend we could see the unity of our community, as we came together as one, choosing to fulfill the 2011 HTC theme, which is "Color the world with love, care, and harmony in difference."

So here we are, coming to the end of another training program when 19 new graduates will be sent into the world, back to their communities, to help create the healthy, just, and peaceful world that we are called to create. While ARI continues to face challenges, we move forward, knowing what Emmanuel means that God really is with us. Understanding that, we continue to try to reach the seemingly unreachable goal of 500 million yen for reconstruction and are giving thanks as support comes in little by little. At the same time, we are patiently working, waiting, and praying that God will touch hearts to bring in the full amount so that we can be about what we have been called to do.

Finally we continue in our present daily struggle. As we train leaders for the creation of a healthy world, we at ARI continue to work for the decontamination of our soil, so that we can with confidence create healthy food for the sustenance for our communities, and through this action, give witness to the whole world of what is possible when God is with us.

The General Secretary's Diary

Symposium Held by the Kyodan's Disaster Relief Planning Headquarters

The Kyodan's Disaster Relief Planning Headquarters hosted a symposium at Ginza Church, Aug.29-30, on the theme "Christianity and the Crisis in Present-day Japan—Issues Raised by the Great East Japan Earthquake," which was attended by 440 participants. Four speakers—a pastor, a theologian, a Christian educator, and a Christian social worker—made presentations from their individual perspectives, and Oki Hideo, president of the postgraduate school of Seigakuin University, gave a special lecture.

The substance of this symposium was extremely valuable, so a report will be published in the future. I will introduce here only the main points of Oki Hideo's lecture, as space is limited. The theme, "Christ's Saturday," is filled with deep and penetrating insights.

The Great East Japan Earthquake caused a massive tsunami, and with "a shaking movement of the earth's foundation" attacked human society with enormous strength, plundering many lives, destroying many towns, and giving birth to a piteous situation that we can hardly bear to see. Moreover, this earthquake caused a nuclear accident, which led to radioactive contamination, and revealed various contradictions in modern society. The superficiality of politics and its deceitful nature made clear the shallow base of education. And not only that, has it not exposed the weakness of faith within the Protestant Christian church in present-day Japan? Neglecting the proclamation of the gospel of the cross and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, regarding as sufficient mere statements like "Follow Our Lord Jesus who was kind to people," such as humanists would say—these weaknesses of the church has been shattered by this great earthquake.

About the desolate scene of mountains of thoroughly devastated debris spreading out before him, one Buddhist scholar reportedly said, "*sai no kawara*" [referring to the hopeless state of a child]. Truly only darkness, uncertainty, and a Hades that must be resigned to are there.

However, in that Hades, Christ is reclining. As clearly confessed in the Apostle's Creed, "[Jesus Christ]... was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell...." That is to say, Christ who died on the cross on Friday descended into Hades and lay Himself down there on Saturday, the day before the Sunday when he was resurrected. Why? It was in order that he might fulfill the role of a bridge crossing over from Hades to the eternal Kingdom, not remaining in Hades, which the Buddhist scholar called *sai no kawara*.

Ezekiel, the prophet during a period of destruction who saw a similar scene of *sai no kawara* in a vision (Ezekiel 37:1-14), spoke of how "dry bones in the valley" were raised from the death. The true God puts new breath in the dry bones, resurrects them, and gives them new life. Japan is now in "the valley of dry bones." That is, we are in the dark Hades of Saturday. It appears as if there is hopelessness, darkness, and only sadness, pain, and tears. But Christ lies down in the Hades of Saturday, and furthermore, He speaks powerfully to those who are in utter despair. "Cross over me, as you would go across a bridge, and receive a new spirit!"

Christ in the Hades of Saturday is the Christ of the resurrection of Sunday. Speaking strongly about this is the mission of the present-day Protestant church. (Tr. SM)

—Naito Tomeyuki, general secretary

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



◆ 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/>