

Japan Update

Spring 2011 Number 61

A Diaspora People Led by Pillars of Fire and Clouds

Stories of a congregation evacuated from Fukushima



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Forced to evacuate from their hometown due to the danger of radiation after the Great East Japan Earthquake hit on March 11, the members of Fukushima First Baptist Church, located near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, were scattered to various evacuation shelters with hardly with any belongings.

Little did Pastor Akira Sato know when he preached the message “Hezekiah, An Urgent Prayer” in the worship service on March 6 that he himself would have to request urgent prayer within a week. He closed his sermon with the prayer, “We are a small group of people, but the same God is behind us. Let us not mourn nor complain... We depend on none but you, God.”

At the time the earthquake struck, Sato and his wife were in Chiba Prefecture, northwest of Tokyo. Unable to go home

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Translated and summarized
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immediately after the earthquake, he tried to contact some church members on a pay phone. As he spoke with each one, tears streamed down his cheeks as he thought to himself, “Is this a nightmare?”

One church member came up with the idea of gathering church members from various shelters and moving together to a safe place. Ultimately, 70 members headed toward Aizu Chapel in another part of Fukushima Prefecture. On March 15, they received a warm welcome by the Christians there. The following day, Pastor Sato and his wife joined them and heard some amazing stories of how God had saved various lives.

Realizing this was going to be a long-

term evacuation, Pastor Sato decided the group should move on to Meeko Memorial Hall of Yonezawa Chapel in Yamagata Prefecture. Some decided to stay with friends and relatives, so a total of 12 cars with 50 people drove through a blizzard to Yonezawa on March 17.



Meeko Memorial Hall in Yonezawa

His mind swirled with questions, such as, “Will we ever be able to go back to our town and homes?” and “Will the church be closed down and the history of mission in this region end forever?” He felt depressed, but he believed and confessed that the Almighty God and Lord of History who reigns over everything including nature would open a new page of mission and lead them on.

He wrote in his diary, “The most miraculous thing to me is that I never get asked questions like ‘Why did God allow this?’ or ‘I can’t believe in God. There is no God.’ From the 160 members I have been in touch with, all I hear are words like, ‘God is great. I want to trust Him as I walk with Him from now on.’ Is this the beginning of an Exodus into a new frontier that the Lord is opening for us? Like the Israelites in the desert, all we can do is follow God as He leads us with pillars of fire and clouds.”



Pastor Akira Sato and his wife

Next Pastor Sato made the decision to leave Yonezawa and head for Okutama Bible Camp (to the west of Tokyo) on March 31, as they had been kindly invited to stay there for a period of time. The risk of radiation was not going to go away for a while, children needed to go to school, people had to find work, and all needed to live in a place with some level of privacy.

He wrote, “Brothers and sisters are bringing us food and clothing from all over Japan. I feel like Elijah, sustained by God with food carried by a raven.”



“The church schedule, and my own, has been totally wiped out. Now the Lord gives us our daily timetable. It seems that when earthly things are shaken to their foundations, the Lord leads us into His own sphere. Now that He is leading us on, I would like us to go with His flow, without struggling, and to enjoy this world that He has prepared for us.”



He prayed, “Lord, how long should we remain in this limbo? Give us permission to start rebuilding. I want to make a new start. Give us a sign. When you give it to us, then I will lead the flock you have given me, encouraging them to hope for that day. If you are not going to give us a sign, give us perseverance. Help us wait on you and discipline ourselves.”

All photos in this article provided by Revival Japan

SUMMARY OF THE JEA RESPONSE TO THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE DISASTER

On March 11, 2011, at 2:26 p.m., an enormous earthquake hit the Sanriku Coast affecting the Tohoku Region and other areas of eastern Japan. The magnitude of the earthquake was 9.0, the biggest in Japan's recorded history. The massive tsunami caused by this quake destroyed towns along an approximately 500 kilometer stretch of coastline from Chiba to Iwate. The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant was also affected by the earthquake and many towns around the power plant have been evacuated.

In response to this national crisis, the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA) held an expanded meeting of the Disaster Relief Commission on March 22 and decided to cooperate with CRASH Japan, a disaster relief organization led by Rev. Jonathan Wilson, a member of JEA Disaster Relief Commission. CRASH Japan is also endorsed by JEMA (Japan Evangelical Missionary Association) and the JEA is closely partnering with JEMA to organize Christian relief to help the churches and people of Tohoku and affected areas.

On March 25, an emergency JEA board meeting was held and the following decisions were made:

(1) The JEA Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster Recovery Office was established in Ochanomizu Christian Center, with Rev. Takao Nakadai, Chairman of the JEA Disaster Relief Committee, as the head.

(2) In order to centralize the project and cooperate with CRASH, Tokyo-based volunteers will be sent from denominations and Christian organizations to the headquarters of CRASH.

(3) All registration procedures for volunteers will be handled by CRASH headquarters; all further volunteer work will be coordinated through CRASH with the assistance of the JEA Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster Recovery Office. Training seminars for volunteer workers will be held as necessary so that volunteers can learn how to be both safe and effective while engaging in the relief and recovery operation.

(4) Personnel will be sent in turns to local



Praying at a site where a church was washed away in Natori, Miyagi (photo by Takaki Nakadai)

CRASH base camps (Rifumachi in Miyagi, Hitachi in Ibaragi, Tono in Iwate, Nasu-shiobara in Tochigi) for them to serve as the base camp leaders while cooperating with local churches.

(5) Reception and distribution of necessary supplies will be done in cooperation with CRASH.

(6) Financial personnel will be assigned to manage and report income and expenditures concerning financial donations from within Japan and from overseas.

Please send donations to the JEA Disaster Relief Commission in one of the following ways:

Japan Postal Bank (furikae)

Account Name: (JEA) Nihon Fukuin Domei
Enjo Kyoryoku linkai #00190-5-7790

Mizuho Bank

Kudan Branch 532-1673098
JEA Enjo Kyoryoku linkai

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

—Psalm 46:1-3

Please continue to pray for Japan and for Japanese churches to receive wisdom and passion to share the love of God with people at this time of national crisis.

Recovery as a Lifelong Process of Sanctification

by Atsuko Tateishi, Assistant Editor

Our difficulties in life often derive from our dysfunctional family relationships. When people come to church with baggage from their respective families, it can affect relationships within the church. This is only natural, because a church is, after all, a family of God. How can a church embrace hurting people and be a truly healing community? To obtain some clues, I went to observe a weekly session of Celebrate Recovery (CR) on a Friday evening at The Biblical Church of Tokyo (BCT).

The ministry of CR originally started in 1991 at Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in California. While the practice of CR is similar to that of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), its concept is solidly rooted in biblical principles and, in particular, the *Eight Recovery Principles* that are based on the eight Beatitudes. CR is designed to let Christians and non-Christians celebrate God's healing power through release from their life's difficulties including hurts, bad habits, and obsessions.

Seiji and Kathy Oyama experienced significant recovery through CR while they were living in the USA. After the couple took on the pastoral leadership of BCT, they introduced CR to their church in the spring of 2005. Today, roughly 30 percent of the church members are involved in CR in one way or another. The Oyamas welcome members of the other churches as well. Some have "graduated" and started CR in their own church. As of this writing, the CR Japan website lists two churches in Kawasaki, just south of Tokyo, and one church in Kobe, west of Osaka, as CR venues.

Supper

For people who come rushing to the church directly from their day's obligations, volunteers prepare supper for 400 yen per person. As people start coming in around 6:30 pm, they serve themselves, and typically sit with a few others to talk over the meal. Some come by to talk to Seiji and/or Kathy, who also join them for supper. Eventually, the dining room is comfortably warmed up by about 15 men and women from their twenties through middle-age. It is the hour for winding down, and preparing themselves mentally and physically before the large group session.

Large Group Session

The first hour of the weekly meeting from 7:30 p.m. is devoted to the large group session, when everyone meets together in the sanctuary. The main part of the session is either teaching one of the CR lessons or a testimony. They take place on alternat-



ing weeks.

There were altogether more than 30 people in the sanctuary this evening. A middle-aged lady gave a testimony. She is a long-time BCT member and a CR veteran. She appeared quite comfortable with sharing her recovery story in an open and matter-of-fact manner. She demonstrated how she had experienced significant healing for the last five years of her involvement in CR. The intercessory prayers of her small group members sustain her on a daily basis. As she believes recovery is an ongoing process, she wants to be involved in CR as long as possible.

Open Share Groups

The crowd now breaks into gender-specific small groups. During the second hour from 8:30 p.m., groups share what impressed them most in what they just heard, and what they believe they need to work on.

I was allowed to observe a women's group for those who are relatively new or have not yet committed themselves to CR. The leader opened the session with prayer. The group of 11 women then recited the five simple guidelines for small groups, which are printed on the back of the program of the day.

Next was the sharing. One by one, in random order, group members spoke briefly of their issues and thoughts. Some chose not to speak, and there was no pressure to speak up. The group listened attentively to each other, and was highly considerate of the time so that everyone wanting to speak would have a chance to do so. Some issues seemed more clinically serious than others, but each and every issue, I could see, was critical for the person who was tackling it. The last few minutes were spent sharing praises and prayer requests, and the leader's prayer closed the session. Once the official program was over, some rushed home and others

lingered for a chat in the lobby.

CR: Its Strengths and Challenge

CR serves as an outreach, too. Non-believers come for CR through the CR and church websites. For those who are new, the low-key and non-threatening approach of CR works well. It works because of what Kathy calls “the *onsen gensoku*” (“Hot Spring Principle”). Whether you are a Christian or not, you are fearful the first time you attend a CR session, like a non-Japanese who ventures into a communal hot spring bath for the first time. When you are in it, however, you realize you have little to fear. After all, you see everyone else is naked as well!

As casual as CR sessions may be, some of the subjects are quite heavy and the sharing can be intense. And, yes, the majority of the issues I heard being discussed involved family relationships. CR provides a safe place for people to process their issues with the support of their small group. Through a combination of study, testimony, sharing, and prayers, CR lets participants grow, and some eventually emerge as leaders. Some study the CR lessons over and over and still find something new. As Kathy says, recovery is a lifelong process of sanctification. As long as we live, there is room for us to grow more like Christ.

The only downside of CR is that few churches in Japan currently offer the program. Two hours a week for at least several months takes a high level of commitment, especially if you have to commute a long way. As it is, some come to BCT to attend CR sessions from out-of-town. It would be good if more churches offered CR, and more options were available.

A Family in the Making

An Interview

Keisuke and Maki, a young couple at BCT, graciously agreed to share with Japan Update (JU), their experience through their involvement in CR.

JU: How and why did you become involved in CR?

Keisuke (K): I used to work as a fishing guide in Alaska in the States during the summer. Gary and Lynne, a Christian couple I was working with in Alaska, shared the gospel with me. I believed in Jesus in June 2003.

Maki (M): I went to visit Keisuke in Alaska in September 2004. We were thinking of marriage by then. While I was there, Gary and Lynne told me about Jesus. I had noticed some positive change in Keisuke during the previous year or so. I didn't know he had become a Christian. I simply thought

he was caring for me more deeply. How wrong I was! It was Jesus who changed Keisuke. My quest for God began in Alaska, and I eventually became a believer.

K: Maki and I got married in November 2004. In the meantime, I settled down in Japan, and started looking for a church. Maki and I landed in BCT and got baptized together on Easter Sunday, April 2005. A little before then, BCT hosted a conference on John Townsend's book entitled *Boundaries*. I knew something was not quite right with my relationship with my parents. The conference showed me that there was a way to work on my family issues. So I decided to be involved in CR, as it was beginning just around that time at BCT.

M: I, too, was aware of the difficulties in my relationship with my parents. I wanted to attend CR sessions, but my work as a full-time nurse and my pregnancy with our first child got in the way. I finally was able to attend CR sessions regularly in spring 2006.

JU: Both of you have been involved in CR until today. Will you share some of the positive results you have experienced?

K: The biggest issue for me has been forgiving my parents, particularly my father. I have learned that forgiving them is really for my benefit, not for theirs. Over the years, I have learned to accept my father for who he is, and also to accept that God has given me such a father. In addition, CR has let me realize that I am in a co-dependent relationship with my dominant mother.

M: CR provides me with a safe place where I am allowed to grow and learn at my own pace. My father had such strong control over me that when I began to be involved in CR, I didn't know how to express my feelings or desires. I have been learning to do just that. I have also come to believe that I can empathize with other people's wounds because of my wounds. Now that I have three little children, I try to pay attention to my own feelings while dealing with them. I am very glad to have given up being a perfect mother!

JU: Does it mean a lot to you to have the support of your respective small groups?

K & M: Oh, yes!

K: I hope there will be more groups and more churches doing CR. I particularly want to help young families struggling with raising children. Maki and I are happy to have been volunteering in childcare during the CR sessions on Friday evenings since last April.

M: My father and I are still estranged, but I hope things will change some day.

JU: So do I. Thank you very much for your time.

NEWS and NOTES

Annual Church Survey Results

September 5, 2010

The *Christian Shimbun* conducted their annual church survey in Japan in March 2010, and published the results in their *Christian Data Book 2011* (in CD-ROM for 5,000 yen). According to the survey, the total number of Protestant churches decreased to 7,997, coming down below 8,000 for the first time in four years. Only 13 new churches were started following the 2009 survey, while 39 churches either closed or have been consolidated, resulting in a net decrease of 26 in the number of churches.

Both the average membership of 64.0 and average worship attendance of 40.8 remained relatively flat compared to the previous year. For the same period, the Protestant population and the percentage of the Protestant population to the total population of Japan were also essentially unchanged at 511,522 and 0.4% respectively.

When we look at the changes in total population and the number of churches by region, the two seem to be in a reverse relationship. While the Tohoku region saw the largest decrease in total population, the number of churches increased by four. Only the Kanto region experienced an increase in total population, but the number of churches decreased by ten. The Kinki region, where the total population declined slightly, saw a decrease in the number of churches by eight.

Mission Forum in Nagoya

September 19, 2010

The JEA hosted Mission Forum Nagoya on September 6-7, 2010, under the theme Transforming Crises into Opportunities for Mission Breakthroughs in Japan. Nearly 100 attendees gathered to evaluate the discussions held during the Fifth Japan Congress on Evangelism (JCE) in 2009, and to develop them for building the framework of the Sixth JCE scheduled for 2016. Session meetings explored issues of diaspora, lay ministries, cooperation among churches and denominations, youth, religious liberty, and disaster planning. The discussions will be further developed during the next Mission Forum.

Japan and Korea United in Songs

October 31, 2010

As part of the God Bless You (GBY) Project, a series of concerts by Japanese Christian musicians delivering God's blessings through music around the world, the GBY Concerts in Korea took place in Seoul and Incheon, Korea on November 8-10, 2010. The picture of Korean and Japanese musicians jointly performing on stage presented a strong message of reconciliation. Makoto Iwabuchi, one of the featured musicians from Japan and the composer of the song

God Bless You, thanked his Korean friends with tears during the concert on November 10, for their forgiveness and friendship in spite of the way Japan treated them in the past. The concerts were received by Korean audiences quite positively, with some voicing hope that such concerts will be repeated.

Gospel Merit Award Given to Minato, Heck and Ito

November 1, 2010

The Japan Gospel Advancement Association awarded the Gospel Merit Award for 2010 to three persons. Akiko Minato served as President of Tokyo Woman's Christian University for eight years from 2002-2010, and has been one of the most prominent female leaders in education and the Church. Douglas Heck was a missionary in Japan for 36 years from 1972, planting churches in Kagawa and Tokyo, while serving in a number of important roles in the missionary world including Chair of the Board of TEAM. Akiei Ito was Chair of the Board of the Japan Assemblies of God (AOG) for 15 years. He was instrumental bringing about Japan AOG's membership in JEA, and was also involved in many interdenominational efforts. During the awards ceremony in Tokyo on November 1, 2010, each of the recipients was recognized for their long-standing contributions to the advancement of the gospel across churches.

Church School Convention 2010

November 7, 2010

The Church School Convention 2010 was held in Tokyo on October 26-29, 2010. Over 200 students and teachers from nine schools all over Japan enjoyed this annual opportunity to network and reconnect through a very full program of classes and chapel time in the morning, sports and free time in the afternoon, and worship in the evening. The students praised and danced to God with great energy during the worship, and the biblical messages challenged them to grow in faith, friendship, and study.

Opening of the Japan Christian Heresy Consultation Office

November 28, 2010

Troubled by the increasing influence of heresy originating in Korea, Jang Cheong-ik, a Korean missionary of the Global Mission Society and pastor of an independent church in Shinjuku, Tokyo, launched the Japan Christian Heresy Consultation Office in Shinjuku. The opening worship service was held on November 9, 2010, with Jin Yong-sik, a heresy expert in Korea and collaborator for the Office, speaking on the topic that Bible study is the way to bring back people from heresy. The Office is in partnership with the Christian Council of Koreans in Japan,

and is expected to help those affected by heresy including the New Heaven and New Earth group, an emerging Korean sect. The Office may be contacted by phone (080-3216-3475) or by e-mail (jako0153@yahoo.co.jp).

Crossover Fellowship of Young Adult Christians

December 12, 2010

Prompted by his own felt need for Japanese Christians in the marketplace to encourage each other, in April 2008 Taro Kaji, a businessman and member of a Presbyterian church in Chiba, initiated Spread Jesus, a crossover Christian fellowship for young adults in marketplace. A total of seven groups in the Kanto, Tokai, Kinki, and Shikoku regions currently meet typically at a restaurant once a month on a weekday after work for sharing, discussion, and prayer. The members, mostly in their 20's through 40's, also fellowship on an SNS website. Visit <http://spreadjc.exblog.jp/> or write to spreadjc7@gmail.com for more information.

The 16th Anniversary of the Great Hanshin Earthquake

January 30, 2011

Shukugawa Bible Church Riverside Chapel in Nishinomiya City held its annual early morning memorial worship service on January 17, 2011, the 16th anniversary of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, and observed a moment of silence at 5:46 a.m., the time when the devastating seismic wave shook the area. The 16th memorial service at Kobe Christ Glory Church in Kobe City on January 16, featured gospel singer Yuri Mori, who sang and spoke from her tragic experience of losing her brother in the disaster. Pastor Wataru Sugawara exhorted the attendees to overcome hardships and to become strong by walking with God who strengthens us.

TV Program to Support Youth

February 6, 2011

Japan Christian Global Network TV (JCGNTV), a Christian satellite TV station, airs *You Are Special*, a program to empower Christian youth. Each episode features a girl or boy sharing his or her dreams and vision. The program helps create a support system among their pastors, church staff, friends, and parents so the youth can pursue their dreams. As of January 24, 2011, 95 young people had been featured, with a number of them professing a desire to be directly involved in ministries. The 15-minute program is aired on Tuesdays at 8 p.m. with reruns on Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. (a dedicated receiver antenna is required), and may be viewed on the Internet at <http://japan.cgntv.net/>

Christians and The Great East Japan Earthquake

Prayer Meeting on the Evening of the Disaster

March 27, 2011

The Eleventh Annual National Prayer Dinner, hosted by Connecting Business and the Marketplace to Christ Japan, was held as planned on the evening of March 11, 2011, the very day of the disaster. In spite of all the confusion and paralyzed transportation system in the wake of the earthquake, 81 people out of the pre-registered 420 showed up at the banquet room of a hotel in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Some walked 2-3 hours to get to the hotel. The main speaker, Mitsuharu Akudo, President of Seigakuin University, began his speech with a prayer, seeking God to remind Christians that an unexpected trial would open the door for the work of God. Akudo then urged the audience in this difficult time to live out and spread the hope that Christians have. Among the six people who were scheduled to offer a prayer at the dinner, only one made it to the venue. Five others were asked to pray on the spot, and all others joined, prostrating themselves on the floor while asking God for the unity of national leaders, the strength of the churches in Japan, and help for people afflicted by the disaster.

Christian Firefighter on a Rescue Mission

April 3, 2011

Taku Fujimura, a 22-year-old firefighter with the Tokyo Fire Department, was dispatched on March 14, 2011, for a six-day search and rescue mission in Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture. When his team saw the daunting scale of the massive devastation caused by the tsunami and ensuing fires, they felt almost numb. Working in the snowy weather, Fujimura stuck to his belief that God was very much present even in the heaps of rubble. If he didn't know where to look for potential survivors, Fujimura told himself, God knew everything. In spite of their high hopes, the team was only able to retrieve four bodies. Fujimura kept working in the hope of relieving the pain of survivors by returning to them the bodies of their loved ones. He was strongly supported by Katayanagi Evangelical Free Church, his current church home. Originally from Morioka, a Tohoku city also severely damaged by the March 11 earthquake, Fujimura now dreams to go back home some day to be a firefighter there.

Please Pray for Japan

1. For churches and people affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster.
2. For the government and its leaders, so that Japan will remain a peace-loving nation.
3. For denominations, churches, and para-church organizations that are going through leadership transition.
4. For the Holy Spirit to pour out His blessings upon all the activities of churches in all regions.
5. For more young people to be inspired to be involved in full-time ministries.

JEA Schedule

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>PLACE</u>
May 16-17	6th Youth Missions Seminar	Tokyo
June 6-8	General Assembly of JEA	Kakegawa
July 18-19	Mission Forum in Aomori	Aomori
October 31- November 1	Missions Forum in Akita	Akita

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