

Japan Update

Fall 2011 Number 62

TOHOKU Perspective on Balance between Relief and Mission



TEAM missionary, Timothy Cole, hands out relief supplies to survivors in Onagawa, Miyagi.

Soon after the terrible disaster that hit the East Japan coastal area on March 11, 2011, many Christian relief organizations inside and outside of Japan began providing food, water, clothing, and other basic needs. Large numbers of Christians both young and old responded to the call for volunteers to help the suffering people in the devastated areas. Not a few local churches in the region barely escaped the giant tsunamis and became relief centers; providing lodging for volunteers and operating as distribution points for goods sent from churches and Christians throughout Japan. Most denominations decided to begin relief work, responding both to the needs of their own churches and those of others. We have never seen such a large-scale relief effort in the history of the Church in Japan. Perhaps for the first time ever, Christian churches in Japan have been experiencing meaningful contact with great numbers of local people who have scarcely had the opportunity to meet Christians. For example, we have heard of many people who have

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welcomed help from Christians providing either necessary supplies or manual labor to clean away mud that had entered their houses.

In the aftermath of this disaster, some Christian groups have thought this is a great opportunity for evangelism. They began to distribute Christian tracts and hold evangelistic meetings with music and sermons. We have also heard that some foreign missions are now planning to pioneer church planting in a way that has never been contemplated before. So in one sense, not a few churches and missions regard this catastrophe as a golden chance for evangelism in Japan, where the soil has been so hard to penetrate.

Yes, indeed, we are to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2). But how the Japanese people respond to a zealous sharing of

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the gospel may be quite contrary to the expectations of Christians. The Japanese may think Christians are merely using them for religious expansion.

In contrast to placing evangelism at the forefront during such a time of disaster, there are people who think relief work is but one aspect of holistic ministry. They do not deny the importance of evangelism, of course. Though they are keenly aware that those who are lost need Christ, they also think mutual trust is a vital key to reaching the hearts of people. Being truly concerned about the physical needs of the suffering, these people provide daily necessities for survival. They are also keen to listen as survivors share dreadful or sad experiences they have experienced during and after the disaster. These Christians regard their love and concern for sufferers as vital, and coming before direct evangelism. They expect that in due time, enough mutual trust will emerge for the opening up of hearts to listen to the good news of Christ shared by Christians who stand and walk close to them.



Playing with children and talking with elderly people at temporary housings—Kamaishi, Iwate.

Many pastors and Christians who are working very hard in the devastated areas and offering help with Christian love are seeing some people asking why Christians would offer help in such a gracious manner. On Easter Sunday, April 24, a small church in Ishinomaki City was packed with people, including not a few locals who had been helped by that church for their livelihood.

It is said that especially in the Tohoku area there are three types of people: (1) outsiders or strangers who are not so welcome to the community, (2) guests who are invited to the community but remain at a distance, and (3) friends who can talk to each other about any private matter.

Dr. Naoya Kawakami, who works as executive secretary of Tohoku Help, a network of churches in Sendai and surrounding cities responding to the needs of churches who have been hit by the 3.11 disaster, com-

ments that it is vital for any Christian to walk alongside suffering people with love and respect and to be accepted as a friend before sharing the good news of Jesus.

Rev. Yoshiya Kondo, pastor of Morioka Baptist Church (Conservative Baptist), and coordinator of 3.11 Iwate Church Network, writes with a similar sentiment about the relief work and evangelism in an article in *Pastors' Journal*, September 2011.

"Immediately after the 3.11 disaster, I often heard phrases like "the chance for mission", "the chance for Japan to be changed", or "the chance for revival" among Christian people. I have felt uncomfortable about these phrases. These words seem to me inappropriate, quite shallow and too Christian-centered in the midst of grief, sorrow and pain. . . . I have thought that the priority lies in serving people and sharing their pain when opportunities are given. Actually, the Lord has opened doors for evangelism in various places because of mutual trust built by serving people for several months with a heart of compassion, while being supported by the prayers of Christians . . . Most of the people in the community we have served may have not met Christians before in their lives. But as prayer-supported volunteers have continuously been sent by churches, looking affectionately after people with an attitude of service, many locals now immediately open their doors and gladly welcome them when they hear, "I have come from a Christian church". Children will cry out "Christ has come!" to spread the news of their visit. When one volunteer asked a local if he needed something, he answered, "I don't need anything, but please visit us and let's talk. When a young Christian volunteer was invited for dinner with a family, the conversation started with them asking why Christians would serve them with such a servant attitude. They continued during dinner time asking about the faith upon which this volunteer's life was based and about the salvation Jesus Christ offered. This was really a chance for a testimony of the Christian gospel."

Yes, these times provide a rare opportunity for churches in Japan reach out in mission—especially in coastal cities and towns along the Sanriku coast that were attacked by the giant tsunamis on March 11th, and where less than 10 churches have been established. Local churches are already moving toward cooperative mission in these coastal towns. Foreign missions are starting to place personnel in these areas. Franklin Graham and his team are now planning to have a big rally on March 11th, 2012 in Sendai. We need passion and strategy for mission—but above all we need patience, love, a listening heart, and the compassion of Christ.

SUMMARY OF THE JEA RESPONSE TO THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE DISASTER - THE SECOND PHASE -

On September 11, 2011, we commemorated the six month anniversary of Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster. Since this day fell on Sunday, many churches had special services and prayed for God's mercy on those who are suffering from the disaster and for His great love to touch their hearts.

According to Metropolitan Police Department, the number of deaths had risen to 15,782 as of September 11, 2011, with more than 4,000 still listed as missing. Many of those who had lost their houses have now moved from evacuation centers into temporary housings.

The six month anniversary marks a change of phase in the relief work. In this second phase, many church groups and organizations are starting to think about long term planning in relation to recovery and rebuilding. Some are starting to plant new churches in the disaster areas. Several regional church networks have been established to work together in relief work and church planting. The Holy Spirit is certainly working among the people and the churches in the disaster areas.

The JEA Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster Recovery Task Force has also shifted the focus of relief efforts from short term relief to long term support for recovery and rebuilding .

(1) From late May to early August, JEA board members and ambassadors visited 115 affected churches to express solidarity with them and to distribute consolatory payments both to churches (80,000 yen) and pastoral families (50,000 yen).

(2) As a second phase in the relief efforts, JEA is subsidizing part of the monthly church budget for those churches that are suffering from a significant drop in their revenue due to the evacuation of church members and so on. This will help churches survive during the process of recovery.

(3) The third phase of relief effort will be to provide financial support for the repair and reconstruction of church buildings.

(4) To assist in coordination, the JEA board of directors released a statement on October 3, 2011 affirming support and active engagement in the coordination efforts of regional networks and relief

organizaions in order to enhance unity in the body of Christ. In this regard, JEA is closely cooperating with JEMA (the Japan Evangelical Missionary Association) and DRCnet (the Disaster Relief Christian Network), which was formed in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster).



With volunteers from Hokkaido in Miyako, Iwate.

(5) JEA is also continuing its good partnership with CRASH Japan—especially in the area of liaison with Japanese churches—so that global relief work resources can be connected to the appropriate churches and organizations.

(6) WEA Ambassador Dr. Brian Stiller and his wife Lily visited Japan from October 9 to 17 to express the solidarity of the global evangelical body of Christ with Japan and also to be able to share Japan's current situation with the world.

We are committed to standing alongside the churches in disaster-stricken areas and to continue to support both their physical and spiritual rebuilding. At the same time, we ask you to pray that the Holy Spirit will give us wisdom and power to share the gospel of true hope with those who are suffering.

Please send donations to the JEA Disaster Recovery Task Force 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

PRESENT-DAY JAPANESE VIEWS ON LIFE

A "SENSE OF ONENESS" AND "LACK OF OTHERNESS" BETWEEN JAPANESE MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

by Pro-Life Japan General Secretary Kiyoshi Mizutani

An American missionary once told me a story:

"A mother and her child were walking along a mountain path and ran into a ferocious bear. The Japanese mother held her child in her arms to protect him, while the American mother stood in front of the bear with outstretched arms, telling the child to run away."



There is no difference between these mothers in their desire to protect the life of their precious child. But the difference between the two is obvious.

In the former, the mother and the child are united as one, sharing the same destiny. In the latter, the mother tries to save her child by separating him from herself.

I see in this story the "sense of oneness between mother and child" that is deeply rooted in present-day Japanese culture. Looking at it from another angle, you might say it is a "lack of otherness." It demonstrates that many Japanese parents today fail to see their children as independent personalities.

I often see how true this is in my pro-life ministry. When for some reason a woman is unable to raise the life growing within her, I suggest giving birth and offering the baby for adoption. The familiar reaction I get is, "If I have to give up my baby

for adoption, I'd rather have an abortion." I get the deep sense that it is a greater loss and agony for a mother to lose her baby through adoption than to lose the child through abortion.

My guess is that this tendency was not present in the old days. In today's post-religion era, the concept of children as a gift from heaven has faded away. Because of the increase in single family households, cooperation among relatives and in the community in raising children is gone. Furthermore, the absence of fathers in homes because of long working hours has weakened ties between fathers and their children. These and other reasons have made mothers and children feel isolated from society and caused their relationship to become too close in an unhealthy way.



This "oneness between mother and child" and "lack of otherness" has caused widespread family problems being passed from generation to generation.

Genesis 2:24 reads, "For this reason a man will leave his mother and father and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." This demonstrates the essence of marriage and family. It also shows the succession of life "from independence, to marriage, to building a family."

Naturally, this oneness between mother and child, and lack of otherness, causes mothers to lose sight of the goal of childrearing—the child becoming independent. Becoming independent is sup-



posed to be a prerequisite for marriage. Marriage without independence brings about the serious problem of “parents who are still children themselves raising children.” It is difficult for children raised by adult-children to grow up to be independent adults.

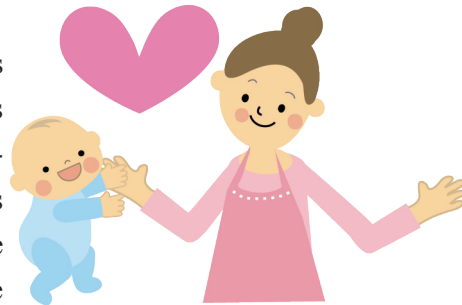
Today, Japan is in a vicious cycle and families with serious problems seem to be on the increase. At first glance there seems to be no relationship between the issue of abortion and Japanese family problems. However I feel they are deeply related through this common view of “oneness between mother and child” and “lack of otherness.”

It has been observed for quite some time that Japanese Christianity is too theoretical, with the message of the gospel not being practiced in daily life. Home life seems to be closed to the light of the gospel more than anywhere else. It is not unusual for Christians to have the same values as non-Christians in building their homes. Actually, such

may be the case in the majority of Christian homes.

In spite of this sad situation, I still raise my hopes high in the Lord. Whether the not-yet-born or the already-born, every life is an independent soul inscribed with the image of God, and a precious life atoned for by God’s own life. I sincerely desire that Christians may stand for the biblical view on life, that they pay due respect to children both born and unborn, and that parents have a right sense of “otherness.”

Overcoming the sense of oneness between mother and child and the lack of otherness (the product of present-day Japanese society) through a proper understanding and application of the gospel will result in opposition to abortion and the forming of healthy homes. Furthermore, I keep hoping that the forming of the healthy homes by Christians will be a testimony with great impact in this Japanese society that is suffering from family problems.



Profile of the Japanese Family

The birthrate (total fertility rate) of Japan keeps dropping, and in 2008 it was 1.37. Japan is one of the foremost nations to face the challenge of a below-replacement-level birthrate. However, one little known fact is that the abortion rate in Japan is among the highest of developed nations.

According to a 1999 survey conducted by NHK (Japan’s public broadcasting network), the rate of abortions among the women who experience pregnancy is 43%. Although Japanese law has a general prohibition of abortion, there is an exception clause that allows abortion in case of life-threatening physical and financial difficulties. In many cases, this exception clause is used to justify abortions almost as a means of birth control.

Recent statistics show that there is an increase in abortion among women under the age of 20. In 1985, the number of abortions among those in their 30s made up about half of the total number of abortions. But in 2007, that number dropped to 41%. As for those under the age of 20, the number increased from 5.1% in 1985 to 9.3% in 2007. This tendency seems to suggest the collapse of traditional family values in Japanese society, which in turn has created a moral vacuum that is eroding young people’s hearts. In a culture where suppressing true feelings is a virtue, many women suffer from isolation—not being able to speak with anyone about their unwanted pregnancy. Please pray for this urgent task of providing counseling to these women and saving the lives of those not yet born.

NEWS and NOTES

Protest Against Religious Liberty Restraint

On May 25, 2011, the majority party in the Osaka Prefectural Assembly, led by Governor Toru Hashimoto, submitted a proposal for the first local ordinance in Japan to oblige, among other things, teachers in public schools in the prefecture to stand up when the “Kimigayo” national anthem is sung at school ceremonies.

In response, the Japan Holiness Church (JHC) sent a petition to Governor Hashimoto on May 30, to reconsider the proposal. In the petition, the JHC expressed grave concerns on the following three grounds. First, the proposal contradicts the non-compulsory principle of the Act on the National Flag and Anthem. Second, there is no law that restricts the public school employees’ freedom of thought, conscience or religion. Third, the proposal is in violation of the provision of the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion of the Constitution of Japan.

Yasuhiro Hakamada of the Reformed Church in Japan wrote an opinion piece for the June 12, 2011 issue of the Christian Shimbun, to voice his opposition to the proposal for three reasons. First of all, it is clear by looking at Japanese history that the national anthem and flag issue is an issue of basic human rights, not an issue of disciplining public school teachers. The second reason Hakamada notes is that obliging a teacher to act against their conscience runs a risk of inflicting damage upon them, which will in turn detract from the quality of school education. Finally, he points out that an imposition of state legislated actions in relation to the national anthem and flag oppresses the consciences of minority peoples, including Christians. Hakamada concludes by urging Christians to stand with people whose conscience is being threatened by the government.

The ordinance proposal was passed on June 3, and was enacted on June 13, to be put into effect immediately.

Mission Cooperation in a Time of Crisis ***The 26th JEA General Assembly***

The Twenty-sixth JEA General Assembly was held in Kakegawa City, Shizuoka Prefecture, from June 6 through June 8. The 2011 resolution was adopted,

which mainly focused on relief and recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster.

The conference program included testimonies by five pastors from the disaster region: Akira Sato of Fukushima First Bible Baptist Church, Tokio Tanaka of Miyagi Bible Church, Takashi Yoshida of Sendai Reformed Church, Yoshiya Kondo of Morioka Bible Baptist Church, and Eiji Sumiyoshi of Nakoso Christ Evangelical Church. They reported on some of their disaster experiences and on how church cooperation has worked to provide relief and support in each area. They also pointed out some current issues in relief operations.

Looking back on the theme of JCE5 (the Fifth Japan Congress on Evangelism) in 2009, “Mission Cooperation in a Time of Crisis . . . Wider and Deeper”, participants shared the awareness of “new time of crisis” and discussed how we could work together in relief operations in order to bear fruit in mission cooperation during the next five to ten years.

In order to prepare for JCE6 in 2016, Mission Forum in Aomori (July) and Akita (October) are scheduled for the fiscal year 2011. Also, the first Japan Congress on Youth Evangelism has been planned for September 2012 by the JEA Youth Commission.

The JEA Twenty-sixth General Assembly elected Nohsei Ando (Pastor of Setagaya Chuo Church, Nihon Domei Kirisuto Kyodan) as the new chair. According to the new by-laws amended last year, all 12 members of the board will serve for a three-year term and may serve for two consecutive terms.

The Japan Lausanne Committee reported on the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization held in October 2010 in Capetown, South Africa.

Eliminating Odors in the Disaster Area

One of the aftermaths of the March 11, 2011 tsunami is the strong, unpleasant odor of the sludge that has been clinging to houses and buildings in the affected areas. Hidenori Ashikaga, President of Riso Sangyo Limited Company and a member of Japan Baptist Kesennuma Church of the Japan Baptist Union, has been offering Effective Microorganisms (EM), a company product, for use by Christian groups in eliminating odors. As a resident of Kesenn-

numa City, Miyagi Prefecture, Ashikaga himself lost most of his properties. When his wife reminded him that he had EM, Ashikaga was given a desire to assist the relief effort with EM.

EM is an activated liquid of several microorganisms. When sprayed, the microorganisms in the EM start breaking down the sources of unpleasant odors, such as decomposing fish, petroleum, and sludge. Compared to the traditional method of odor elimination, EM is safer, and kills only the harmful bacteria. Thus, according to Ashikaga, EM is an effective and inexpensive solution.

As of mid August, EM has been sprayed in some 350 households by the volunteers of the Southern Miyagi Relief and Assistance in partnership with the Wesleyan Holiness Church and CRASH Japan. As more Christian groups show interest in EM spraying, spraying EM in rice fields and other crops that have been damaged by seawater is now being considered. More volunteer work will be done through September 2011.

Pastoral Families Need Care, Too

Pastors in the disaster stricken areas of northern Japan hardly leave their people. But what is necessary for the care of pastors?

CHC (Churches Helping Churches), founded after the Haiti earthquake in 2010, in cooperation with ALPHA Japan, Asian Access, CRASH Japan, JCGI, Kakudai Institute for Missions, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and Three Stream Ministries arranged retreats for pastors and their families on June 13 and 14 in Miyagi Prefecture and June 16 and 17 in Iwate Prefecture.

During the retreats, pastors shared their experiences in small groups with other pastors,

Masayoshi Nakano, pastor of Izumi Conservative Baptist Church, Miyagi, said, "I have been working hard to support people and organize many things, I was nervous and tired. I came to get relaxed."

Yukimasa Otomo, assistant pastor of Shiogama Conservative Baptist Church), shared. "I thank God that I was able to take an onsen (hot spring) bath, have a nice meal, and share time with various people. I was encouraged to continue in my relief

work."

Chiori Kondo, pastor's wife at Morioka Conservative Baptist Church) joined with her family. "For four months, we had no family time. It was nice to talk with my husband."

Fumiaki Otsuka, pastor of Morioka Minami Church) and founder of 3.11 Iwate Church Network, said, "Our relief operations will be continue to be intense. This retreat encouraged me a lot."

Gifts sets composed of books, hand-cream, sweets, hand-made jam, tea and mental health resources were given to each participant.

An American Lady Commemorated in Hiroshima

In time for the memorial day of the atomic bombing on August 6, 2011, a new monument was unveiled on June 12, 2011 in the southeastern part of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, commemorating Barbara Reynolds (1915-90), the founder of World Friendship Center (WFC) in Hiroshima City.

As an American Quaker, Barbara came to Hiroshima for the first time in 1951 with her husband and three children. Her husband was commissioned to study the radioactive damage on the people. Later, Barbara returned to Hiroshima, founding WFC in 1965 to promote friendship and peace. The city of Hiroshima recognized her efforts by awarding her honorary citizenship in 1975.

At the unveiling ceremony, Barbara's daughter Jessica spoke of how her mother experienced a spiritual awakening in 1964. At that time, 49-year-old Barbara was divorced and heartbroken. Her friend who was a Buddhist monk, invited her to spend some time in meditation, fasting, and prayer at a Buddhist temple in Rokkosan in Hyogo Prefecture. At the end of one week there, Barbara clearly heard the voice of God, which was loving, fatherly, and forgiving. Filled with joy and peace, Barbara committed herself to weeping with and serving atomic bomb survivors. Jessica concluded her speech with her own resolution to pass the memories of *hibakusha* (A-bomb survivors) and the message of peace to next generations. The full text of Jessica's speech is available at <http://wfcnews.blogspot.com/>

Please Pray for Japan

1. That the Holy Spirit would work through churches in Tohoku area to minister to the people who are suffering from the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster.
2. That God would intervene in the healing of family relationships among Japanese people and that broken family relationships would be touched by Christ's love.
3. That the younger generation of leaders among Japanese churches would be encouraged and equipped to take bold steps to advance the Kingdom of God in this nation.
4. That Japanese churches would stand alongside other Asian churches for a greater impact of Christ's love in Asia.

JEA Schedule

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>PLACE</u>
October 31- November 1	Mission Forum in Akita	Akita
November 6-11	WEA MC Consultation	Germany
November 11	23rd Religious Liberty Seminar	Tokyo
January, 2012	CCK General Assembly	Korea
June 4-6, 2012	JEA General Assembly	Kakegawa

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Chairman : Nohsei Ando
General Secretary : Kenichi Shinagawa

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