



*Workers of JEA related relief organizations gathered together to help Kumamoto Harvest Church*

## Being called “Kirisuto-san”: Re-visiting Christian identity in post-disaster Japan

Summary of the lecture presented at  
the 4th Great East Japan Earthquake International Theological Symposium

### Introduction

In this symposium we will grapple with the concept of Christian identity. Since March 2011, a significant number of Christian workers have built trust relationships with sufferers in the Tohoku disaster area. Their work continues to be appreciated—so much so that disaster victims often call Christian workers “Kirisuto-san” or “Mr./Ms. Christ,” a title rarely used for Japanese Christians.

Let me share a story about a pastor who has repeatedly gone to the disaster area. He visits suffering people one by one, asks them about their needs, and later brings them what they ask for. One day, during a customary visit with an elderly lady, she asked him, “What do you have today?” “Nothing, Ma’am” he answered, “but I’ll try to bring what you need next time.” “I don’t need anything but your visit,” she replied. “It gives me joy. You people are ‘Christ-bearers,’ aren’t you?” As she spoke, he realized he had nothing to give but Christ, just like Peter at the gate called “Beautiful” (Acts 3:2, 6). I believe we can gain some important insights from this

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episode, about what “being a Christian” means, and what we as Christians are supposed to do in “bringing the gospel.”

### “Christian” in historical overview

The New Testament tells us that the Gentiles began to call Jesus’ disciples “Christians” as a term of contempt and insult. The disciples, however, dared to take the title positively as an honorable name (I Pet 4:16). Ignatius’ Letter to the Romans (3:2) shows that the title “Christian” came to be recognized by believers and their leaders as an indicator of their identity, that is, ones “belonging to Christ,” “bearing his name,” or even “living truly in accordance with his name.”

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The medieval legend of Christophoros, or Christopher, reminds us that a Christian should be one who “bears Christ,” remembering that he bore the sufferings of people in the world. During the Reformation, Calvin insisted that the title “Christian” is not just a name or a sign, but a way of life to demonstrate the image of Christ.



How can we, bearing the name of Christ, truly be his witnesses and become “Kirisuto-sans,” especially in the context of the mission field?

## “Christian” in terms of mission

*The Lausanne Covenant* (1974) has significantly influenced the concept of mission and church among evangelicals today. It argues that both evangelism and socio-political involvement are “necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ.” Throughout the history of Christianity, Christian churches and believers have responded almost instinctively to the needs of suffering and oppressed people.

The Bible gives us a theological foundation for the work of love. God often identifies himself with people who are weak and suffering. In many so-called humane laws, we repeatedly find the phrase “for you were...” in passages such as “Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt” (Ex 22:20). This reminds us that works of mercy must be done with humbleness.

Jesus not only identified himself with “a small child” (Mk 9:37) and “the least one” (Mt 25:40) who is hungry, thirsty, and sick, but also with the “miserably stricken man” in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25ff), because he told the story from man’s perspective. The life of Jesus Christ was the gospel, the gospel of being.

Hence, it seems quite clear what the “necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man... and our obedience to Jesus Christ” are supposed to be. Quoting again from *The Lausanne Covenant*, “We need to break out of our ecclesiastical ghettos and permeate non-Christian society. In the Church’s mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary... [A] church which preaches the cross must itself be marked by the cross. It becomes a stumbling block to evangelism when it betrays the gospel or lacks a living faith in God, a genuine love for people, or a scrupulous honesty in all things including promotion and finance.”

The March 11, 2011 disaster, therefore, has taught us not just how to do relief work, but the very essence of the Christian mission. Published the year before the 2011 disaster, *The Cape Town Commitment* challenges Christians to be “the face of Jesus” (Pt.II:A:1) and to “embody the transforming grace of God” (Pt.II:C:3) for the world.

Criticisms that evangelical churches now face may be the backdrop for these challenges. Philip Yancey has pointed out in his recent book, *Vanishing Grace: Whatever Happened to the Good News?*, that evangelicals bring a sense of guilt rather than Good News. They view people as targets for evangelism rather than human beings. They tend to contact people with a sense of superiority and arrogance. They prefer talking to sincere listening. Yancey claims these attitudes have developed out of a distorted understanding of the gospel of Jesus. He urges Christians to go back to the original meaning of the gospel.

When we sincerely come face to face with suffering people, empathize with their pain, and listen to what they have to say, we often are struck speechless by the heaviness and seriousness of their stories. We deplore the fact that we cannot do much beyond praying. We cry with them, and try to walk alongside them. In doing so, I believe the love of God and his profound grace shows through us.



## Conclusion

As Christians, we are called to dedicate ourselves to the kind of work Jesus did. Not only in the disaster area, but wherever we are, we are called to be with those who suffer and to share their burdens so that happiness and joy will be restored to them. In doing so, I believe we can lead a relevant lifestyle in today’s world.





## The Great East Japan Earthquake and church transformation

*Rev. Yukimasa Otomo*

*Associate/Youth Pastor, Shiogama Bible Baptist Church*

Five years have passed since that tragic day. Our church is centrally located in the disaster-stricken area, so from right after the Great East Japan Earthquake up until now, we have hosted many volunteers from both inside and outside of Japan and worked together with them to support victims of this disaster. Churches are called Christ's body, and during these past five years, we have been Christ's

hands and feet to local people in the stricken areas. As we have served in this way, people have seen the love of Christ. This work has not been done just by our congregation, but by



a wide segment of Christ's body, in other words, the holy Christian church. A vast number of financial donations, volunteers, and missionaries, and the prayers of many, many churches have made this work possible. I would like to express my deepest appreciation for their support and prayers.

As a result of this earthquake, Japanese churches have been both shaken and transformed. Since most evangelical churches in Japan were established as a result of the love and effort of American missionaries after World War II, Japanese churches have been greatly influenced by them. Christian fundamentalism, born after conflict with liberal theology, was enormously influential on evangelical churches in Japan. The theology of separation, one of three principles of Christian fundamentalism, in its extreme form means not to have any positive relationships with ordinary society or with churches holding different theological positions. Evangelical churches in Japan seem to have inherited this attitude spontaneously. That is why, for the more than 60 years before the Great East Japan Earthquake, walls between denominations were so high that there was little opportunity for mission networks to be established among evangelical churches. Furthermore, the idea of serving local communities through volunteer activities to meet social needs was of no interest to conservative evangelicals.

However, as a result of this earthquake, many churches that previously had been blocked by denominational walls began to help each other. In Miyagi prefecture, one of the devastated districts, a nondenominational mission network was founded after the earthquake. Ever since then, workers from various denominations have gathered once a month at a regular location. The Bible tells us that we

need to be encouraged through the work of apostles (Acts. 11:23, 15:31-32, 16:40, 20:2) to continue mission outreach, so this network is used as a place of encouragement to overcome continuing challenges in the devastated areas.

Through the Great East Japan Earthquake, churches have learned the importance of serving local people. Before the earthquake we were interested only in the spiritual needs of people and concentrated only on mission activities. However, the earthquake forced each church to learn to serve the local people. As a result, churches in Tohoku learned that works (James 2:18) are great tools of testimony for Jesus Christ. Shiogama Bible Baptist Church, which I belong to, is not an exception. After learning this lesson, our church founded a food bank, which will help local people experiencing difficulties long term, even after support for earthquake victims is no longer available.

This transformation of churches has transformed relationships between churches and local communities. Before the earthquake, churches were out of touch with our local communities, so we did not have any influence. However, once our church members "went therefore" (Matthew 28:19) to serve the community after the earthquake, the community accepted and trusted us.

Let me share from my personal experience. After the earthquake, we helped clean a local Buddhist kindergarten, which had been damaged by the tsunami. As we continued to work for them, the kindergarten principal liked me—a preacher!—and hired me as an English teacher. I also became the director of the PTA of a neighboring elementary school as a result of a recommendation that stemmed from our relief work. Now I am trusted in the community in a way that had not existed before the earthquake, and it helps a great deal in my mission work.

Ten people have been baptized in our church since the earthquake. They were deprived of so many things by the tsunami. Now they have eternal hope in Jesus Christ, and are full of joy. Please pray that people in Tohoku will follow their example and believe in Jesus Christ. Also pray that more people will come to work to Tohoku.



## Kumamoto Earthquake update

*Dr. John Houlette, Three Stream Ministries*

On April 14 and 16, a series of powerful earthquakes reaching a magnitude of 7.0 shook Kumamoto and Oita Prefectures in Kyushu, with the hardest hit areas being Mashiki and Minami Aso. There was much devastation



and loss of lives with 68 confirmed deaths as of May 14 according to the Mainichi Newspaper. Ninety percent of the 10,312 homes in Mashiki were damaged notes the July 28 morning

edition of the Asahi Newspaper. The Kyushu Christian Disaster Relief Center (Kyukisai) reported that there were 3,570 people living in 68 temporary shelters. In response to this critical housing need, 88 temporary housing units had been built and survivors were able to move in on June 14th. Over 3,000 units were to be completed by the fall, stated the June 10 edition of the Mainichi Newspaper.

Kyukisai, launched soon after the disaster, is committed to assisting in disaster relief and survivor care in four ways: 1. Meeting physical needs with relief goods. 2. Providing human support by connecting volunteers to manpower needs. 3. Giving financial support, and 4. Imparting emotional and spiritual care. Paul Yokota is the representative for the organization, with Yoji Nakamura directing the Kumamoto aspect of the work. These pastors are striving to meet the tremendous recovery needs by partnering with many churches and organizations. Kyukisai has base camps at Kiyama Christ Church, Harvest Church and Ueki Christ Church. They benefited from the wisdom and experience of the Miyagi Mission Network and the 3.11 Iwate Church Network, allowing them to organize quickly. They have recently launched a new web site: <http://kyusyu-christdrc.wix.com/kumamoto> Volunteer opportunities can be explored there.

The Disaster Response Chaplaincy Committee (DRCC) partners with Kyukisai. The DRCC is under the umbrella of the Disaster Response Christian Network (DRCnet) and JEA. DRCC is staffed by representatives of CRASH Japan, the Salvation Army, Seikei Seminary, DRCnet and Three Stream Ministries/Asian Access. DRCC has



facilitated an emotional care/active listening seminar in July and will lead seminars on self-care, on August 16-18 at the second clergy retreat, in Amakusa. The first clergy retreat was led by CRASH Japan in June. Chaplaincy training will be launched at various locations throughout Kyushu starting in August to equip church members in disaster-related emotional and spiritual caregiving.

Kumamoto church leaders are resilient, but very tired. Some are facing burnout. One pastor does not have permanent housing, so shuttles between living in a tent in a shelter and living with volunteers in her church. In June, heavy rains flooded the church parking lot as the riverbank across the street from their facility partially sunk after the earthquake.

Another minister and his wife have a burden to minister to children in the epicenter even though their church and parsonage were destroyed. While they are concerned about their own care, their chief concern was finding a regular meeting place so that they could reach out to the traumatized children.



There are many challenges to disaster relief ministry in Kumamoto. As mentioned above, rainstorms and typhoons could bring a second wave of traumatic stress. Coordinating many international multicultural volunteer teams takes energy and wisdom to ensure that they are adequately oriented, trained, and debriefed. Kyukisai staff work in highly relational, labor-intensive environments with little time off.

Please pray for the ongoing relief work in Kumamoto:

1. For pastors Yokota and Nakamura, as they lead the work of Kyukisai.
2. For Kyukisai staff, volunteers and local pastors to develop and practice good personal emotional and spiritual care habits.
3. For pastors as they balance church ministry with relief work. For energy to preach and care for their flocks.
4. For churches to practice the bond of love in Christ.
5. For the region to be protected from heavy rains during the typhoon season.



## Research report on disaster and religious faith

*December 20/27, 2015 issue of Christian Shimibun, translated by Atsuko Tateishi*

In November 2015, an interim report outlined the results of a research project on religious faith in Tohoku following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. The materials were presented during the November 24–26 National Conference of Asian Access Japan (formerly JCGI Network) in Miyagi Prefecture.



Pastor Yukikazu Otomo of Miyagi Mission Network (MMN) began by sharing about the initiation of the research project. Otomo said that during the first couple of years following the earthquake, MMN realized there was an absence of research material about mission work during the days following

disasters. At a general meeting of the Disaster Relief Christian Network in Tokyo in September 2013, MMN expressed its desire to create a research institute relating to post-disaster mission. This prompted the launch in 2014 of the Research Institute of Mission in Disaster Areas (RIMDA), co-founded by MMN, Wheaton College (USA), the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA), and Asian Access Japan (A2J). It was decided that RIMDA would embark on a research project relating to mission work in the disaster area in collaboration with the Tokyo Christian University (TCU).

In January 2015, the project, entitled “Research on the Earthquake and Religious Faith” began as a collaborative research venture between MMN, JEA, A2J, and Japan Missions Research (JMR), a division of TCU’s Faith and Culture Center. A survey was conducted from June through September in 2015, which provided data for the November 2015 interim report. In the report, Mr. Hatsuo Shibata, a research fellow with JMR, noted four characteristics of post-disaster mission work undertaken among MMN members.

Shibata first observed that 22 churches had existed in the area before the earthquake, but that following the disaster, these were joined by a significant number of new churches and mission bases. So far, 19 new churches and 19 new mission bases have been established by Japanese denominations and overseas mission organizations.

Second, he noted that the types of ministry outreaches in use have diversified since the earthquake. New ministry outreaches include house churches and other gatherings, cafe evangelism, community support and development, and social enterprises.



Third, a large number of people have shown an interest in Christianity, or have become believers. Thirty churches and ministries responded to the survey, and among those responses, 90 people have been baptized. Including all who have confessed faith in Jesus or have shown an interest in pursuing Christian faith, over 500 new people have come to be associated with a Christian church or ministry.

Fourth, MMN has held monthly meetings as an interdenominational network since October 2011, significantly contributing to information sharing, mutual encouragement, and collaboration.

Shibata reported on two questions included in the survey. One question asked, “Do you think the earthquake has changed how local people in Miyagi Prefecture perceive Christianity?” Most respondents said either “changed significantly” or “changed to some extent.” Fuller answers included:



- Christianity and the Christian church have become a familiar presence in the community through relief work.
- A trust relationship has been built between the community and the church.
- A number of people have opened their heart to the Scriptures and enjoy attending church meetings and events.
- Local people are thankful for Christian volunteers and have taken to calling them “Kirisuto-san” (Mr./Ms. Christ).
- A number of local people have expressed that there has been a change in their way of life and/or thinking by seeing how Christians around them live.

Another question asked: “How has the earthquake led you to change, clarify, and/or deepen your views?” A large number of ministers and laypeople answered that their view of church and mission had changed. Some indicated that area Christians have come to appreciate the cooperative missional effort among the local churches.

Shibata said the research results suggest a significant shift among local churches in Miyagi Prefecture—from ministering more or less exclusively as evangelistic bodies to ministering as organizations that also meet tangible needs of the community. He noted three key factors that the results seem to suggest have allowed for such a shift to take place: 1) holistic church and mission, 2) a good relationship with the community, and 3) an effective local mission network.

### Celebration of Love with Franklin Graham draws 38,000 over three days

A partnership of Greater Tokyo area churches, various Christian organizations, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association held the Celebration of Love with Franklin Graham on November 20–22 at the Nippon Budokan in Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo. It attracted 38,880 participants to four programs held over three days and 1,480 people made faith decisions. The program on the last day was broadcast online, and 51,220 people from 44 countries around the world watched, and 3,254 people made faith decisions. English, Chinese, and Korean speakers were seen at the Budokan, as well as substantial number of Filipinos and Brazilians, symbolizing the global nature of missions. More than 450 churches participated. Various Japanese and international musicians performed a wide range of music, from hymns and gospel, to contemporary Christian music. Franklin Graham clearly shared the core message of the Bible.

This was the largest-scale evangelistic event in the Greater Tokyo area since the Billy Graham Festival in 1994 at the Tokyo Dome. Twenty years have passed since then, and churches in Japan have been confronted with many challenges, such as passing on the legacy of faith to the next generation, how to deal with an aging society, and how to partner in missions. Those who saw this as a new opportunity for partnership in missions came together, formed the Mission 2015 committee, and prepared for this evangelistic event.

The program on the first day was kicked off by Japanese artists Night de Light, a four-member band from Hokkaido, Saluki=, a rock duo based in Tokyo, and New Wings, a gospel choir from Fukuoka. After these groups had warmed up the crowd, Christian music's internationally known Hillsong from Australia took the stage, and the entire audience at the Budokan rose to their feet. Michael W. Smith, who has been a leading figure in contemporary Christian music, led the audience in medley of worship songs. Smith had come to Japan even though his father was in critical condition, and he returned to the States immediately after finishing his part on the stage the first day. From the second day onwards, Stu G, a member of the Michael W. Smith Band and former member of the Christian band Delirious?, led the worship in place of Smith.

On the second day, the morning program started off with a marimba performance by Ms. Tomoko and Reiko Shiohama. Choir members filled the entire back of the stage and gave a resounding performance of the Hallelujah Cho-



*Many responded to the call*

rus. Mr. Trey Hillman, who used to be manager of the Nippon Ham Fighters came to support the event and shared an encouraging message. When well-known Swedish gospel singer Lena Maria sang in Japanese, the audience erupted into applause. During the evening program, Gospel Hula and hip-hop dancers filled the stage and gave powerful performances.

On the final day, a 1,300-member gospel music choir sang powerfully in English, Korean and Japanese.

Dennis Agajanian and the Tommy Coomes Band performed in every program, and their performances included Japanese popular songs and worship songs sung in Japanese.

Franklin Graham's messages emphasized the problem of sin that separates man from God and the love of a forgiving God. He referred to Bible passages on the salvation of the prodigal son, Zacchaeus the tax collector, and Bartholomew the blind beggar.

On the last day, Franklin Graham shared that his wife's aunt had recently passed away and that Michael W. Smith's father also had passed away during the Celebration. He then asked the audience, "If your life were to be taken away tonight, would your soul be secure in God's presence?" He followed up by speaking about eternal life and the value of the soul. He urged people to repent from their sins and believe, saying: "Everyone has sinned and must be judged by God. The only way to salvation from your sins is through Jesus Christ."

During the benediction, Celebration of Love chairperson Rev. Nobumichi Murakami prayed: "This is not the end, but the beginning. It is the beginning of a new life for those who made faith decisions. It is also the beginning of new future missions for those churches who participated. Lord, please have mercy on the nation of Japan."

Looking back on the Celebration of Love, general manager Rev. Toshinori Ishida said, "It turned out to be a fine event, attracting almost 40,000 people. Of those, some 1,400 made faith decisions. We regret that we could not keep records of some people, as there were not enough counselors for those who came to the front of the stage and made faith decisions. Nonetheless, what's important is for churches to follow up with those who made faith decisions, and for those who made decisions to remain and abide in the church."

He also thanked the volunteers who served in the Celebration, saying, "People of all ages, from the young to those in their 80s, came to serve as volunteers. Even the senior volunteers helped pack up and carry items. Looking to the future, Ishida mentioned,



*Dr. Franklin Graham calling people*



“Unfortunately, Michael W. Smith had to urgently return home, but he offered to come back to Japan for more events. We are hoping to plan some follow-up events.”

### Education in the significance of life and sexuality

Part one of a two-part seminar series entitled *The Significance of Life and Sexuality: Educating Children in Your Region, School and Church* was held Jan 10–11 at Shiawase-no-mura (Village of Happiness), Kobe. A regional pre-gathering leading up to the upcoming Sixth Japan Congress on Evangelism (Sept 27–30), this seminar series is designed to give Christians a biblical foundation in the significance of life and sexuality and enable them to discuss this topic in their region, school, and church as well as their home.

The news media publicizes many problems: the rising teen suicide rate, the increase in sexual intercourse among younger people, the spread of STDs among youth, the record number of HIV patients in their 20's, etc. So how should Christians react to these serious issues?

Three speakers offered their perspectives: Ikuko Nagahara, midwife at Manna Maternity Center, warned: “Too few adults can comfortably discuss the true significance of life and sexuality.... Christians should not close their eyes to this problem; they need to take a stand.” Kiyoshi Mizutani, former representative of Pro-Life Japan and currently an associate pastor at Kasugai Bible Church, mentioned: “Sunday school teaching tends to give the impression that sex is sinful.



From left: Rev. Oshima, Ms. Nagahara, Rev. Fujita, Rev. Mizutani

Instead, we should teach that fundamentally, sex is a blessing from God.” Keiko Fujita, representative of Japan Creative Ministry and also an associate evangelist at Tsukuba Fukuin Church, shared about the human need for love in order to live and grow. The two-day program was filled with various reports, demonstrations, and time for discussion.

### 6th East Asia Youth Christian Camp held in China for the first time. Three countries unite in prayer for peace and evangelism

The 6th East Asia Youth Christian Camp took place in Hong Kong January 5–8 under the theme of reconciliation, peace and evangelism. Next generation Christians gathered from Japan, China, and Korea to share in fellowship and worship and to learn about each other's culture, history, and current situation. Started

in 2010, up until now the event had been held in Tokyo and Korea, but this year for the first time it was held in China, attracting many people from this Chinese-speaking region.

Throughout the conference, those who gathered learned about prayer, Bible reading, discipleship, reconciliation, and how to keep peace by understanding the past. On the last day they shared communion.

On the third day of the conference, a special event, Hong Kong Night, was organized by Asian Outreach, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Nine mission organizations that send missionaries to Japan backed the event and led the people to pray for Japan.



Praying together for East Asia

Attendees from Japan spoke of their experience at the conference with statements such as, “I was able to think about my own country,” “The negative feelings I have held against other countries have changed,” and “My faith has been strengthened and I was able to consider my calling.”

Each of the countries presented prayer points and prayed for the other countries. Some of the main prayer points included:

#### Korea

For the unity of North and South Korea. For the churches and society to turn their eyes towards peace. For the church to be restored to its original form. For young Christians to follow God and be an example of what a true Christian should be.

#### China

For unity. For the Korean church. For revival in Japan.

#### Japan

For churches to pray for those in power in the government, and for Japan not to repeat the mistakes of the past through a military regime. For unreached regions. For the elderly and youth. For Japan to reach out not only to the Japanese, but also to foreigners living in Japan. For recovery from the 3.11 earthquake and for churches and pastors in the earthquake-struck regions. For churches to repent of cult-like tendencies and isolation.

## Please pray for Japan

1. That Christians in Japan re-discover their identity as “Kirisutō-san” – followers of Christ who serve those who were weak and suffering. In doing so, churches would restore their relevance to people and local community.
2. That churches in Japan will continue to serve and minister to the people and communities in the disaster-stricken areas with Christ’s love.
3. That God will use the Sixth Japan Congress on Evangelism (JCE6), Sept. 27–30 in Kobe. That it will advance the Kingdom of God in Japan and pave the way for a greater sense of unity in mission and creative collaboration among churches and mission organizations in Japan.
3. That through the preparations for JCE6, younger leaders will be connected, encouraged, and equipped to reach out to the next generation.

## JEA related schedule

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>PLACE</u>
Sept. 27-30	6th Japan Congress on Evangelism	Kobe
Sept. 30-Oct. 1	Global Japanese Christian Forum	Kobe
Oct. 3-7	WEA Mission Consultation	Panama
Nov. 21	JEA Associate Member Gathering	Tokyo
Nov. 25	Religious Liberty Seminar	Tokyo

## Editorial

On my first day as the general secretary of JEA, I woke up in a sleeping bag at Sendai Baptist Seminary and went around the tsunami-struck coastal communities to deliver relief supplies to people. It was a very difficult time but taught me many invaluable lessons on how to manage disaster situations and also to be a better follower of Christ.

Five years later, we faced the Kumamoto earthquake disaster and we are re-learning our lessons. Hopefully, this issue communicates some of the important lessons we have learned in this process. Please continue to pray for Japan!

Kenichi Shinagawa, Editor in Chief



## Japan Update

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Chairman : Takao Nakadai  
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