

Japan Update

Summer 2017 Number 73



English conversation class at a partner church in Michigan

Missional cooperation between Detroit and Toyota churches

In the spring of 2011 I began my assignment at Toyota East Christ Church, a Mennonite Brethren church in Toyota City, Aichi prefecture, an area famous for its large concentration of automobile-related companies. In October of that same year, Setsu Shimizu, a leader in Japanese Christian Fellowship Network (JCFN) and a long-time friend, unexpectedly showed up at our church. JCFN is a ministry to follow up those who become Christians overseas and then return to Japan. During this visit she exclaimed, "Pastor Nozomu, God has been doing something exciting in Michigan!"

A large number of Japanese people live in and around the cities of Detroit, Novi, and Ann Arbor as employees in the automobile industry. Area churches have built a cooperative interdenominational network and have been offering English conversation classes for these employees and their family members. According to Setsu, this missional effort has been going on for some time. As a result, many Japanese people, especially wives, have heard the gospel. Moreover, most of these people return to Aichi prefecture after their stint in Michigan.

As I heard Setsu talk about what God has been doing in Detroit, I got so excited that

**Nozomu
Kashima**

*Pastor,
Toyota East
Christ Church*



I shared the story with the other pastors in our Toyota City pastors fellowship. They responded positively. And thus began a collaborative effort among our member churches in Toyota to welcome returnees from Michigan. In addition to my church, members of our fellowship include Toyota Hope Chapel (Pastor Koji Yamamoto), Toyota Kamiike Christ Church (Pastor Kei Sano, and since April 2017, Tsugeru Irie), Toyota Christ Church (Pastor Kiyokazu Takayama), Toyota Gospel Church (Pastor Yoshinobu Sasaki), Toyota Bible Church (Pastor Sang Jun Park), and Toyota Minori Christ Church (Pastor Ryuji Imori).

Our collaboration with JCFN opened a way for Pastor Kei and me to go to Michigan October 26 to November 2, 2015. We visited Spring Arbor Free Methodist Church, St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Oak Pointe

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Japanese ministry and church formation in Europe

Challenge and Vision: from “Mission cooperation in an age of crisis” to “Re-vision”

Nobuyuki Uchimura, Pastor of Japanese Christian Church in Milano

Effect of the European economic crisis and terrorist threat on Japanese churches

It has been 14 years since I was sent as a missionary to Milan, Italy, to share the gospel with the local Japanese. During this period, I have had the privilege to return to Japan for both the 5th and 6th Japan Congress on Evangelism gatherings (in Sapporo and Kobe respectively) as a member of the diaspora mission project. Looking back, much has



Milano Praise Church

changed in Europe since 2003 when I began my time in Milan. One of the major turning points was the European economic crisis that followed the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in the fall of 2008. In such a social context, the JCE5 gathering in 2009 was held with the theme “Mission Cooperation in an Age of Crisis.” In Europe, however, even before 2008 a major paradigm shift for Japanese manufacturers had already been taking place. The European market share of Japanese household electrical goods and automobiles was gradually being eroded by manufacturers of other Asian countries. This phenomenon significantly affected the manner and mode of Japanese ministry in Europe. The membership profile of Japanese churches in Europe also went through a major change. Most significant was the departure of many Japanese business people who had been dispatched by Japanese businesses to work in Europe. These were people who had played financial and spiritual leadership roles in Japanese churches. This resulted in difficulties in running churches in the same way as before. In some churches, the pastor returned to Japan without a successor. More recently, Europe has seen the growth of religiously motivated terrorism and the spread of discrimination brought about by a rise in nationalism and hopeless feelings of being besieged.

But as an attendee at JCE5 in 2009, God gave me a vision for the future of missions in Europe. I envisioned ministry leaders of the future collaborating in effective teamwork, on the lookout for networking opportunities, and being well-prepared to deal with problems.

Number of Japanese in Europe on the rise, more people with whom to share the gospel

Even during this process, the number of Japanese living in Europe has been increasing. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, some 200,000 Japanese people currently live throughout Europe.

As I said earlier, the number of Japanese business people who are sent to posts in Europe with their families has

been decreasing. Meanwhile, the number has been on the rise for Japanese who are single or married without children and are sent by their Japanese company to a post in Europe. The number has also been on the increase for the Japanese in their 30s and 40s who choose to work in Europe, or who quit their jobs in Japan to engage in professional study in Europe.



Pastor Uchimura

Many of these Japanese come to Europe with a positive and glamorous image of Europe. Many, however, have to accept the hard reality that their initial goal is not achievable. Some stumble when they encounter difficulties that trigger mental problems. Through such hardships, quite a few Japanese people in Europe come to question the meaning of life or develop an interest in the Bible, because they see it as the underlying basis of European thought.

An urgent need for leaders to share the gospel and to take care of the sheep

An effective network is in place among the Japanese Christians and churches in Europe. In fact, as a whole we share a sense of building a single Japanese church in Europe. The sense of unity is best attested to by the Japanese Christian Convention in Europe, which to date has been held annually for 33 years. Also, in 2006 we launched the annual Japanese Pastors Workshop in Europe. Some 30 pastors gather to build mutual trust and to engage in inter-denominational missional work as one unified body.



European Servant Leaders Retreat (SLIM)

Obviously, our group of pastors is far too small to minister to and share the gospel with all 200,000 Japanese people in Europe. As was advocated in the theme of JCE6 in 2016, we need “Re-Vision” or the casting of a new vision. In recent days, the following words of Jesus keep running through my mind:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:37-38)

(continued from page 2)

To my knowledge, none of the Japanese churches in Europe have their own place of worship. Each congregation has figured out different ways of getting together. Some gather in the sanctuary of a local church, while others meet in a rented space or a member's home.

The facilities may be different, but the same Holy Spirit works within each congregation to build up the body of Christ. Most Japanese churches in Europe were typically begun by a homemaker who opened up her house for Bible study, and invited Japanese people in the neighborhood.

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Church, Crossroads Community Baptist Church (Japanese congregation), and Faith Covenant Church. In each of these churches, we observed the wives of Japanese businessmen in the automobile industry cheerfully attending English conversation classes and Bible studies. We saw that the English classes were so popular that host churches had to put people on waiting lists.



members of Michigan Bridge Builders 2017

While some of the churches employed paid staff to teach these classes, others had unpaid volunteers who were effectively building friendly relationships with Japanese business people and their family members. We also witnessed the faithful offering of fervent intercessory prayer for Japanese people behind the scenes—especially for business people and their families by local church members and volunteer staff.

To be honest, until I saw how God was at work in Michigan, I had my doubts. It's good to see Japanese people showered by love in the USA in a cultural context quite different from that in Japan. However, I felt it quite impossible that these people, once back in Japan, would get connected to a local church. What I witnessed during the Michigan tour gradually affected my perception. God had provided Japanese people with a natural exposure to the gospel. God so loved Japan that he had moved people in Michigan to evangelize and bring salvation to the Japanese. Furthermore, God was already sending Japanese people back to Japan who had become Christians in Michigan. I clearly saw God at work in ways beyond my comprehension and imagination.

Building on our years of cooperation, this summer we are expecting Michigan Bridge Builders, a mission team from the cities of Detroit and Novi, to visit Toyota City from July 19 to August 2. The team consists of ten English

A number of people met Jesus Christ through these Bible studies, and were led to a profession of Christian faith.

During the past few years, we have seen some Japanese businessmen and homemakers enroll in correspondence or online seminary courses. It is our priority to ensure that these Christians will be equipped to maturity, for the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).

It is my sincere hope that the network of Christians within and outside Europe be further strengthened, so that they will share the burden of ministry to the Japanese people through both prayer and collaboration.

conversation class teachers who are involved in ministries to Japanese people at four churches. The goal of this mission trip is to build bridges between returnees and Jesus, between returnees and churches in Japan, and between churches in Michigan and Toyota City. During their stay in Toyota, various events are being planned in an effort to connect returnees with local churches. There will be a reunion of returnees, and teens and kids English club events. The team members will experience homestays and attend worship services at different Toyota churches. The trip will culminate in a Motor City Summit on July 31. Attendees at the summit will share about their current situations and the historical and religious backgrounds of their respective churches in Michigan and Toyota City. They will also discuss challenges and difficulties in incorporating returnees into a church, and will pray for each other. Both groups, Michigan Bridge Builders and the Toyota pastors fellowship, are eagerly looking forward to the summit. We have been holding regular Skype meetings in preparation.

I can't foresee how God will guide our collaborative efforts. It might be short-lived. A new church of returnees might be launched out



Toyota pastors visiting Michigan

of the cooperation among the Michigan and Toyota churches. God might have other plans to promote the integration of returnees into churches in Japan. Whatever happens in the long run, the Toyota churches have been greatly encouraged by their connections with the Michigan churches. Our partnerships have been growing stronger. I accept in faith all that God has been doing, even if it is beyond my understanding and experience.

As we navigate new uncharted waters of this trans-Pacific partnership, I want to move ahead step by step with expectation as to how God will work.

Diaspora in your neighborhood

Atsuko Tateishi, Assistant Editor of Japan Update

How can the members of a local church in Japan reach out and collaborate with people of the diaspora? They probably don't have to look far. One spring afternoon in early 2017, at a pleasant cafe in the suburban city of Tokorozawa on the outskirts of Tokyo, Japan Update interviewed Erika, a Christian woman in her early 20s with an international family background. To respect her privacy, we will only identify her by her first name.

Atsuko: Please tell us a little bit about yourself.

Erika: My father is Japanese and my mother is Filipino. My parents divorced when I was in the fourth grade. My



mother then went to live in the U.S., and took my little sister with her. I chose to live with my father, because I wanted to stay in Japan, and because I

didn't like my mother. She used to beat me in the name of discipline. She was not a motherly type, either.

Atsuko: Do you have any significant memories from your childhood?

Erika: To be honest, I was glad when my parents divorced, as I no longer had to live with my mother. Up to junior high school, my memories are rather vague. My childhood was not much fun. Kids would bully me at school. It got so bad that I stopped going to school in the middle of my second year in junior high.

Atsuko: How did you get to know the church you have been attending?

Erika: We would go to church as a family, because my mother was a Christian. But soon after my parents divorced, I stopped going to church. Then during my junior high school days, my father started going to church again when he was in the middle of some financial difficulties. I went along with him. We alternated between two neighborhood churches my father found.

I appreciated both churches. One of them was an international church with an English worship service. However, eventually I settled into the other church, where they worshiped in Japanese and had an active Sunday school program.

Atsuko: I understand that's the church where you were

baptized and still attend. Why did you keep going to church?

Erika: Because I felt comfortable and accepted. I met a number of kids from international marriages there. You see, I had been bullied at school and was not going to school at that time. So at least I had a regular place to go to on Sundays. I even tutored a boy at the church for awhile. He was a little younger than I, and also the child of an international marriage.

Atsuko: How did you come to believe in Jesus?

Erika: I began to pray to God on my own around the time leading up to the entrance exam for high school. I was accepted into an evening high school. Then a Christian friend at the church invited me to the activities of hi-b.a., a ministry to high school students.

I went to the hi-b.a. summer camp during my second year of high school, in 2012. Part of me knew that it was time to commit myself to Jesus, but the other part of me wanted to leave one foot in this world. By the end of the camp, however, God gently led me to profess in front of all the campers my desire to get baptized. I was baptized around Christmas later that year.

Atsuko: What has changed since you began to walk with Jesus?

Erika: I have no relatives I can turn to, but now I can depend on God who never lets me down. I also have my family of God at the church, which gives me a sense of security. I am happy now with my life.

Atsuko: What are some reasons you continue to follow Jesus?

Erika: I suppose I could choose to walk away from him at any time, but I won't make that choice. Without God, I don't know how I could overcome life's difficulties.

In fact, I went through the greatest challenge in my life when I was about to become a senior in high school. I was put in a situation where I'd have to quit school. I was in despair, and couldn't even pray for a few months. I asked my friends to pray for me. God eventually opened a way to resolve the situation, and I was able to finish high school. Looking back, that was a test I had to overcome at that particular time in my life. Because I know it was God who opened a way for me, I will keep following him.



Japan Council of Philippine Churches advances vision to Bless Japan

Ana Megumi Gamez, Vice-President of JCPC

The Japan Council of Philippine Churches (JCPC) is a fellowship of Filipino pastors and missionaries who have the same vision and doctrine and voluntarily associate themselves for the purpose of fellowship, edification, equipping, and the expansion of God's kingdom in Japan and beyond. JCPC provides a structure and context through which meaningful relationships can be cultivated and members can care for each other. Its vision is to make disciples, serve the church, and bless the world, which includes Japan. It has about 40 member churches in Tokyo and nearby prefectures, and is a member of the Philippine Missions Association (PMA).

JCPC meets six times a year. Regular meetings for mutual edification, fellowship, and prayer are held in January, May, July, and September and usually take place at Shalom Christian Fellowship in Shinjuku, Tokyo. JCPC also holds two annual events: the Bless Japan Prayer & Worship Summit in March and the Annual Thanksgiving Celebration in November.

The Bless Japan Prayer & Worship Summit

JCPC has held the Bless Japan Prayer & Worship Summit every March since 2014. This year it took place at the Kitano Shimin Center in Hachioji with the theme "Engage in the Harvest." It was attended by 230 people from JCPC churches and other churches in the Kanto area.

The guest speakers were Rev. Lalano Jr. Badoy, National Director of the Philippine Missions Association (PMA) and Bishop Noel Pantoja, National Director of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC). Rev. Badoy challenged attendees to participate in the global harvest, especially in Japan. Bishop Pantoja's message focused on "Unity: Working Together to Bless Japan."

This year's event was indeed momentous with the participation of not only two guest speakers from the Philippines, but also with Rev. Shinagawa, JEA General Secretary, and Mr. Armin Messer, missionary to Japan with OMF International. A prayer time for



Rev. Noel Pantoja of PCEC

Japan was led by Rev. Shinagawa and Mr. Messer. Rev. Shinagawa also led in the induction of JCPC executive officers, who will serve for three years, from 2017 to 2019.

Follow-up events

After the Bless Japan event in Tokyo, JCPC held the

first Bless Japan Missions Conference in Manila on April 8 at Union Church of Manila (UCM). This meeting



Bless Japan Prayer & Worship Summit in Hachioji

took place in partnership with Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF)–Philippines, SEND–Philippines, UCM, Operation Mobilisation (OM)–Philippines, and Worldwide Evangelization for Christ (WEC).

It was attended by 300 people from different churches and mission organizations. In October of next year, JCPC plans to hold a Bless Japan Missions Conference 2 in Manila and also in Davao City in Mindanao.

Vision for the future

JCPC envisions accomplishing the following projects in the coming years:

1. Equip the JCPC churches. To make this happen the executive officers will serve as an equipping team for churches that are in need of such a ministry. We will also hold seminars addressing our specific challenges in the Japan context.
2. Establish deeper relationships with Japan-based organizations. We desire to deepen our engagement with the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA) and Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF)–Japan in the evangelization and discipleship of this nation.
3. Forge healthier partnerships between JCPC churches that will improve both ministerial ethics and the resultant synergistic effect. This will be accomplished by scheduling regular meetings and increasing engagement in our annual events, the Bless Japan Prayer & Worship Summit in March, and the Annual Thanksgiving Celebration in November.
4. Continue to bless the world through our global internet radio broadcasts in partnership with the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC)–Philippines.
5. Do collaborative missions whenever possible in partnership with various kingdom-minded and harvest-focused churches, ethnic groups and mission organizations.

How to engage young people in religious liberty discussion

Among a number of meetings on religious liberty annually held on and around National Foundation Day on February 11, “the 51st Tokyo Meeting on February 11”—Abolish National Foundation Day! Stop the Nationalization of Yasukuni Shrine! meeting featured Shigenori Ōshima, the general secretary of KGK (Kirisutosha Gakusei Kai), as the keynote speaker.

Generally, religious liberty events hosted by Christians on National Foundation Day are not well attended by young people. Although there is ongoing discussion on the cabinet level of a constitutional change that could affect religious liberty, a higher percentage of people in their 20s support the current cabinet than other age brackets. Ōshima offered some suggestions on how to engage young believers in religious liberty discussions.

Ōshima first listed some of the characteristics of today’s youth:

- Rather than newspapers, young people now obtain their news from the internet, where conservative media sources have a stronger influence.
- In postmodern society, young people tend to be guided more by subjective feelings than by objective truth.
- They tend to fear wounding others to the extent that they avoid getting into discussions with people of differing opinions.



However, Ōshima then pointed out that youth are not entirely uninterested in politics. He recalled that in 2013 the “Declaration of Hope Evening 2” (Kibo o Kokuhaku Suru Yoru, abbreviated to Kibokoku) attracted 200 people on-site and 1,000 through the internet. He also noted that some young Christians have been meeting regularly for prayer in front of the Diet building.

In order to effectively involve youth in religious liberty discussions, Ōshima suggested three things. First, events and meetings should be designed in such a way that youth feel comfortable. They appreciate a safe place to open up with questions and an inviting atmosphere to learn. Second, Ōshima encouraged communicating with passion. He noted that titles and big names do not mean much to youth. They value effective communication that resonates with them. Finally, Ōshima stressed the importance of authentic living. Youth will not listen to speakers that preach peace but do not care for their own families. Ōshima reasoned that youth will respect a person whose “talk matches their walk.”

Ōshima went on to list seven things that he would like to see in youth: 1) study of the errors committed by the

Japanese church during the prewar and WWII years; 2) maintaining a Kingdom mindset; 3) nurturing hope through an end times perspective; 4) serving others; 5) engaging in personal conversations; 6) fellowshiping with Asian neighbors; and 7) partnering with non-Japanese congregations in Japan.

Regarding political discussions, Ōshima recommended that Christians maintain a worldview and historical perspective rooted in the Bible. He also recommended first listening to what youth have to say, and then developing long-term relationships with them.



Finally, he touched on the potential contribution of the Japanese church to global society. Because the Japanese church is aware of its errors in catering to the political agenda of the Japanese government during WWII, it has a keen sense of discernment in matters of war, peace, and the separation of Church and State. In conclusion, Ōshima expressed his wish to send young people with a Kingdom mindset and sense of calling into the global arena.

(translated and summarized by Atsuko Tateishi)

Fukushima Christian Conference hears project team reports

On March 11, six years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Fukushima Christian Conference (FCC) held a 3.11 memorial meeting at Sukagawa Shion no Oka Church in Fukushima with its five project teams: the Fukushima Hope, victim support, church mission cooperation, mission broadcasting, and radioactivity problem projects. Each project team reported on what they have been doing during the past two years.

Rev. Seiji Funada of Shirakawa Eiko Church compared the situation in Tohoku to Moses’ 40 years in the wilderness: “If without knowing God we had entered the land flowing with milk and honey, we would have lived only for our desires and what we could see. The land would have been filled with envy and hatred. In Tohoku, because of the nuclear power plant accident, many people still live with feelings of fear and insecurity. However, even if reconstruction were to go well and we saw a return to prosperity, if we did not know the living God the result would not be cause for blessing, but despair. We have learned that



the best testimony we have to offer is our faith in trying to follow what God wants and in facing reality along with prayer.”

Fukushima Hope project

Rev. Keiji Kida of Koriyama Christ Gospel Church, Chair of the Fukushima Hope project, reported on how their ministry has grown: “The Fukushima Church Relief Support Network—a community made up of pastors in Fukushima City—first started children’s retreats in local communities. But to meet more mothers’ needs, we expanded our ministry area and set up the Fukushima Hope project. Since then, we have had 30 retreats with about 30 regular participants.”



In March of 2017, all the staff who had deeply committed themselves to this project from the beginning moved on and the project has new staff. Kida explained, “Without the help of those first staff members, this project would have never gotten started, but now they have to carry on with their own lives.”

Now Kida is thinking of organizing a new type of camp involving local Christians and non-Christian mothers who have participated in past camps. “This may guide non-Christian mothers toward church involvement,” he said. He also has another idea—to hold a thyroid cancer screening at their church. “Mothers who had to stay in Fukushima with their families after the nuclear powerplant accident are quite fearful that their children may have thyroid cancer. We hope to offer them a chance to have a tie with the church as well as a place for medical checks.”

Radioactivity problem project



Rev. Seiichiro Kishida of Fukushima Bible Church, who is in charge of the radioactivity problem project, explained about the meetings they

are attending once every one or two months to deepen their knowledge about radioactivity problems. “The person in charge of the meeting assigns some books for us to study, such as *Genpatsu Jiko to Kojosen Gan—Nuclear Power Plant Accidents and Thyroid Cancer* (Akira Sugaya, Gentosha) or *Naibuhibaku no Kyoji—Threats of Internal Exposure to Radiation* (Shuntaro Hida & Hitomi Kamanaka, Chikuma-Shinsho).”

Victim support project

Ms. Ichiko Goto, a lay minister with the Japan Alliance Christ Church, shared about the current concerns of temporary housing residents. Goto says, “What I hear is sorrow and then anger. They all say ‘We have no home. Where can we go back to?’ As most temporary housing facilities will be closed on April 1, what we have been doing to support the residents there will no longer work. But we will keep in touch with each resident individually and continue our service to them.”



Rev. Takuo Takahashi of Aizu Bible Church, who has been bringing refugees from the coastal area to Aizu for periodic visits, said “People in Tohoku seem to have been suppressing various feelings for six years. What they are really suffering from has not yet been expressed enough, but I feel their voices in silence.”

After sharing their thoughts, the participants prayed in small groups.

(translated and summarized by Tomoko Kato)

“Re-visioning” JEA as mission infrastructure - JEA 32nd general assembly

JEA’s 32nd general assembly took place in Hamamatsu city from June 5th to 7th, 2017. The main item of the 2017 annual strategic plan is “re-visioning” JEA as mission infrastructure, which was the vision shared at JCE6 (the 6th Japan Congress on Evangelism) in Kobe last year.

According to that vision, JEA Mission Commission (MC) was restructured into three task forces: (1) Mission Forum—to lead JCE6 projects and host an annual Mission Forum in different places, (2) Mission Research—to gather and analyze mission data and provide network of MCs among JEA members, (3) Glocal (global+local) Mission Network—to provide an open space of connection for Japanese ministries overseas as well as ethnic churches in Japan. Through this new structure, JEA seeks to serve as a catalyst of God’s mission to Japan and Japanese people.



Eleven new board members were elected and Rev. Kaoru Hirose (Japan Alliance Christ Church) was elected as the Chairman of JEA for the three year term of 2017 to 2019.

Please pray for Japan

1. That more grassroots mission cooperations like the Detroit and Toyota case will start in many other places, connecting God's people globally and locally. Also pray that churches in Japan will open their eyes to what God is doing in the world and participate in it.
2. That God will raise more ministry workers and send them into the harvest field in Europe and other places where many Japanese are coming to Christ. Also pray that church leaders like Rev. Uchimura will be protected and blessed.
3. That more "Kingdom minded" collaborations will happen among different ethnic churches in Japan and Japanese churches. There are many opportunities including ministry to children of mixed marriages and so on.
4. That God will raise up the next generation of Christ-centered, gospel-driven leaders among young Christians in Japan.

JEA related schedule

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>PLACE</u>
Sept. 11-13	Tokai Mission Congress	Nagoya
Sept. 25-26	JEA Mission Forum in Kobe	Kobe
Nov. 24	Religious Liberty Seminar	Tokyo
Dec. 6-8	AEA Consultation	Korea
January 28-29	Theological Commission Retreat	Tokyo
Feb. 5-6	East Japan Earthquake International Theological Symposium	Tokyo

Editorial

In April, I spoke at the Reaching Japanese for Christ (RJC) Pacific Northwest Conference and had an opportunity to visit Japanese churches and ministries in Vancouver, Seattle and Portland. I was blessed by meeting many brothers and sisters who are so enthusiastic about reaching Japanese for Christ! I was also blessed by meeting international students (including Japanese) at a gathering in Seattle who were very eager to study the Bible and discover the truth. It reminded me of how I was as an exchange student 30 years ago. God is certainly on the move and touching the hearts of Japanese people everywhere. Praise God!



Kenichi Shinagawa, Editor in Chief

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Chairman : Kaoru Hirose
General Secretary : Kenichi Shinagawa

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Japan Update Staff

Editor in Chief	Kenichi Shinagawa
Asst. Editor	Atsuko Tateishi
Translation Editor	Gary Bauman
Translation Staff	Tomoko Kato
	Grace Koshino
	Hiromi Kiuchi
	Mie Takatsuji
	Nobue Tachiki

Editorial Office:
c/o JEA, OCC Building
2-1 Kanda Surugadai
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101-0062, Japan

telephone 03-3295-1765
fax 03-3295-1933
email adminoffice@jeanet.org
website <http://jeanet.org/>

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