Japan Evangelical Association

Japan Update

Autumn 2019 Number 77



Asher Ibaraki: Futsal Team of the Ibaraki Bible Church

Sports ministry: starting point for tomorrow



Hiroaki Yonai Senior Pastor, Kokubunji Baptist Church

Sports is said to reflect the times. In prior eras, sports brought liberation and hope, even in times of ethnic discrimination. Recently, sports have delivered hope to children who have suffered from natural disasters. Sports influence people, and at their best, sports bring people together.

The 2019 Rugby World Cup will be held in 12 cities throughout Japan in September. This will be the first international rugby festival hosted in Asia. Rugby may not be well known in Japan, but the Rugby World Cup is among three major global sporting events. Upwards of 4 billion people will watch these games worldwide. Next year, the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be held in Tokyo. So in two consecutive years, Japan will host two of three major global sporting events.

Through God's grace to the church in

Japan, my colleagues and I launched JiSP in 2014 to spread blessing through sports ministry. Please allow me to share our thoughts on "Why sports ministry?" and "What does Japan International Sports Partnership (JiSP) bring?"

Why sports ministry?

(1) Because it is a point of contact.

According to the 2011 Social Life Basic Survey from Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs & Communications, 72 million people (about 70%) of the population of Japan participate in sports. This includes activities from jogging for health to watching sporting events. Sports are deeply relevant to Japanese people in their daily lives.

The participation rate of junior high school and high school students is also very high: 80.1% for junior high school boys and 57.1% for junior high school girls; 65% for high school boys and 37% for high school girls (reported by the Juvenile Education Organization, 2016). With the exception of high school girls, these rates are rising compared to 10 years ago. Many junior and senior high school students are actively involved in sports. Participation in sports greatly impacts students because of the

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http://jeanet.org/

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Sports ministry at Ibaraki Bible Church: Finding your resources from within

Michito Kasagawa, Associate Pastor of Ibaraki Bible Church in Osaka

"And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins." Mark 2:22 (NIV)

How can Japanese churches reach out to the young generation, especially those who are extremely involved in sport activities?



Ibaraki Bible Church (IBC) is an evangelical church with a 50-year history located in an Osaka suburb. Even though the church has extended much effort to reach out to youth through programs such as Sunday school, ESL classes, and camping ministries, young

people tend to stop attending church once they become involved in weekend sports clubs such as baseball, basketball, and soccer.

To overcome the high youth dropout rate, in 2016 we started a futsal (indoor soccer) ministry. Before we started this ministry, we already had a monthly futsal fellowship for years. However, the Lord had a plan to bring us to a new stage by having us start a registered futsal team. Surprisingly, a Christian business owner offered to become a sponsor by covering the entire cost to enroll in a futsal league. After setting up the team—including getting approval at the church's general meeting to participate in Sunday matches—in March 2016 the team enrolled in Division 3 of the Osaka Futsal Federation (OFF). In the beginning, eleven players signed up for the team including three nonbelievers. We named the futsal team "Asher Ibaraki" from the Hebrew word "blessed" in the book of Psalms.

In the first year, the team struggled to set up a team policy. As a pastor, I endeavored to keep nonbelievers on the team. However, to win matches, our team needed to select players who could regularly participate. Players who did not get playing time quickly lost motivation and left the team. We added five new players, but then six players left. As a pastor who is committed to evangelism, I was really disappointed to lose these nonbelieving players. Through these experiences, we gradually developed a team culture that focused on winning matches and cultivating strong relationships among the players. Toward this end, the church played a great role by encouraging our members to attend and support the team in the matches, and also to prepare meals after the matches. As a result, our team players appreciated the church community and in turn the church people loved the team as a part of the church.

In the second year, 2017, the team added new players and won a title. As a result, we moved to the next level, Divi-

sion 2. This year, our fourth year, the team continues to belong to Division 2 and aspires to move to Division 1. We are currently fifteen players strong, including nine nonbelievers. I believe God has profoundly blessed this ministry with the baptism of two players. In addition, other non-Christian members have become more familiar with the church community and Christianity.



Pastor Kasagawa

Sports ministry is not just a tool of evangelism to invite people to the church. When the church is committed and participates in any serious sports ministry, both pre-evangelism and discipling flows into the team community. As they are involved in training twice a week and share joys and sorrows as a team, young non-Christians are learning about Jesus and his church through Asher Ibaraki. The team also provides a place for church kids who love soccer. Through our team, there is an opportunity to embrace young people who Japanese churches cannot reach. Of course, it takes time to see the harvest and a lot of work to keep this ministry going. But I see in Asher Ibaraki the hope that Japanese churches can reach out to the young generation through sports ministry.

What is the next challenge for us? In order to continue this ministry for another five or ten years, we need to train the next leaders. Following our futsal model, we could start another sports team. We already have a basketball fellowship once a month. Some teen members have asked me if the church can start a 3x3 (three-on-three) basketball team in the near future.

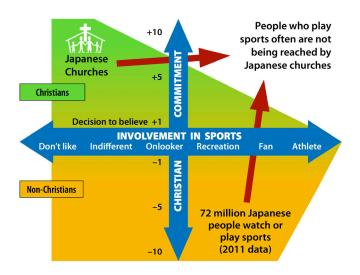


Jesus said that we need new wineskins for new wine. My hope is that this sports ministry model will prepare "new wineskins" for Japanese churches to receive, develop, and nurture "new wine"—an active, energetic, and hopeful new young generation that loves sports.

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significant time investment and life lessons gained.

Historically, Japanese churches have not embraced this view. Please see the illustration below.



- The church in the upper left of the figure has not reached the people in the lower right.
- Many people do not come to the upper left church until they stop playing sports.
- These people want to do sports even if they become Christians
- The gap cannot be bridged without a paradigm shift by Japanese churches.

(2) Because through JiSP, we can share biblical values and our desire to raise up the next generation.

Today's world records leave ambitious targets for future competitors. They encourage tomorrow's athletes to aim at and inevitably break them. Yet, history still notes even the most modest records. We must accept that we cannot always break a world record; similarly in life, we need the courage to face our limits.

Modern sports require rules and respect. In Japan, there are ever-expanding gaps between theories relating to the natural world and philosophies relating to the spirit. Through sports, we can tangibly share biblical values. For example, the Rugby Charter lists the following five values: "Integrity," "Passion," "Solidarity," "Discipline," and "Respect." However you look at it, these values hold importance in raising the next generation in the Christian Church.

Some years ago, I held a baseball clinic to which I invited a Christian professional baseball player and the general manager of my community Little League. Later the manager approached me and said, "I have taught baseball many times, but today I have learned good guidelines for life that apply to more than baseball." Sports ministries allow athletes, coaches, and churches to actively share biblical values and raise new disciples of Jesus.

(3) Because the world and Japan are connected.

There are many sports missions in the world. Such outreaches cannot be done with only one church approaching public schools or regional governments. Through sports mission opportunities, it is possible for even a small church to have international exchange programs. Successful sports ministries develop connections so that ministry teams are warmly welcomed as they return every year or so to the same ministry destinations. Relationships and spiritual fruit come from this kind of ministry little by little over a period of years.

What does JiSP bring?

The importance of the JiSP experience is Legacy.

When we talk about the Rugby World Cup and the Olympics, people often think of event-based plans like a big rally and a *Taikai* (tournament). This is wrong. The most important thing for JiSP is what will be left in Japan after the Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics have concluded. The legacy will be churches stretching their own ministry limits through sports ministry and producing spiritual fruit in their communities.

To that end, JiSP is promoting "Vision2024". This vision is a prayer that 10 times the blessing will be brought to this country by 2024. It may seem impossible. Yet, in the Bible, God answers even the most impossible of challenges. The servant Elisha asked for a double portion of the prophet Elijah's spirit. Elijah answered, "You have asked a difficult thing" (2 Kings 2:10 NIV). Nevertheless, Elisha became a wonderful successor. The Bible is full of difficult challenges. We, the members of JiSP, would like to serve together as partners to develop a continuing sports ministry, building a network through hosting events around the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This Vision2024 will bring together a lasting team of regional churches, who will support these ongoing sports ministries together.

In conclusion

JiSP has four pillars: Church Sports, Community Sports (community festivals for every generation), In Sports (training of Christian athletes, coaches, and trainers) and Major Sports Events (activities at the World Cup, the Olympics, etc.). Please join our prayer team, and let's work together.

*Japan international Sports Partnership (JiSP) is a network that includes Japanese churches, Christian athletes, and coaches, etc., It works with the ISC (International Sports Coalition) to promote Vision 2024. Visit us at https://www.jisp2024.com

Teach soccer and teach Jesus

Keller Costa, Co-founder and coach, Shalom Sports Center

As missionaries, the word "suffering" means pretty much nothing to my wife and I—now. But it wasn't always like that, and I'm not saying that because I feel strong all the time or because we have something special compared to other people. It's because we learned through God the true meaning of faith and endurance.



My name is Keller Costa and I'm the co-founder of Shalom Sports Center. I'd like to take this opportunity to share with you a little of our background so you can understand the greatness of

the blessing that God has given us after having withstood several trials and afflictions. I usually just tell my testimony to really close friends, but now I feel it's time to let whoever wishes to be encouraged know about how amazing God is to those who put their trust on Him.

I'm 34 years old. Both of my parents are Brazilian but I was born on the mission field where my parents were serving, in Lima, Peru. I lived there until I was 15, when we moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, USA, for my first missionary trip. Now I live in Ibaraki Prefecture together with my wife Suzanye and our four-year-old daughter, Miyuki.

The first time I came to Japan was in 2003, where I and many of my friends worked in various places trying to survive—be it building concrete walls in construction sites, or assembling car pieces and carrying heavy tubes up and down in cold factories in the winter and extreme heat in the summertime. Well, after two years of "suffering," I went back to Brazil to study in a university in Minas Gerais, where I graduated in the area of communications with a focus on advertising. After graduating, in 2010 I decided to come back to Japan—with no financial support—in order to help my parents who had started another mission work here. Not wanting to work in factories anymore, I put my complete trust in God and left my future in His hands, trusting in His promises. He has never let us down.

I remember very well that when I came in 2010, I prayed to God and told Him, "Jesus, I'm here again, but as a missionary now to do Your will, and I want to do exactly what You brought me here to do."

Around that time, my father got very sick and as a consequence half of his face was paralyzed. I couldn't take him to a normal hospital because my Japanese wasn't good enough. After praying, a Japanese friend, a pastor from a nearby church, called me just to check up on us. I felt the hand of God then, because through that, he told me he knew a doctor who spoke English, was near, and was a faithful

and loving Christian! So we rushed to his clinic. While we were there with him and my dad was getting treatment, Doctor Luke Hirokawa started talking to me and said: "What is your vision for your life in Japan?" I responded sincerely with what I already felt strongly in my heart: "I don't know exactly what God wants me to do but I am here willing to do whatever He tells me." So he replied: "And what is it you like to do?" "I love soccer!" I said. While a smile grew on his face he said: "And would you be willing to start a work with kids, teaching them soccer and about the love of God?" As peace filled my heart I replied "Yes, I would-whatever I can do for the glory of God." Then he said "Hallelujah! I've been praying for almost 5 years for God to bring either an Argentinian or a Brazilian person willing to start something with me here to bless the kids in the community!" And so we started a soccer school, with the support of the local church, Saiwaichō Christ Church, which now is being taken care of by Pastor Ayumi Kurisaki, the actual president of Shalom Sports Center.

As soon as we could, we started activities on a rented space in a nearby park. We were able to gather 23 kids in our project, which then was named Golden Eagles Soccer School.

After the big earthquake and tsunami of 2011, I lost most of the kids because they either moved back to their home towns or because just going out was really hard because there was no food or gasoline to move around. I was having practices with one kid only, so it felt more like a private lesson.

Most of the foreigners started leaving the country and my parents asked me if I wanted to leave, too. While praying about it, God sent a friend to one of our practices and he told me during our time together: "You gotta do whatever God tells you to do, even if it is for one person. The party will be amazing in heaven when that one gets there!" I felt so renewed by those words and decided to continue here and be part of the process of healing and rebuilding the community.

Some years later, Doctor Hirokawa decided to build Shalom Sports Center so we could have our own home field and not rent fields around town anymore. We founded it on April 4, 2015 and today we are working with more than 150 kids, teaching them all how to talk to God on a daily basis, to trust God more than anything, and to put Jesus' teachings first above anything else.

We offer our kids what they deserve—the biggest and best dedication to their growth that we can provide. We teach them not only high quality and advanced international soccer techniques, but also "life quality changing" teaching, so that their morals can always be aligned with God's moral standards.

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The brilliant path of a life with Jesus

Yoriko Okamoto, Pastor of Osaka Vision Church, Director of Dream Taekwondo School

While pursuing her athletic career in South Korea, the home of taekwondo, one Korean teammate impressed Yoriko Okamoto with his kindness to foreigners. When she asked this younger teammate to be her coach, he agreed. By the time he invited Yoriko to his church, she was ready to accept Jesus. That was in December of 2006.



"I want to win the world championship of taekwondo! Then finally I will be somebody of value." That's what I used to think.

To me, my value depended on how much success I achieved. The cycle of my life was to set a goal and then to work hard to achieve it.

Winning a match would make me happy for just a little while.

Whenever I lost a match, I would become anxious. I would keep working hard nonetheless. Life was tough indeed.

However, on Christmas Eve 2006, I learned something completely new. For the first time in my 35 years of life, I heard something I had never imagined. I learned I was so valuable that Jesus Christ, who is God, died for me on the cross.

Until then, I had devoted myself entirely to taekwondo. In my mind, being a successful taekwondo athlete was the only way to prove my value. When I met Jesus, however, I came to realize that I was valuable with or without success in taekwondo.

I used to be in a living hell, obsessed with winning in order to prove my value. What bliss now to know that I had been loved by God all along, just as I was! I began to worship the Lord with joy and thanksgiving. My athletic career was transformed. I only had to do my best with the physical and mental powers I had been given by God. I still practiced hard, tried to recover my physical strength as effectively as possible, and performed to the best of my ability in matches, but without an obsession to win in order to prove my value.

I am deeply thankful for having been born as my parents'

daughter, as they were instrumental to bringing me to an understanding of the unconditional love of God. Until I believed in God, I hadn't been aware of the power of being loved and trusted. I am not from a noble family. My parents were not wealthy or powerful in society. They were just ordinary citizens. I used to dismiss them as not helpful at all for my success.

When I realized, however, that all along my parents had poured much love upon me and had always been supportive of me, I accepted my upbringing as a precious gift that no amount of money could buy. Getting to know Jesus opened my eyes to the fact that the sense of being loved and trusted draws the best performance out of me.

I used to think that winning a bronze medal at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 was the luckiest thing in my life. But the greatest "luck" I now see in my life is that I was born of my parents, who showered true love on me. Because of them, I grew up to be a healthy and hardworking athlete who won an Olympic medal. I felt I lacked nothing. I was able to focus on my athletic career without worries.

I have retired from my active career as an athlete. Today, I live joyfully, relying on the day-to-day guidance of God's Word. I love God, and I love my neighbors as I love myself. Nothing can replace the joy I have. Before I knew God's love, my life was tough. I was saved, thanks to the church where Christians shared the gospel with me. I am loved and have been forgiven by God. It is a great privilege for me to be a member of a church, and to share about God who is invisible, but real. My life now is full of amazement and excitement.

By the grace of God, I have been ordained as a pastor. I am so thankful every day for such a brilliant life that I am willing to go wherever God sends me, and to do whatever God tells me. I dedicate myself to building the kingdom of God. I receive in turn everlasting happiness that the world can never give to me. My soul is fully content as I look

forward to an imperishable crown.



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Today we work with five other staff members who have decided to get on board this same train and move toward growing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If I can ask something of all of you, it would be that please, keep us in your prayers always. We need it so much,

for our enemy is never happy with what we do. Praise the Lord all the time!

Remember, "Never give up that which the Lord called you to do—keep it up until the very end, when we are in His Glory." Grace and peace to all.

Lausanne East Asia Younger Leaders Gathering

The Lausanne Movement ("Lausanne"), a global mission movement, hosted the East Asia Younger Leaders Gathering ("EA YLG") in Jeju Island, South Korea, on March 25–28, 2019. Over 220 younger leaders, mostly under 40, gathered together from East Asian countries and areas, as well as 45 mentors and over 60 volunteers. Some 50 younger leaders and 6 mentors attended from Japan. Under the overall theme "The essence of the gospel," the participants pursued the goals of "unity in diversity" and "a heart of sharing the gospel at all cost for the lost."

Each participant was assigned to a shared interest small group. A mentor was assigned to each group. The same group got together occasionally throughout the four-day gathering for discussion and fellowship. Time was also allocated for each participant to meet one-on-one with their group mentor.

In addition to the Bible expositions in the morning and plenary sessions in the evenings, a number of breakout sessions were offered in such areas as art, business, leadership, history, unity, evangelism, and theology. Even though many sessions were available, time was generously allocated to meals and free periods to stimulate spontaneous and organic connections.

Plenary speakers

Michael Oh, the Global Executive Director and CEO of Lausanne, took the podium on the first evening. He spoke about the three keywords of connecting, convening, and collaboration. As a movement of individual Christians, Lausanne serves as a broad platform for convening and connecting people. Michael noted that he often hears the phrase "I met . . ." at Lausanne meetings. He shared his own story of how attending the Lausanne Global YLG in 2006 dramatically expanded the sphere of his ministry. He expressed his hope that EA YLG would spawn a number of "I met" stories. He also encouraged everyone to collaborate in all areas of ministry toward building the kingdom of God through listening to and learning from others.



The Bible exposition was provided each morning by Patrick Fung, General Director of OMF International. The first morning, he exhorted those in attendance from Acts 11:19–26 to become disciples of Christ by upholding the important qualities of humility, integrity, and simplicity. The second morning, he spoke of unity in the gospel by looking at the 26 people mentioned in Romans 16. He noted how those people came from a wide variety of backgrounds, and yet were united in Jesus, even at the risk of their lives. The last morning's exposition was entitled "Suffering for the gospel." From Acts 4, Patrick declared that what can destroy the Church is not persecution, but Christians' own attitude of diluting the gospel. He stressed repentance through experiencing forgiveness, sharing the gospel in words and deeds of sacrificial love, and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Kisung Yoo, Senior Pastor of Good Shepherd Methodist Church, preached from Galatians 2:20 on the second evening. He showed the way of demonstrating Jesus who is within us, through professing that we have died with Jesus but are now alive with Jesus.

The third and final evening saw Jae Hoon Lee, Senior Pastor of Onnuri Community Church, speaking from Ephesians 4:1–6. As a community of people who have been called to join the body of Christ, a church must keep Godgiven unity through humbleness, gentleness, generosity, love, patience, and peace. Such unity within the church will be a witness to the living life of God, Jae Hoon taught.

Regional presentations

At the beginning of each plenary session, testimonies and prayer requests were shared by participants from each area or country represented at the gathering—Hong Kong, Mongolia, Japan, Taiwan, Macau, South Korea, and China. Following each presentation, all participants lifted up shared prayer requests.

Planning team

Since 2017, a multi-national planning team of younger leaders had been developing plans for EA YLG. JiYoung Yoo from South Korea and Kohei Takeda from Japan co-chaired the team, under the supervision of David Ro, Lausanne Regional Director for East Asia. On the final day of the gathering, each of the two co-chairs testified of the unity that was nurtured within the planning team through the period of preparation leading up to the gathering. During his closing address, David Ro shared how his missional ambitions had once been shattered. The experience made him appreciate more than before the power of God and the essence of the gospel. Quoting 1 Corinthians 1:17–20, he offered a closing prayer.



Participants and mentors from Japan

Japanese mentors

Six Japanese people, three men and three women, served as mentors. They were glad to see cross-cultural and intergenerational connections grow at EA YLG. Masanori Kurasawa, one of the mentors and Chair of the Japan Lausanne Committee, hopes to see more collaborative connections born out of the Lausanne platform serving in the frontlines of ministry.

Christian Shimbun, April 14, 28, and May 26, 2019 Translated and summarized by Atsuko Tateishi

Is there a future for Fukushima?

Eiji Sumiyoshi, pastor of Nakoso Gospel Christ Church in Fukushima Prefecture, contributed his thoughts to *Christian Shimbun*. Excerpts follow.

In April 2019, the World Trade Organization (WTO) Executive Committee ruled in favor of South Korea's import ban on fishery products from Fukushima and seven other prefectures. The ban was introduced in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. In 2013, during the process of luring the Olympic Games to Tokyo, Prime Minister Abe declared that the contaminated water in Fukushima was "under control." In light of the latest WTO ruling, I wonder if it really is under control.

In the meantime, a lawsuit has been filed in a mandatory indictment against three former members of the management of Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), the operator of the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Plant. The primary matters at issue are if 1) the defendants were capable of predicting large tsunami; 2) the government's long-term assessment about potential earthquakes was sufficiently reliable; and 3) advance measures would have prevented the 2011 disaster.

Another issue is the contaminated water that has been kept in tanks on the premises of the nuclear plant. Storage space is expected to reach maximum capacity by the end of the year 2020. While the government has suggested that diluting and discharging the water into the ocean would be the easiest and most inexpensive method of disposal, the local fishery association strongly opposes the idea as fatally damaging to the fishing industry.

The contaminated soil is also problematic. Even though the government previously established a policy that it would move all contaminated soil out of the prefecture by March 2045, it is now trying to promote the reuse of soil that is within a permissible level of contamination for public works projects in Fukushima Prefecture.

Obviously, all of these matters require a huge amount of money. According to a preliminary calculation by the private think tank Japan Center for Economic Research, the total cost involved in the Fukushima nuclear disaster would be in the range of 35–81 trillion yen (approximately US\$300–700 billion). The dismantling of the Fukushima plant is expected to be completed sometime in 2041–51, but the work has just begun, and the timeline is highly uncertain. The government nevertheless is aiming to increase the percentage of nuclear power generation for Japan's electricity supply to 20–22% by 2030. I wonder if nuclear power generation is worth pursuing at all.

I am a resident of Iwaki City, where the population has increased by 30,000 since the 2011 disaster. This is largely due to people relocating from neighboring communities within Fukushima Prefecture. On the other hand, in the nine cities where evacuation orders have been lifted, an average of only 23% of the population has returned. In addition, there are few children among those who have returned. Some communities within those nine cities might disappear altogether in a decade or two, when the elderly people have passed away. So the circumstances vary even among the cities of Fukushima Prefecture.

How then should the Church work on renewal and restoration in the name of Christ in this region? The challenge is daunting. It is about time for the Church to treat the energy issue as a missional issue. We need to give thought to both the economic and spiritual welfare of people. I believe the future of Fukushima depends on missional efforts by the Church.

Christian Shimbun, May 5, 2019 Translated by Atsuko Tateishi

Please pray for Japan

- 1. As we are going to have the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in the summer of 2020, pray that Japanese Christian churches will welcome all the Christian athletes and guests from overseas and will testify Jesus to them so that God might be glorified through the Olympic Games.
- 2. That the Holy Spirit will work through each of the sports ministries in Japan so that Japanese young athletes might come to Jesus and grow their faith in Him.
- 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>	EVENT	<u>PLACE</u>
Nov. 4	Ethnic Ministry Network Meeting	Tokyo
Nov. 7-12	WEA General Assembly	Jakarta
Nov. 11-12	Kyushu Mission Forum	Fukuoka
Dec. 13	JEA Religious Liberty Seminar	Tokyo
January 20 Feb. 1, 3	Youth Commision NSD Summit The 6th Great East Japan Earthquake International Theological Symposium	Tokyo Tokyo

Editorial

This April, I began work as General Secretary of the Japan Evangelical Association. Since then I have been learning and thinking about how JEA should serve the varieties of evangelical churches not only in Japan, but



also in the world. One of the important tasks is to share JEA's activities and prayer requests with *Japan Update* readers and ask them to pray for Japan. In this issue our focus is on sports ministries in Japan. As many of you know, Japan is going to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in 2020. I would like you to pray for the Japanese churches and their sports ministries which will work during the Olympic Games. Thank you.

Takahito Iwagami, Editor in Chief

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