

News Letter No. 3

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Issuer: Bishop Hiromichi Kato Director-general

Editor: The Revd. Jun Nakamura, Office Director



Let Us Walk Together Project

NSKK Support for Victims of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake



Preparing the grounds at volunteer accommodations in Sendai



Distributing aid materials to houses of disaster victims in Ishinomaki City



Distributing aid materials at temporary housing in Ishinomaki City



Clean-up work at a welfare facility for the aged



children's party at St. Nathaniel's Church, Murone



Work on the grounds at volunteer accommodation

Voices

of the Volunteers

※ NOTE: This issue features the voices of those volunteer workers who have participated in this project (making use of their schools' summer holidays).

Visiting the Areas Impacted by the Great East Japan Earthquake

Terue Lucia Namisato

3rd year student, Williams Theological Seminary

I have been praying continually for the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11. This year's summer practicum at Williams Theological Seminary (participants: a teacher and 12 seminarians) involved volunteer work connected with the Great East Japan Earthquake. In a real surprise, our time at the Miyatojima fishing cooperative in Higashimatsushima turned unexpectedly into an occasion for mission: as we cut grass, the ladies of the fishing cooperative were asking question after question about God, or Jesus, or the church. When we made our way to Shinchichi-machi in Fukushima Prefecture, I saw roads, rail lines, stations, houses, cars, boats and other things all reduced to rubble and strewn around; I was rendered speechless. When I heard all the tales of everyone's efforts to help each other, and of those who could not be saved, and talk of people committing arson on damaged houses and ships, I felt I was brought face to face with the fearsomeness of nature and the fearsomeness of humanity, and I could not stop crying during the memorial service at St. John's Church, Isoyama. Again, it was clear how the raging tsunami had completely swallowed up Shizugawa in Minamisanriku-cho.

It truly pained me to hear how, at the time of the tsunami, that woman who kept on giving the announcement to evacuate, and also people from hospitals, facilities and people in the town, were washed away; and yet, I happened to see a sunflower growing in the middle of the rubble. From amidst steel girders and loose wood, I got to see this flower, rooted in earth that must have been covered by the seawater, yet still blooming into a great big flower; I could feel the flower's sturdiness, its cheerfulness, its gentleness, and in this, the awesomeness of nature. The distressed area is vast, and the circumstances there are difficult, but I want to tell those close to me about these circumstances, and be providing support and prayer.

I hear that the people of Tohoku are long-suffering and quite reserved, but I wish they might open their mouths with us.

In Okinawan dialect, they say "*Ichariba choohdee* (once you've met, you're brothers)"; we want to be encountering

others, mixing together and helping each other out. We are one body in Jesus, so shouldn't "we're in this together" be our motto...?

And as these victims come to mind, I want us to be praying for them.

After my Practicum at Workshop Himawari

Ryoh Christopher Nagatani

2nd year student, Central Theological College

For the 3 weeks from July 25th to August 12th, the summer practicum for the Central Theological College/Sei Ko Kai Shingakuin involved lodging at St. Nathaniel Church, Murone, while working with the clients of the Workshop Himawari job assistance facility for the mentally handicapped, in Kesennuma, and generally helping out at the facility from the morning meeting, before 8 AM, to the final meeting in the evening. There were many facility staffers, clients and others near and dear who suffered in the disaster, and their new facility which was just about to open was lost to the tsunami and to fire.

The Himawari workshop makes sweet breads and cookies, but deliveries to large fishing boats (their steady customers) have been interrupted, and we hear that the sales situation is even more difficult than before. Declines in sales will affect the wages going to the clients. I got the sense that orders from those who know about this parlous situation, along with continuing aid from the Let's Work Together! Project, will give support not just for wages; I feel the daily round of work at the facility will lead directly to smiles on the faces of the clients.

"Since they have this work creating cookies, the clients can also truly sense that they are doing something which helps with rebuilding, so even if they're quite busy, it seems they are happy." I can't forget these words told to me by staffer "T". I firmly believe that, for these people, continuing to live their every day here at the very site of the disaster, while having a hope for tomorrow, is the best possible sustenance for the soul. And I am thankful that I have been able to be connected with this in some little way.

In this practicum, my encounters with the staff and clients were the very greatest of blessings. I am feeling a certain melancholy at the end of this practicum, leaving this facility behind. Those sweet breads, cookies and cakes we helped in making, it wasn't so much the taste on the tongue that was delicious, but that my soul cried out "this is delicious!" Being led in these small encounters, and led even

further by being needed, I experienced the fostering of various encounters and relationships. I really want to hold these relationships close to my heart. And may prayer continue to be holding us together.

※ Note: At Rikkyo (St. Paul's) Middle School in Ikebukuro, 10 people took part in the program from July 20-23, 8 students (4 middle school students and 4 high school students) and 2 teachers leading them.

Sendai Work Camp



Yuuta Imada
2nd Year Student, Rikkyo
(St. Paul's) Middle

I was taking part in after-school activities when it

happened – the Great East Japan Earthquake of 11th March, and the terrible scenes in Tohoku that I saw on the news. As things started to return to normal in Tokyo, I began to think about what I could do for those affected, but at the time I did not really understand anything.

The Sendai Work Camp was created for us to be at the disaster area, get a feeling for how things really were and be with those affected. 8 junior and senior high school students took part, and visited areas heavily affected by the tsunami: Wataricho and Ishinomaki. These seaside towns were entirely engulfed by the great tsunami. When we came upon the area even now, some 4 months after it all happened, we were left speechless when we saw the scene of debris and household goods piled up in mountains and dishes and toys scattered all over. This was completely different and more horrific than the images we had seen on television. When I imagined the terror of those living here at the time of the great earthquake, it brought tears to my eyes. And considering what they might think as they gazed over this new reality, I was filled with a heartrending pain.

As volunteers we were surprised as we visited temporary housing to be welcomed with smiling faces from the survivors. I had been shocked by the scenes found at the disaster areas and did not know how to behave towards the victims. In contrast, though, it was these smiling faces that gave me strength. The smiles of people who were strongly committed to making the best out of such a tough situation left a strong impression.

I will never forget this experience. Of being made aware of the foreboding presence of nature. And even then the smiles of people looking to the future. This time our group

could only help a little, with improvements to the ground around the volunteer accommodation, but we learned many valuable things. There are limits to the information that we can glean from the media. There are many things that I thought I knew, but did not really know at all. Being at the disaster area, seeing how things are, listening to the voices of the victims and appreciating the work of the volunteers – these things will be a catalyst for us to think deeply on how we should live our own lives. No one is alone. Even if we live somewhere else, we should all think about what we all can do to help regeneration in Tohoku.

I wish to express my appreciation to the teachers who put together this plan for us in the midst of tough conditions, and everyone else who helped us. Thank you so very much.

※20 students from St Hilda's (Koran) Junior & Senior High School (for girls) took part in volunteer activities from 16 – 19 August, and 25 from 29 August – 1 Sept

My Thoughts after Taking Part in Volunteer Activities

Aya Suefuji
5th Grader, St. Hilda's
(Koran) School

There was nothing there, as far as you could see.

Only tiles and fragments

of teacups left on the foundations of houses.

Rusty cars and boats on the roadside. Stuffed toys and soccer balls

visible in mountains of rubble.

It is hard to believe that where I was standing, many people lost their lives, that people had been living their lives here. “What on earth can be done now,” I thought wherever I went.

Before volunteering, Tohoku seemed a distant place, and there was nothing I felt I could do. In reality, though, it is only a 2 hour bullet train ride from Tokyo and things happen here that go beyond what is reported on TV and the newspapers.

It was not only buildings and land that were damaged. I learnt from going there and talking with the locals that a large scar has been left in the hearts of the survivors themselves.



There were many items among the relief supplies that did not seem likely to provide any relief. In this disaster area short of goods, though, the ongoing life of the survivors depend on the relief supplies we send. Seemingly simple things bring great happiness. In the disaster area, all daily consumables are seen as vital. For people like us surrounded by things, we do not know how it feels for the most basic of things not to be available.

The tensions went out of us upon seeing the smiling faces of the survivors in the temporary housing. We all must continue to support these smiling faces. These smiles will surely lead to something positive. All of us in Tokyo should also value smiles, and live in such a way that we do not forget our time as volunteers.

After Participating in the Let's Walk Together! Project—

Akiko Onoe
Christian Center, St. Mary's (Ryujo)

St Mary's College Nagoya had a chance to participate in the "Let Us Walk Together Project" in a quickly arranged program lasting from 1-4 September. The program received more than double the designated number of places when we asked for volunteers in early July, and there was clearly more potential interest. In the end, there were 18 students and 5 staff members, separated into 2 teams. One team, using the city of Sendai as its base, went visiting Fuji Nursery School at Yamamoto-cho (the nursery's day care was taking place in the local Ward Hall due to the effect of the earthquake) and also Shizugawa in Minamisanriku-cho (interacting with children as part of our support to Philippine women), while the other group went visiting Aikoh Nursery in Kesennuma

and held a children's party at St. Nathaniel's Church, Murone; thus, both groups took up their stand in the distressed areas and interacted with children.

Being at the actual locale and seeing the tough conditions and listening to those who lived through the events was an invaluable experience. Also, we felt heartened by our interaction with the children; seeing all those involved with day care staking their lives in their efforts, we caught sight of the basics of "What really is day care?".

This experience is surely engraved deep in the hearts of many of the students that took part. We will set aside time to look back on and share these students' experiences with the whole College. The full process of reflection is yet to come, but we would like share a part of one volunteer's impressions.

On 2 September "I visited the makeshift Fuji Nursery. The children were very lively and amiable. As we were together, though, I heard a voice say "It's safer if you build it high", and some children were playing at funerals. It was clear that the children's experiences from the tsunami and from what had happened around them had entered into them. Even when children were having fun making pretty colored drawings, they would suddenly say "it's all been swept away by the tsunami", and even now some children are afraid to go out and play on rainy days. Looking at the damaged Fuji Nursery, thinking of the 8 children and 1 teacher who were swept away, even as I prayed, my tears just would not stop."



"Let Us Walk Together!" Project Office

(Open) Mon – Fri 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM (Closed) Sat/Sun/Holidays
2nd Fl. Kuraisu Bldg., 3-4-5 Kokubun-cho, Aoba-ku,
Sendai, Miyagi Pref. 980-0803

Phone: (in Japan) 022-265-5221 Fax: (in Japan) 022-748-5321
(from overseas) [+81-22-265-5221](tel:+81-22-265-5221) (from overseas) [+81-22-748-5321](tel:+81-22-748-5321)
Email: walk@nssk.org URL: <http://www.nssk.org.walk/>