

## News Letter No. 8

Issued 1 March, 2012

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Editor: The Revd. Jun Nakamura, Office Director



## Let Us Walk Together Project

NSKK Support for Victims of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake

Natori-City Refuge (May, 2011)



Kamaishi Base



Kitakami-cho, Ishinomaki  
Traditional feast



Sendai Office



Onahama Base



Minamisanriku-Cho



## H o p e

## Looking Towards Tomorrow

It is now almost a year since 11 March, 2011. But some things cannot be measured in terms of time. I sometimes get the feeling that the question 'How are we supposed to go on living?' hasn't left us for a moment, ever since that day.

But human beings are strong. All around us we see people rising up, striving to go forward, saying 'We have to carry on.' Those involved with the Project with us say they share that same feeling. We would like to present a two-part series sandwiching March 11 to pass on messages of 'Hope' from various different areas.

## MARCH 11, ONE YEAR AFTER

‘Let’s Walk Together!’ Project  
Representative Bishop Nathaniel Makoto Uematsu

Since 11 March last year, how often has the prayer passed our lips, ‘Dear God, why?’ For people affected by the disaster, it was a brutal year lived amidst despair. Yet with hearts full of suffering and grief and resentment, still they were thankful to have the gift of life, still they reached out to try and help each other. Our Project volunteers and staff were truly driven by this spirit. No one could possibly fully enter into the grief of people who lost their entire family overnight. We could only pray to God to touch their wounds and to give them solace.

But amidst such unimaginable, hellish suffering, there were also incredibly uplifting moments, many times that you felt overwhelmed by the warmth and strength of human beings. Given the situation, there must have been times when people hurt each other, fought with each other, or gave vent to their feelings on each other. But in the midst of it all, it was compassion – the deep impulse of love given to man – that truly overflowed in so many places. The things we considered important up till now, the things we thought we couldn’t live without – our whole sense of values was turned upside-down by the disaster. We were reminded that what really matter to us as human beings are the things we cannot see. This was especially evident in young people, who were not only asserting themselves, as was their habit till now, but also seemed to be busy at thinking of others and taking action to help others.

People’s losses were huge, and that is something time will never erase. But in the midst of such infernal suffering, many times I saw examples of people resolutely gather their strength to move on. Whether believers or not, I felt that the boundless compassion of our Lord, who created all men, was with them . . . giving them strength, giving them wisdom, giving them love. He has deigned to watch over our ‘Let’s Walk Together!’ Project up to this point, despite all its trial and error. The project is not fully capable over all its aspects; it has imperfections, at times we have made repeated mistakes. But its staff and volunteers have set aside their personal priorities to come and stay in the disaster areas and be there for people afflicted here. Like those who gave the five loaves and two fishes in the service of our Lord, what we have done comes from our faith that even our smallest offerings can be blessed by the Lord and used by Him. The work of our staff and volunteers is a great encouragement to us all. Such compassion, that gift most needed by humankind, is born amid the darkness of despair, and if it will spreads among us, and among the wider Japanese society, I feel it will surely bring about some form of change.

When I think of the enormous number of people who died in the disaster, I am at a loss for words. They would have wanted to go on living. They would have wanted to spend more days with their families. In place of this suffering found in people’s hearts over the past year, accompanied by feelings intense enough to make us want to curse God, I hope we may continue to seek a path to recovery, through His gifts of compassion and love.

**“A Year from the Catastrophe: What I Feel Now”**  
**Hitomi Takahashi**  
**(Kamaishi Shin'ai [Divine Love] Church)**

About a year has passed since the earthquake catastrophe — yet it's not clear to me if the days since then feel like a short time, or a long time. When I look at memos I jotted down so hurriedly at the time, I recall some things regarding the nursery school for which I work. Yet, quite honestly, I really can't remember what I was thinking and how I was feeling shortly after the earthquake. I think I was just living through it all day by day.

I have always had day-to-day concern regarding earthquakes, but at the time of the great earthquake, I was truly taken aback and afraid that the preschool's building might collapse. I was not imagining the possibility of a tsunami, so I believe I was lacking in some of the crisis management abilities demanded from a facility's manager. Yet my fellow staffers kept their cool, proving they had learned very well from their regular training. And once at the emergency shelter, these staffers continued with their responsibilities until parents had come to pick up the last of the children, and have continued doing their best each day to be of help to the preschool children and to their parents, and the people of the community. Now, in my preschool, I see and hear just as many smiles and laughs as I did before the disaster, I believe.



And yet, though our grief and sorrow and pain have slowly been alleviated over this year, they have not

completely disappeared, and I am sure it will take a very long time for us to regain true vigor and joy. Now that a year has passed since the day, I'm always thinking, “I've done nothing for others, while all these people have been giving me so much. Is this justifiable??” We have received material

support and so much love and encouragement from church-related groups, and also from people from all over this nation and around the world. I have had encounters with many people I never knew before, learned what it is help one another, and come to feel heart-level connections. I am truly filled with gratitude.

I am determined that we continue to help and encourage each other, to bring joyful smiles to the faces of the children, who hold Kamaishi's future, and to enable both Kamaishi Shin'ai Kyokai and its nursery school to realize new dreams and hopes.

Seven months have passed since the Diocese of Kitakanto, NSKK, sent me out to join in the “Let Us Walk Together” Project. That hot summer, every time I went to visit Ishinomaki City, for which I was responsible, there was smoke rising from the debris, the smell of

**“My Thoughts, One Year after the Disaster”**  
**Barnabas Nozomu Kishimoto,**  
**Deacon of NSKK and staffer of “Let Us Walk Together”**

things decaying, and flies that were getting into everything, but now all that feels like times long since past — and the day of March 11 feels like ancient history. Still, some scenes I see in the areas hit by the disaster are at odds with this personal sense — I see things that have not changed at all in the past eleven months. I make my way to far-away Sendai from Tochigi Prefecture, coming back each weekend through distressed areas which have not changed at all, but it really pains me to consider what is in the minds of those who have to keep on living in those areas every day.

My call to the ministry has its roots in an encounter I had in the great Kobe earthquake of January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1995. It was rooted in my encounter (during my third year of high school) with a disaster victim as part of aid activities with St. Mark's Church, Ashiya [in the Kobe area]. There, I came into contact with a certain victim of the disaster. I remember how a quite lukewarm view regarding the church was changed to enthusiasm and how I felt led to dedicate my life to working at scenes where life and



death are right at hand. I also have bitter memories of how this encounter was so intense that my strength of will failed me, and I left without really fulfilling my responsibilities. I still regret what I did.

Now, God has given me another opportunity to serve at the scene of a great earthquake. Once again, I find myself standing in shock when faced with unbelievable scenes, with the grief of people who have lost everything. I worry over whether what I am trying to do will really help victims. But I have become a minister; I am convinced Jesus is at work on the scene with me, no matter what difficulties there may be. I see people become connected with each other in surprising ways, and have witnessed miracles of hopelessness turned into hope. In the cruel realities of these devastated sites, where none of our experience, knowledge, or worldly know-how proves to be helpful, my idea is simply to keep having encounters with people, just like Jesus did. With the prayers and support of all of you who remember our project, I will keep on going, even as God blesses me in many, many ways.

**“What is in My Mind These Days”**

Hiromi Seki, St Timothy’s Church, Onahama

Soon, it will be a year since the great March 11 earthquake. In Iwaki City, on the day after the catastrophe, people had wait in line for five hours to get water. What is more, with the Fukushima meltdown, only the aged and disabled, and medical staff – those who could not evacuate – were left behind in the city, so the city was very quiet for two weeks. These and many other things flash through my mind regarding this last year, that seems to have passed by in an instant, yet also seems oh so long – I don’t have the

words to properly convey this. Still, in any case I am very grateful for all the aid and cooperation provided over this year by the Diocese and by parties even farther afield. The Onahama Base is receiving human, physical, and moral aid and support from innumerable supporters now, and also for the days to come.

Those who have come from the evacuation zones around the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant and are currently living in temporary housing in Iwaki City really look forward to those days when “Hokkori [Heart-warming] Café” is open, when they have a fun time of rest and peace. For St Timothy’s Church, Onahama and its kindergarten as well, this is a year that evoked very powerful emotions, such as we never experienced before. Though the kindergarten’s graduation ceremony had to be postponed from March to April, we were able to make this time of going forth a happy memory for these children, with all the kindergarteners there in the sanctuary, receiving the blessings and good wishes of numerous volunteers. What is more, we were able to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this kindergarten’s founding on November 3<sup>rd</sup> (though this was some six months late). For Christmas, in December, we were enabled to offer prayers that continued to ring in our hearts through the sung communion service celebrated by the Rt. Rev’d Kato, bishop of the Diocese of Tohoku. Though the disaster has taken away many things from us, it has given us deep, deep ties with many, many people. Though many things still remain unclear, those of us who live in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, look to go forward step by step, taking our time with the process of restarting and rebuilding. We are sincerely grateful for all those signs of love that we received from so very many people.



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