



Let Us Walk Together Project

NSKK Support for Victims of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake

News Letter

No.12

1 August, 2012



△ Having a good time with people from the women's division of the Hirohata Temporary Housing Residents' Association (right), September 24th, 2011



Gym used as a shelter, March 12th, 2011



Holy communion at temporary housing, July



Prayer at St. John's Church, Isoyama, March



Opening service for Shinchi Base, June 9th, 2012

Shinchi Base launched

- ✎ Hiroshi Michael Matsumoto
"The Second Year of our Work at Shinchi, Fukushima"
- ✎ Nobuyuki Miyake
"For the Future of Shinchi, and of its Children"

"Fukushima Base" (tentative naming) Established

Activities have begun with St. Stephen's Church, Fukushima as the operating hub

Support to non-Japanese residents Moving Over to Individual Care

In Ishinomaki, Tagajo, Kesenuma, etc.

On June 2012, we opened our base, the "Disaster Victims Support Center, Shinchi" in Shinchi-machi, Fukushima Prefecture. This was the third local base for the "Let Us Walk Together!" project. (A report on the opening ceremony appeared in No. 11 of this Newsletter.) This issue will report on the views of a staffer of the base and of a local resident who has ideas on the future of Shinchi-machi from such aspects as local administration.



< Shinchi-machi, Fukushima Pref. >

Shinchi is a coastal town on the prefectural border between Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures. There are only a few hundred meters (several hundred yards) from the railroad station to the sea, and the built-up area of the town was nearer to the ocean than the station.

The Second Year of our Work in Shinchi, Fukushima

– “With Whom Are We ‘Walking Together’?”

Hiroshi Michael Matsumoto,

Staffer with the Disaster Victims Support Center, Shinchi “Let Us Walk Together!” Project

On June 9th, 2012, the “Disaster Victims Support Center, Shinchi” celebrated its opening at a new and very convenient location close to the Town Office of Shinchi. Though there was heavy rain on the day, there was an overflow of many different participants at the town multipurpose hall – residents in temporary housing, local residents, and staffers of the “Let Us Walk Together!” Project. All these people joined to celebrate the day with people from the hard-hit areas and in particular with victims of the tragedy – it was a day when we all shared our desire to “continue walking together here in Shinchi-machi, even in this second year.”

Among the disaster response activities we have conducted in various locations since the 2011 disaster, our activities in Shinchi consisted of a year of driving back and forth from Sendai, centering on the family members that remained of the three church members who lost their lives in the disaster and on temporary housing in Shinchi-machi, where church-related people who lost their houses are now living. You need to realize, the round-trip drive for our work in Shinchi would take 3 hours! On the other hand, every time we visited, we were warmly welcomed with “Hi, good to see you!” “We always appreciate your hard work,” and so on. When we met a child, they’d be saying, “Look! It’s Matchan (a nickname for the writer!)” “Can you play with us today?” As we left, we would hear “Why not take some of these veggies back with you?” “When will you be coming back?” and so on – it’s been a year where we’ve developed relationships where this kind of conversation flies back and forth naturally.



Chatting with residents of Hirohata Temporary Housing (right)

Yet, thinking it over carefully, we can say that at the start these relationships and activities were, in a sense, highly limited and one-sided;

they were formulated based on our circumstances and standards. Yet this is inevitable in the case of an emergency. In the early phase of disaster relief, it is inevitable that you have an “offering side” and a “receiving side.”

The Shinchi Center concept of literally forming a operational base for walking together in Shinchi-machi in Year 2 of this Project together with the victims and residents of this hard-hit area, first became part of the deliberations of the Shinchi Program Council around the time of the solemn celebration of the anniversary requiem service on March 11th of this year, which was held at the site of the former house of a church member which was destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami.

Time flies, and almost a year and a half has already passed since the devastation. I would direct our hearts, once again, to all those affected by the disaster, especially to those who perished and their families. The Litany that we pray each day before we get down to work crystallizes the spirit and principles of our Project. Standing in this spirit and on these principles, we should see no major changes to this spirit and principles in starting new activities here in Shinchi.



The meeting hall of “Disaster Victims Support Center, Shinchi”: Local residents and volunteers are often going in and out.

Our major intention in building up the “Disaster Victims Support Center, Shinchi” is to embody ever more fully our Project’s slogan, “Let us walk together!” With whom, then, should we walk together? Where should we walk together? And, what should we do to be walking together?

I pray that we may be used abundantly, so we may respond to all the needs of these distressed people, areas and dioceses, needs that change day by day and moment by moment, and collaborate effectively, remaining fully aware of our mission and responsibilities as project staff.

For the Future of Shinchì, and of its Children

Nobuyuki Miyake, Shinchì Town (Fukushima) Councillor / Administration Committee Chairman,
Hirohata Temporary Accommodation Center

When the great earthquake struck on March 11 last year, we heard the emergency broadcasts warning that a tsunami would follow, and headed for the Rachiama area to take refuge, as we had been trained to do in our annual safety drills. The road had collapsed in places, and old houses had been destroyed. We were calling out to residents at every house along the way, urging them to escape to the highest point in the area and designated evacuation site, St John's church Isoyama, when suddenly only 100 meters away, even higher than the 20-meter pine trees planted along the coastline, we saw the white wave coming after us. It was the great tsunami. My mother's house was right in front of us, but there was no way we could get to it or even call out to her. It was all we could do to turn the car around, with the tsunami coming right behind, and flee for the national highway just 2 kilometers away.



▲ St. John's Church, Isoyama, on the day after the March 11 earthquake

It is a great cause of sadness, however, that eight residents of our area lost their lives in the disaster, including my mother, and we continue to deeply mourn their loss. For those who survived, life in the evacuation center at Fukuda elementary school began immediately afterwards. But local people quickly provided clothing, blankets and stoves to help ward off the cold, and home-grown rice and fresh vegetables, and for a long period even did the cooking as well. The NSKK, both from within Japan and through its overseas affiliates, also provided food, clothing, and many other relief goods. We will never forget this support, for the rest of our lives.

The major questions confronting us now are recovery for our city (measures against radiation pollution, the group relocation project, etc) and the future of our children. Regrettably we are still living as refugees in temporary accommodation, but as residents of this area, we are doing everything we can to help.

walknow!
Where are we now?

We want you to know where our project is going, with whom we're working!
Here's a picture of how our current activities are proceeding, including further developments in programs already made known to you

■Fukushima City [Fukushima Pref.] : "Fukushima Base" (tentative name) Established

In the Executive Committee meeting held at the end of June, it was decided to establish a new base of activities in Fukushima City, at St. Stephen's Church, Fukushima. Though there had long been calls for activities based in Fukushima, our committee held many careful deliberations on these proposals, in light of the effects of radioactivity and other serious issues. Revd. Hiromi Kageyama, the priest-in-charge of St. Stephen's Church, Fukushima, became head of the new base, with cooperation from the Right Revd. Shoji Tani (former bishop of the Diocese of Okinawa), who has been coming to stay in Fukushima for about three weeks each month. In preparation for full-bore activity, we are already beginning to build relations with nearby temporary housing and with Misono Kindergarten.



■Ishinomaki City [Miyagi Pref.] : Individual support for non-Japanese residents

Ishinomaki has more than 400 foreign women from outside Japan who came to marry men in the area; many of them face problems in their everyday lives. Such problems include visa, employment, marriage and child raising issues – many issues involve privacy. Such problems, therefore, require careful help that is fine-tuned for each individual.

Also, many non-Japanese mothers find it hard to help their children as they learn their school subjects in Japanese. For that reason, the "Let Us Walk Together" project, in addition to providing help to individual mothers, will continue helping children of elementary and middle school ages with their homework. Also, during long breaks, like summer vacation, we recruit college student volunteers who live in Sendai and provide learning assistance to children of non-Japanese mothers and to their friends.



Help to temporary house residents

- ◆ Gym class program: Kamaishi
- ◆ Shopping bus tours: Natori
- ◆ Tea parties, bazaars: Shinchi
- ◆ “Hokkori” (“Comfy”) Café (in collaboration with the Japan Christian Church Alliance and others): Iwaki City
- ◆ Preparation for the annual “Taira Tanabata” festival viewing the stars: Iwaki

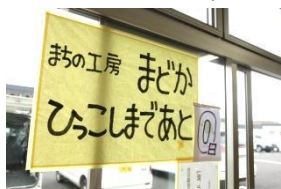
Also – home visits, confectionery classes, handcraft classes, classes of “origami” (the art of paper folding) and “e-tegami” (drawing on letters and postcards), pizza making, tem. house cleanings

Help for the disabled

- ◆ The project’s representative participated in the leaders’ assembly for the NSKK’s women’s association, in order to report on progress regarding support offered to Himawari through purchase of its baked cookies as aided by the NSKK women’s association (Yokohama).

◆ Madoka’s new workshop opened

The “Madoka Arahama, workshop for the mentally challenged, was moved to its new site in Sendai on June 25th. Having changed its name to “Machi no Kobo Madoka” (literally, “Madoka, the Neighborhood Workshop”), it has restarted its operations. This new location is quite close to the facility Madoka was borrowing for more than a year. This means that clients will be restarting their operations in an area they know very well. In addition to the “mayu dama” (silk cocoon designs), they will soon be involved in businesses like bread baking and sales, silkscreen printing.



- ◆ Help through purchasing products: Sendai (Madoka), Kesenuma (Himawari)

- ◆ Helping with the job; creating signboards: Kesenuma (Himawari)

Help to non-Japanese residents

- ◆ Handicraft program: Minamisanriku
- ◆ Help for individuals (helping children in their learning, accompanying them to city offices and employment offices, etc.): Ishinomaki, Minamisanriku, Tagajo cities
- ◆ Courses to train English instructors: Ishinomaki, Minamisanriku, Tagajo cities
- ◆ Inspecting foods, etc. for radioactivity (relying on Emmaus – the Tohoku District Center for the United Church of Christ in Japan): Fukushima City

Other items

◆ “Aoba Retreat House” rebuilding finished

Aoba Retreat House is a facility used for many years for Tohoku Diocese retreats and meditation sessions. Rebuilding and quake-proofing for the facility were completed in June. This serves as a base of action for volunteer activities, and also should be used for “refreshment programs.” (*Many people that live in areas that are contaminated with radioactivity are unable to spend long time outdoors. In these programs, such people would leave their areas for a short while and come visit here..)



The colors for the bullet points indicate activities in: ◆ Iwate Pref. ◆ Miyagi Pref. ◆ Fukushima Pref. There are other activities not listed here. For more information, visit each base’s blog. [only in Japanese]

The project’s website <http://www.nskk.org/walk/>

Column On that occasion, with that person

(2) Children’s paintings

We have been holding “training courses for English instructors” in various parts of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures in collaboration with certain other organizations, as part of project assistance to non-Japanese residents. We want to support foreigners who lost their jobs in the disaster, and desire to begin some new form of work where they can make use of their abilities in English, yet do not know how to teach.

Here’s what happened recently when we held this course at our Sendai Office. While the mothers were attending the course, four of their children were having fun in a separate room. Two girls were drawing paintings, as they said things like: “This is XX’s house!” “And here is YY’s house.” “XX’s house is upon the hill. No tsunami can reach there! YY’s house should be here, too – a tsunami will come.” These children had lived in the area that was mauled by the tsunami. Maybe they witnessed that tsunami with their own eyes in March 2011. Also, in Minamisanriku, there was a two-year-old boy that was using LEGOs® to make “temporary housing.” We sensed that these children, in their smaller bodies and their differing sensitivity to events, were dealing with the disaster in their own way.. (Sendai Area Base staff, June 2012)



The “Let Us Walk Together!” Project NEWS LETTER No.11 Issued 1 July, 2012

The “Let Us Walk Together!” Project Office **OPEN** Mon–Fri 10:00AM–5:00PM **CLOSED** Sat/Sun/Holidays
2nd Fl. Kreis Bldg., 3–4–5 Kokubun-cho, Aoba-ku, Sendai, Miyagi Pref. 980–0803

Phone: (in Japan) +81–22–265–5221 Fax: (in Japan) +81–22–748–5321 (from overseas)

E-mail: walk@nskk.org Website: <http://www.nskk.org/walk/>