



# Let Us Walk Together Project

NSKK Support for Victims of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake

News Letter

No. 17

1 February, 2013



▲ Making noodles for New Years



▲ Lion dance



▲ New Years at Shinchu Base

## New Year 2013

O God of Heaven, we thank you for a New Year. We know not what the coming year may hold, but please use us in it, as your servants, to create the kind of world you desire. Enfold in your arms all who suffer under heavy burdens, comforting and encouraging them so that their faces may be radiant with smiles.

We ask this in the name of your son our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Rev. Hiromi Kageyama (Let's Walk Together Project Management Committee Member)



▲ Pounding New Year rice-cakes



▲ Nadeshiko apron singers choir



▲ Encouragement banners

## “Walking with” Non-Japanese Victims

Our experiences with non-Japanese residents who suffered in and after the quake

## End to supportive purchase of Madoka's products

A one-year program of help to buy goods from the workshop finally comes to a close.

## A Final Look at “Tohoku,” before We Change Gears

✎ Director – general Bishop Hiromichi Kato  
Japan as seen from Tohoku, after March 11

## A Second Look at Japan Japan as seen from Tohoku after the Events of March 11

Bishop Hiromichi John Kato

### ➤ Tohoku Area – Its Severe Climate and History

Before the construction of New Aomori station, when you got off at the station in winter, the building would be covered in snow right up to the roof. A bitter, strong wind off the sea would sting your cheeks, recalling the words of the hit song by Sayuri Ishikawa 'Tsugaru Straits: its Winter Landscape.'

'As the overnight train pulls in from Ueno,  
Aomori station is shrouded in snow.

In the crowd returning home to the north,  
no-one speaks,

Listening only to the roar of the sea.'

It is a song that really conveys the bitter conditions of Tohoku. But Sayuri Ishikawa comes from Kumamoto city in Kyushu, southern Japan. In fact most Japanese idols and popular singers seem to come from the south. Singers from the north were like Yoshi Ikuzo, with songs like 'I'm Headin' for Tokyo,' who seemed to make a point of using and capitalizing on his Tohoku accent and the impoverished conditions here. There is a sense that progressive, modern, or powerful things, emanate from the south, or maybe the west, whereas 'going back home to the north' seems to have connotations of sadness. There is even a song 'Returning Home to the North.' It goes 'The window of the night train is fogged up, and the city already far away . . .'

The heroine of 'Tsugaru Straits: its Winter Landscape' is getting on the ferry connecting to Hokkaido, but there things are seen as relatively open and progressive. Among the volunteers coming to help us in the relief efforts in Tohoku, quite a lot said they often went to the northern island Hokkaido, but had never been to Tohoku before. They had simply flown over it in an aircraft on their way further north.

Tohoku has a history of suffering from poor harvests and serious food shortages, and of group job-hunting and mass exodus of its citizens to find temporary work elsewhere, and even today unemployment among its young people is high (little work is available). Until recently, Akita

and Iwate Prefectures have had the highest suicide rate in Japan.

Though we simply say 'Tohoku,' in fact it covers a huge area where local history and experience and emotions can be completely different. In each area, people have their own customs and cultural pride, and their own fearless way of living in the face of the extreme cold.

I myself was born in Matsuyama, on the southern island of Shikoku, and spent 50 years in Tokyo before becoming bishop of Tohoku. So I scarcely think I'm qualified to talk about 'Tohoku.' Having said that, my mother's ancestors were craftsmen from the town of Naruko in Miyagi Prefecture, where they made traditional kokeshi dolls. So I have at least a distant link with the Tohoku area. Probably if you asked, you'd find a lot of people say 'Actually some of my ancestors were from Tohoku.'

### ➤ The Lesson of Tohoku – 'Rallying Back'

As a result of the disaster, I believe something has come out of Tohoku, that has led us to reexamine our way of living and conducting our daily lives. This is also true as regards the questions of energy and nuclear power. One of Tohoku's major bookstores has a corner entitled 'Tohoku Studies,' and quite a few of the books there today are concerned with taking a fresh look at Japan in the light of the earthquake disaster and of Tohoku. For example there are books looking at Tohoku from a historical perspective, against its Jomon period-like background or in terms of its place in the modernization of Japan, and books focusing on its folktales and festivals or local customs.



▲The 'Local Literature' corner

One eye-opening set of news articles appeared in the Asahi newspaper's 'Opinion'



column on July 4, 2012. The articles' headings sum up and give an idea of the content : 'My Shrinking Hometown : Towards a New Independence, Won by Activating the Area's Underlying Strengths' and 'Depopulation, Advanced Age, Poverty, Discrimination – A Melting Pot of the World's Problems. We Will Rally From Here.'

Unless out of the pain of this disaster we genuinely reassess Japan and the values of our culture, we can never respond to the tears and sacrifice of so many who suffered or died. We cannot be a society that simply passes over smallness and sadness and poverty and distress.

From the start I was hoping not to see an overwhelming amount of unnecessary relief that would put pressure on the disaster victims. The 'Narrow Road to the Deep North' (as the poet Basho described Tohoku centuries ago) can only be traveled quietly, step by step. That, I believe, is what underlies the words of our campaign slogan – the 'Let's Walk Together! Project.' It is the awareness that we need to walk together with, and with full respect for, those whose lives have been so heavily burdened.

## The 'Let's Walk Together! Project' From Now On

People in the disaster areas, I believe, are really grateful for the support provided by the NSKK from all over Japan. And the interaction between young people and others from all corners, has been wonderful to see, giving them unexpected new experiences. We express our

deepest thanks to you all.

The problem of 'Depopulation, Advanced Age, Poverty and Discrimination' is not something restricted to Tohoku or to the disaster areas alone. It is a problem that exists throughout Japan. In the aftermath of the events of March 11, 2011, the question we must ask is, how will our lives change? I myself feel a need to 'renew my heart,' as it were – placing myself firmly between those areas still suffering from the effects of the disaster and the trend now appearing in Japanese society to gradually forget.

NSKK's 'Let's Walk Together! Project' to aid victims of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake was originally set up as a two-year project which would conclude at the end of May this year. But in reality, as we all feel, the difficulties of the distressed areas are far from over, and the end of their suffering is still not in sight.

- ◆ 'What activities can be brought to an end?'
- ◆ 'What is needed to transfer the initiative back to the local people themselves, or to local churches and other groups?'
- ◆ 'What activities should be retained and continued? And how?'

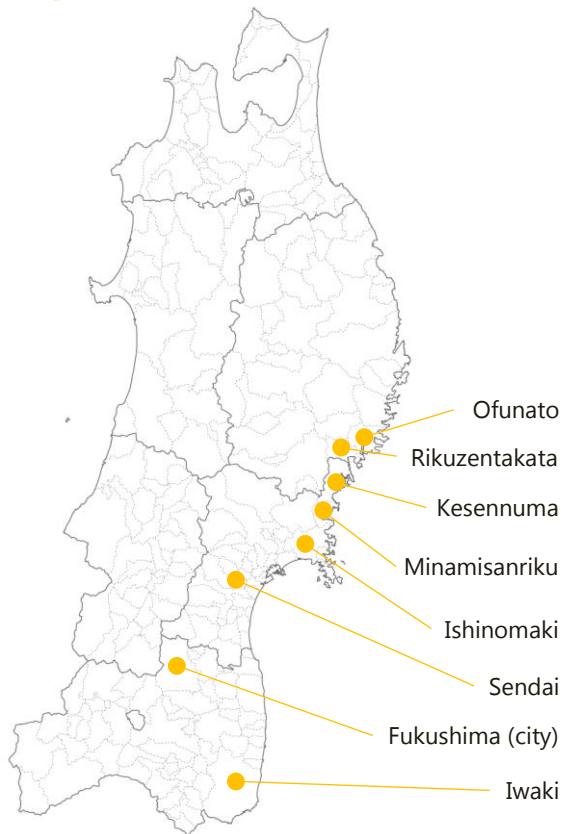
Somebody has referred to a need to 'change gear.' But within the management committee of our 'Let Us Walk Together! Project,' we remain deep in discussion as to how the project should be brought to an end, and what the next stage of our work here should be.

Please be in prayer for this.



## We have been “walking with” non-Japanese victims

Our work with non-Japanese victims up until now,  
and from now onwards



Since very early on, the “Let Us Walk Together!” project established a staffer to support victims of non-Japanese nationalities. Initially, to be honest, we were at a loss over what to do, facing the seemingly endless extent of the devastation, over some 500km (313 miles) in length! Still, one encounter produced another and another, and that ring of activity is still growing now in terms of numbers and activities. Most of the non-Japanese residents we have encountered are women, who came in to Japan to marry into a Japanese family and have developed roots in their local communities as wives, daughters-in-law, and as mothers.

Rather than carrying out support activities, we have been simply “walking together” with them, sharing both good and difficult things. Some lost their loved ones in the disaster, some their houses, and some their jobs. Furthermore, many problems that were lurking before the earthquake became evident after it.

One major problem is the “language barrier.” Ever since they came to Japan, many of them have been learning Japanese, yet only the kind of Japanese one uses in everyday life. How could they talk about things that are complicated or deep? Also, many find the language quite tough to read and write. This language barrier creates many issues and problems.

Thus, our hope is to help them overcome this barrier and make progress toward independence. So, the “Let Us Walk Together!” project, is running the programs listed below:

### Training for the “Class II home helper” license

There have been three sets of classes and courses for the “Class II home helper” license, two in Minamisanriku and one in Kesennuma. The participants are continuing to learn Japanese in order to join in practical training courses provided this March by Sanko Fukushi (Welfare) College. Though they sometimes have trouble dealing with technical terms, their enthusiasm and determination are evident.



▲ Participants from Shizugawa and Minamisanriku.



▲ Participants in Kesennuma



## Japanese class

*Working to pass the "N4 Japanese Language Proficiency Test"*

22 women from Cuba and the Philippines studied in this class. They took their test on December 2, 2012, and are now waiting for their results. Also, this January, we launched the "Part 2 Japanese Course." Each of these students has their own dream – "I want to speak correctly with my kids," "I want to learn kanji [Chinese characters as used in Japanese] and find a job," "I want to read Japanese newspapers," and so on. They will be meeting six times each month, to make these dreams come true.



## English instructor training course

Many of these non-Japanese residents are proficient in English. Therefore, we gave instructor training courses, which not only showed them how to teach the language but helped them develop English classes as well. So far, we have held this course in Iwaki, Fukushima City, Sendai, Ofunato, Rikuzentakada, and Ishinomaki. In all, 65 instructors have participated, from the Philippines, Cuba, and Chile. Some are now running English classrooms in their houses, local community halls, while others are teaching in elementary schools, children's halls, and the like as assistant teachers.



## "Refreshment" programs

The earthquake-initiated disaster was almost two years ago. Yet many victims are still suffering in mind and heart. We created opportunities for them to talk about whatever they want to in their own languages, as well as offering some workshops. Through the Holy Communion and the prayers which are part of the program, the participants can let their bodies and minds rest.

So far, we have held three "refreshment" programs with Filipinas, Indonesians, Chinese, Chileans and Colombians living in Ofunato, Rikuzentakata, Kesennnuma, Sendai, and Iwaki.



▼ We held art therapy workshops for children too!



## And in the months to come

We have invited representatives from the areas affected to a meeting on January 26-27. There, they will discuss the problems they have shared with us so far, and together we will prepare a policy statement. We are also writing a report on what we have done over the last two years in walking together with these victims. We hope this report will be of some help in future efforts to build up a society of multiple ethnicities living together.

## ■ Iwaki, Fukushima Pref. – New Year news from St. Timothy's Volunteer Center, Onahama

St. Timothy's launched activities for 2013 on January 5th with the traditional "mochitsuki" (rice cake pounding). Early in the morning, all the local folks involved as well as many volunteers joined in the event to turn two "tawara" (large straw bags) of rice into rice cake. From this, they provided many servings of "anko mochi" (rice cake with sweet bean paste), "kinako mochi" (rice cake with toasted soybean flour), and "o-zoni" (broth with rice cake and many other ingredients), and served them to some 400 participants. In addition, other groups supplied cotton candy, omelets, and even hosted a lottery game. Performances by many local participants added a lot of fun to the event. A group of kids performed cheerleading, some local residents performed the "hyottoko" comedy dance, while others performed tai chi chuan and sword dances. To conclude, a local comedian named KC Takamine brought down the house.

The leaders of resident associations and others who worked in this event described their joy, saying that the participants looked happier than last year. Our gratitude goes out to everyone that made this event possible.



▲ The "mochi pounders" were highly experienced.



▲ the "hyottoko" dance

## ■ Shinchi-machi, Fukushima Pref. – 2012 to 2013, in "Center Shinchi," our Shinchi Base

In a corner of the base's central hall stood a large, brilliant Christmas tree. People used to decorate a tree with many lovely ornaments at St. John's Church, every year. This year, people from three different temporary housings came to our Center Shinchi to adorn the tree there. The fully-dressed tree watched over the Center's programs, the work of the voluntary staff, and every single person visiting the Center throughout the Christmas season.

Someone named "S" and the "N" couple brought some handmade "year-end/new year buckwheat noodles" (eaten by many Japanese on New Year's Eve) and "new year special cuisine" to the Center's staff. Other locals brought in some food to the staff at least twice every day, in the morning and in the late afternoon. Two others visited the Center shortly before midnight and did the New Year countdown with the staff. Still a number of others, came to the Center on their way back home from work, with "veggies, stew, and something for the chickens, there you go!" All these sweet people were victims of the tragedy of 2011 – some lost their loved ones, some their houses.

Five volunteers joined in the Center's activities from New Year's Day, and since then we have been working together with local volunteers in many programs – a remembrance of our summer camp, a movie gathering, knitting classes, tea parties, pilgrimages, New Year parties, shiatsu massages, and so on.

This was the first Christmas-New Year season we have celebrated in Center Shinchi, so everything that happened during the season was new to us. Now they are all part of our precious memories from "walking together" with the locals here.



▲ Fellowship party after Holy Communion



▲ Knitting class held on January 3rd



## ■ Kamaishi, Iwate Pref. – Christmas-New Year season at Kamaishi Victims Support Center

Thanks be to God, this Support Center is now celebrating its second Christmas and New Year! What do we, the Center's staffers, do, during the holiday season?? It depends on what the victims need.

As a result, we were terribly busy throughout last December and entering the new year. This all began with a Christmas concert by the Christ Church, Sendai choir. We had ten concerts this season, including Hirosaki University's glass harp concert. In addition, we had three Christmas parties for kids, six rice cake pounding events, and helped clean houses for some 50 families in two temporary housing areas. [Japan has a custom of year-end house cleaning.] While carrying out all these events, we had regular programs as usual in four temporary housing areas.

Last year, many victims were at a loss over how to spend the New Year season. This year, however, many recalled the way they spent the season before the tragedy and spent it in that same fashion. In short, they had a good, relaxing time with their family members. It was important for us not to disturb this time. However, we came alongside those who were alone during the season – this was our way of celebrating the new year.



▲ Glass harp concert



▲ Rice cake pounding at Kasshi B temporary housing

## ■ Koriyama, Fukushima Pref. – Inauguration ceremony for the new Church Hall of Sts. Peter & Paul Church, Koriyama

This church, completely destroyed by the earthquake, now has a new hall. There was a major snow fall on the hall's ceremony, on January 14th. Still, some 60 people gathered from various parts of Japan, thanking God for the new hall and hoping that it will have abundant use over the years to come. The new hall is meant to be not just a place of mission for the church and the diocese but a facility open to local people as well. Also, the hall is expected to be a base of support activities in the efforts to rebuild Fukushima, which should go on for many more years to come.



▲ Blessing of the new hall

## ■ Sendai, Miyagi Pref. – An end to supportive purchase of Madoka's products.

We of the "Let Us Walk Together!" project, had been purchasing products of Madoka Arahama, workshop for mentally challenged workers located in Sendai, since the summer of 2011. The income the workshop gained from our purchases went back to its workers in the form of pay raises. We received many prayers and messages of support from those parties both domestic and abroad, who received their goods.

Every month, on the delivery day, some managers of Madoka carried our orders to us. On the last delivery, however, all the 17 workers accompanied them.

The workshop was completely washed out by the tsunami of March 2011. They were able to move out of their temporary building and into a new place last June. When speaking to these workers, one gets the sense that the 2011 tragedy is becoming a thing of the past. Yet there are no few number of workers at the workshop who still cannot forget the fears and pains that the devastation brought to them. Though this project's purchase support for Madoka is ending, we are determined to keep up our friendship with all its people, getting out their word to the world around.

\* Needless to say, any churches and individuals can continue to buy Madoka products in the years to come! For more details, please visit our project's website, shown at right.



▲ The workers carried our orders to us, on a freezing day.

### Madoka's "mayudama" Easter eggs



Especially for NSKK, Madoka has created some special Easter egg "mayudama" – silk worm cocoons. Currently, the project's secretariat is making preparations for sending samples of the eggs to those want them. For more information on how to buy them, please visit our website, shown below, or contact Nozomi Matsumura at our Secretariat.

[The project's website]

<http://www.nskk.org/walk/>  
[Secretariat]

Phone: (+81)-22-265-5221  
E-mail: [walk@nskk.org](mailto:walk@nskk.org)

### Help to temporary house residents

- Distributing "zabuton" (floor cushions), Cooking parties, Wreath making, Rice cake pounding : Kamaishi
- ▲ Shopping bus tours: Natori
- ◆ "Hotto (Relaxing) Corner" (tea time), "Hotto" Cinema (movie shows), shiatsu massages, haircuts: Shinchi-machi
- ◆ "Hokkori" ("Comfy") Café, Christmas parties, rice cake pounding: Iwaki

In addition: sing-along gatherings, salon chat programs; distributions of potatoes and towels; glass harp concerts; presenting handmade sock covers; thank-you parties for volunteers; Christmas meetings; etc.

### Help for the challenged

- ▲ Purchase of products and help in selling: Madoka
- ▲ Help in their work: Himawari
- ▲ Joining in and helping Christmas parties: Madoka

### Help to non-Japanese residents

- ▲ Individual assistance (tutoring for kids, explanations of official papers, accompanying people to employment offices, etc.): Ishinomaki, Tagajo, Sendai
- ▲ Helping to start up English classes: Natori, Sendai
- ▲ Hand-made goods program: Minamisanriku
- ▲ Japanese language class: Sendai
- ★ "Refreshment" programs: Morioka, Iwaki

### Other items

- ◆ Sharing our chickens' eggs: Shinchi-machi
- ★ Helping kindergartens in their special events: Kamaishi, Aizu Wakamatsu, Koriyama

#### ◆ "Sumo classes" at kindergartens in Wakamatsu, Koriyama

A former sumo wrestler visited two kindergartens run by NSKK, to give their kids a good opportunity to exercise.



In these cities, due to the radioactivity from the Fukushima 1 meltdown, children have to stay indoors and do not have many opportunities to play outside.

#### ▲ Request radioactivity inspection of foods, etc.:

##### Sendai

Through having the food radioactivity inspection lab run by the Sendai Christian Alliance Disaster Relief Network (Touhoku Help) inspect foods and the like, we can respond to the needs of those citizens worried over food safety, as well as non-Japanese residents and others that are unable to collect safety information on their own.

The colors for the bullet points indicate activities in:

● Iwate Pref. ▲ Miyagi Pref. ◆ Fukushima Pref.

★ Others, or multiple Prefs.

Please visit the project's new English blog. We will be posting weekly updates of the various activities happening in the Let Us Walk Together Project.

<http://letuswalktogether.blogspot.jp>

### Column On that occasion, with that person

#### (6) New Year in Tohoku

Around January 15th many Tohoku residents take part in the "donto" festival. They take their New Year ornaments to Shinto shrines and pray for good health and safety throughout the year.

This January, in a local community in Kesenuma the "donto" festival was resumed for the first time in two years. The tsunami from almost two years ago destroyed the community's shrine and surrounding buildings, and the earthquake caused those grounds to sink about 70cm (28"). People once living around the shrine lost their houses and are currently living in temporary housing scattered in various places. Yet they still wanted to celebrate their "donto" festival at the same old place. They made their wish come true, in this January's "donto."



There are other festivals which are making a comeback, such as "shishi mai" (lion dance, for the new year), "ohtako matsuri" (giant kite festival), and so forth. Just a year ago, many did not have the necessary supplies nor the "spirit" to celebrate these festivals. This year as they celebrated, some said that it made them feel as though they were truly moving on. We hope that these precious occasions will continue to be restored, with new events created as well. (Sendai Base, January 2013)



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The "Let Us Walk Together!" Project Office **OPEN** Mon-Fri 10:00AM-5:00PM **CLOSED** Sat/Sun/Holidays  
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