

Our activities: **Hokkaido Special District**

“Give Me a Straight Heart”

Representative Yoshiko Ogane

On February 20th, in snow and cold, the 12th District Women’s General Meeting was held in Sapporo. In Hokkaido there are three JELCW member congregations, consisting of 20-some members. This term, rural churches could not send representatives, so Sapporo church chose its three members for the district board. It is a bleak situation.

At the General Meeting, we confirmed the goal -- to grow in faith and carry out ministry -- and talked of spreading the circle of fellowship. The spiritual theme of “Christ Wants You”—Joy, Prayer and Gratitude—each congregation hopes to transmit this message.

“Unite my heart to fear Thy name” (Ps. 86:11)

Now and increasingly, many of our church women are nursing their parents, husbands, or siblings. Let us introduce this testimony by sister, Yoko Otsuka, on “Caring for Mother”.

== Inauguration of the District Board for the next two years ==

Representative: Masako Kondo
Co-representative: Tomoko Kurihara
Treasurer: Mikiko Oga



Testimony:

“I See God’s Plan in Mother’s Life Story”

Yoko Otsuka (Hakodate)

My mother is 84 and lives in a Catholic nursing home. Last July, while in critical condition because of heart disease, doctors told us she could pass away within 2 days. My husband and I prayed late that night in the ICU, “Lord, take her to your side.” But from that point, her blood pressure, which had been under 40, began to rise, she regained consciousness, and recovered in a startling way. Her doctor told us this was nothing less than a miracle.

Mother had attended church in her 20’s but it was in the ICU after becoming bedridden that she received baptism from Pastor Sakamoto.

Looking back, it was over 10 years after first signs of dementia set in, that she agreed to go together to see a doctor, to allow me to help with medicines and daily tasks, and manage her finances. I recall my own feelings of not being able to be truly patient and kind with her, not really understanding her suffering or solitude. After these experiences, now I sometimes read to her from a book of poetry and illustration by Tomihiro Hoshino, in love, realizing that this is a special time given to us by God. We thank the Lord.



Ms. Otsuka and her mother

Our Activities: East District

One of the activities our volunteers carry out is that of reaching out to homeless, namely, “Hoshikuzu-no-kai”.

20 years ago, this project began in Sanyo by Catholic sisters. Since then, it has grown to include non-denominational volunteers who run a day activity facility, “Hoshi-no-ie” and the Lutheran branch which cooperates is called “Hoshikuzu-no-kai”. Every Tuesday, we pitch in with cooking rice and making rice balls and miso soup, and doing night rounds.



Participating, one can see that depending on the recipients of a particular meal, kitchen staff answer to the individual needs in areas of salt intake, amount of miso, and the size for cutting ingredients. Then at 8pm, a warm meal of rice balls and miso soup is handed out in various parks. For 20 years this service has been made possible by the work of love of many hands. It is one action of filling a need, in which we do what we can do, for our neighbor plainly in need. We plan to continue to fill the immediate need.



Churches in Transition

—Tokyo Church—

Celebrating 100 years of Ministry

On October 28, 2012, Tokyo Church celebrated their centennial with a special service, and over 250 attended.

It started with a prelude, a solemn chant by the choir, which was Pastor Nozomu Utsumi’s translation from Bach’s work. After a sermon by Pastor Tadahiro Tateyama, JELC President, dedication of the baptismal fount was performed by the former pastors of Tokyo Church. (photo: below)



Following was a baptism service of seven new members and confirmation service of five confirmants, and the whole congregation was wrapped up in festivity. In the afternoon was a celebration party. Pastor Naoki Asano, who leads the East District, delivered a congratulatory message, and then there was a presentation of the 100 year church history, titled, “Journey of Light”, through light show and music and narration. A new musical piece based on “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” was dedicated, performed by the congregation. (photo: left)

Our Activities: Tokai District

We introduce Sister Sakai of Nagoya Kibou Church who, living out our district's theme, "Prayer and Joy at Being Given the Gift of Life" has called upon the whole district to participate in donating to disaster victims in Eastern Japan, 360 patchwork hot dish mats, and also offered a training course there.

At Kesennuma by Shigeko Sakai

In July, 2012, a friend and I were able to visit the Emergency Relief Center at Sendai Church, as volunteers. The morning after our arrival, a nurse, the Sasaki bothers, and we (5 in all), rode in a car driven by by Pastor Noguchi for 4 hours, touring the disaster sites as we went towards our destination, the temporary housing district at Kesennuma.

Along the way, at Okawa Elementary School, where there stands a memorial monument, it was all we could do to offer prayers for the children killed in the tsunami and their grief stricken families. We were to teach a patchwork quilting course and took with us the makings enough for 20 participants.



At first I wondered if each participant could successfully finish her project, but in the end all members held up their completed work and smiled so radiantly that I felt the effort was certainly worthwhile. As we proceeded, every one was so diligently working, that I wasn't obliged to ask into each



person's story of the disaster, but one old woman next to me was very sun tanned, and to my inquiry she told of having been working in the seaweed industry, but of course she had to give up that work. I prayed that before her tan faded too much, the seaweed industry could be revived.

Although our time for socializing was short, I received the impression that these victims, although burdened by sadness and suffering, were striving to move on positively, and I will never forget our encounter.

Later I received a letter from a resident of Vienna who had helped during the summer with distributing hot dish mats in Sendai. It had been a moving experience to be able to help in the cause. I give thanks in realizing that what started out as a mere small act of charity, being blessed by God, grew into a great happiness.

Churches in Transition —Numazu Church—

When Numazu Lutheran Church was established by the AELC in 1954, the first pastor there, Rev. Conrad Arnot, performed a dedication ceremony on Christmas Day. 60 years later, in 2005, the building was renovated. Upon seeing the original stairs, one is reminded of the height of ceilings along with the strong beams in those days. This church building is witness to countless encounters and partings, and stands to nurture the followers as limbs of the Christ's body. For this house of prayer in Numazu, Tokai, we give gratitude and glory to our Lord.



Our Activities: West District

String Telephone

by Kazuko Nishikawa (Mihara)

We would play “string telephone” as children, using two paper cups, the bottoms being connected by a string. Speaking into one paper cup, the vibrations of our voices were transmitted by the thread, and on the other end, one who held the cup to her ear could just make out the words spoken, by carefully listening. We at Mihara Church are connected with “Mugen” in Matsuyama, which is located across the Inland Sea.



“Mugen”, as some may recall from vol. 141 of this newsletter, is the shortened name for NPO Corporate Peer Lutheran Occupational Center Mugen. Several years ago when the pastor of Mihara Church also served Matsuyama and Fukuyama churches, a close connection to these churches and to “Mugen” evolved. “Mugen”, which supports the mentally handicapped, has created an atmosphere where anyone can feel at home and engage in the activity of their choice. Specifically, they work through reforming old kimonos into new, beautiful products. Matsuyama Church, which helps run “Mugen”, has no women’s group, so it is through connection to Mihara Church that these products are advertised and marketed. In addition, Fukuyama Church participates in their local “Rose Festival” by putting on a bazaar at that event, where “Mugen”’s products are sold. When playing string telephone with paper cups, the only way to succeed in communicating is to listen very

intently. We feel it is our mission to hear and transmit “Mugen”’s small, weak voice.

Churches in Transition

—Ube Church—

Ube Church is 60 years old. If compared to a human lifetime, this marks the end of the fifth cycle of the Chinese Zodiac calendar, the auspicious year for the mature to restart, “Kanreki”. The first time I stepped over the threshold of the church was in 1962, the autumn of my last year in middle school. At that time, the majority of members both men and women, were mature adults. Next in numbers were high school students. Those students grew into young adults, and many moved away. Just as in urban society there is a turnover of the population, so there should be in churches a “metabolism” or flowing in and flowing out of youth and older members. But in Ube Church, those who did not leave for the city stayed and have carried the burdens which go along with supporting the congregation, together with retired people who have returned from their jobs in the city. As “Kanreki” means “calendar turns over”, we understand that one does not only sit still, waiting to be overcome by age, but receives renewal, gives thanks for being given life, and moves on forward.

On Feb. 2nd, one of our brethren who was with us at Ube Church for 50 years, seeking God’s righteousness, passed away. He was 74. In him God gave us a wonderful example to follow.

As the average membership age is 65, we feel a big challenge in how to hand our church over to following generations.

(Kazue Ishimaru)

