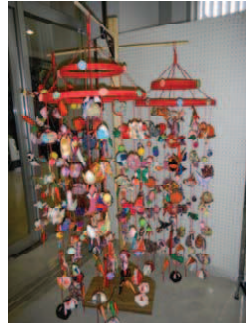


## Women in Action – Becoming a Neighbor

### JLER – your Neighbor

by Setsuko Ishida (Chiba)

Rev. Noguchi, who is in Sendai conducting the relief/support programs by JELC for the survivors of the East Japan Disaster (Japan Lutheran Emergency Relief), asked me to come and find out what was needed in the disaster-hit areas from a female point of view. Therefore, I visited Ishinomaki on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in December last year together with Ms. Omaki, a board member of East District and Rev. Koizumi, the district adviser for the JELCW, in his car.



(photo: hanging dolls completed)

### Photo Album Project Update

As reported in the Newsletter #145, the donations from South Carolina Women of the ELCA were offered for the yearbook/photo album project of JLER. Recently, we received their thank-you notes via Rev. Tateno. Here are some of the messages:

“This spring (note; 2012), I felt relieved by the school reunion held for the first time in 30-some years. I lost my house in the tsunami last year but all my family was safe. A lot of memorable items are gone and my memory has limitations, but I can keep the photos for the rest of my life. I have heard that the followers of Lutheran Church helped with the album. I appreciate your trouble paid for us strangers. I say thank you to all people who were involved.”

“The tsunami washed away my house entirely. Any witness of my life to this point, was lost. Getting this album, however, I felt as if seeing a beam of light. Thank you very much.”



(photo: making the dolls)

At the temporary meetinghouse for the survivors, we joined the making of “Tsurusi-bina (hanging dolls)” over a cup of tea. The ladies so concentrated on making dolls and went back home for lunch break that we did not have time to listen enough to them. We only felt glad that we were able to hand over Christmas presents in person.

Although we were unable to learn what the women in the disaster-hit areas needed, we were able to feel our connection more strongly by meeting them in person than by praying for them from a distance. We are grateful for this opportunity and hope to visit repeatedly.

## Relief Action in the Disaster-hit Areas

### Volunteering from a female point of view

by Sae Ishii (Chiba)



Since March 11 on, as I saw and heard the overflowing news by the media, I felt more and more eager to do something in the disaster-hit areas for myself. By chance, I learned that Japan Overseas

Cooperative Association (JOCA) recruited some volunteers for disaster-relief. JOCA, which is associated with JICA's Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers program, actually targeted at OB/OGs of the JOC volunteers. Since I was a JOC volunteer in the Kingdom of Tonga from 2008 to 2010, I registered immediately and waited to hear from the headquarters. In reply, I was asked to go to Kamaishi, Iwate Pref. to help bathing elderly and disabled people, and taking interview surveys. They wanted someone qualified for the long-term nursing care. Though I had passed the level 2 of the qualification as a college student, I have never worked in that field. But I asked for a leave from my workplace, which generously arranged it as an official trip, and began to work on April 16 for the following six weeks.

I washed many persons' backs who had not taken a bath for weeks. An old lady said, going into a bathtub for the first time in days or months, “I cannot take my hand off the rail for fear of water because it reminds me ....” I could not say a word but just imagined that she had been washed by the tsunami.

I was asked to write an article on the theme “volunteering from a female point of view”. Looking back, it seems that I did not have any particular awareness as being

a woman. I stayed at a shelter together with the survivors for about two weeks, where men and women of all ages tried to survive together day after day with all their might. I did not realize that I was weakening but I had developed deafness. One day I found myself having trouble listening daily conversation. I felt ashamed that I forgot to take care of myself as a volunteer worker.

Yet, I was filled with energy whenever I was welcomed warmly by the disaster-survivors, helped by peer volunteers and, most of all, I was reminded of my family and colleagues at my workplace waiting for my return in Chiba. Support from the native community is essential in order to work away from home. I believe that you may know someone who is helping in the disaster-stricken area. Please remember them in your prayer, which I believe, will give them great power you



can never imagine.

(photo: the local radio station picked up Ms. Ishii, volunteer interviewer)

**Note:** Ms. Sae Ishii is a powerful lady, who continues to visit Tohoku region as a school counselor while working at Chiba Bethany Home, a welfare facility for the women and children in need. She says that she was happy to meet an old lady with whom she had lived at the shelter in Kamaishi, on the night bus on Feb. 24. She was sorry they could not talk much because the other passengers were asleep.