

The 24th JELCW Newsletter

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Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church Women
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Overall theme: "Living Together in the Grace of God"

Subtheme: "Encouraging Each Other in Hope and Joy, We Work Together for Peace on Earth."

Scriptural Theme: "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him"
—Romans Chapter 6: 8

To you

'I wouldn't let you die'



Rev. Hodaka Nagayoshi
Pastor, *Kokura Church*
Nogata Church

From the day we are born, not a single day passes without interaction with other people. It would be great if we could have happy human relationships where we belong; in families, kindergartens, schools, and workplaces.

To be needed by others can sometimes be a burden, but it can also be proof that you are indispensable. On the other hand, if you feel you are not welcomed or thanked by people, you can't help thinking that they don't need you.

I have realized by talking to my church members that each person has such a great number of things to do in their church life. Some perform various duties in the congregation, some provide mutual support among church members, and some serve in a women's group at an individual church, in the district, in the diocese, and at the national level. The duties increase according to the degree of involvement.

How can they accomplish all of these tasks? Is it due to their strong faith? Jesus tells us, "If you had faith as big as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea and it would obey you.'" (Luke 17:6)

I am reluctantly aware that my faith is not even as big as a mustard seed. It is clear that I would burn out if I worked with this tiny faith of mine.

It is not that our faith drives us to do what we believe we should do. God calls to us, saying "I will not let you die." (Ezekiel 16:6) We, who are not anything yet, are needed by Him. Every one of us is an indispensable existence to Him. Here lies the origin of our walking with God.

Reports from the Districts

East District Women's Group

-Face to Face Networks-

Naomi Ichikawa, President

This spring I attended the entrance ceremony of the Japan Lutheran College / Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary with the vice president. The principal addressed the students in his speech, telling them that the college is a place for them to meet new people and have new experiences. Seeing the students who will study at college, leave there some years later, and bear the next generation, I felt it crucial to support them through JELCW.

In April, 60 members gathered at *Hiyoshi Church* (Yokohama-city, Kanagawa). Under the JELCW's theme "Turn our eyes more to society," our fellow members working as volunteers for '*Itsukushimi* (Compassion)' at the Tokyo Nursing Home and at '*Hoshikuzu-no-kai* (Stardust Get-Together)' gave speeches at the gathering. They told us in detail about the loving care being done and what precisely was needed at each institution, which made me realize that there were a number of things I could do for communities and places that were waiting for volunteers. Pastor Shunichiro Matsuoka, who has been supporting the people victimized by the earthquake and tsunami in the *Tohoku* (North-Eastern) region, spoke on the subject: 'There must be something we can do'. The speech was very encouraging and would remain in our thoughts.

In June, the *Koshin* District Women's Group had a gathering at *Matsumoto Church* (Matsumoto City, Nagano). Four of the board members attended it. This annual gathering has been held in turn among the churches within the district.

We are preparing for autumnal events with the aim of making them good opportunities for us to nourish our connections. Looking back over the history of these events, we would like to pray for continued success.



Gathering at *Hiyoshi Church* in April

Tokai (East Pacific Coast) District Women's Group

-Reflecting on the 2nd Gathering-

Shigeko Sakai, President

In May, over 90 members assembled for the second gathering in *Kozoji Church* (Kasugai City, Aichi) under the theme 'Turn our eyes more to society'. We successfully concluded the gathering by the Lord's blessing.

The issue of nuclear power generation is one of the most serious matters in our society. We had Pastor Shingo Naito of *Minoridai Church* (Matsudo City, Chiba), who has been advocating for 'anti-nuclear society' as a speaker. He spoke on the subject "Cherishing life and being a peacemaker." He earnestly told us from the societal viewpoint about nuclear power's threat to the human body and also about our government's policy on this issue. We were intensely reminded of the victims still struggling with the aftereffects caused by the nuclear accident in *Tohoku* which occurred in 2011.

There was a beautiful and relaxing violin performance after lunch. Then, with the guidance of an instructor, we did some stretching and were completely refreshed.

Mr. Hideki Kokubo, representative of '*Makiba-no-Ie* (Pastures Home)' was a speaker in the afternoon. He talked about how the children lead their lives, what difficulties the staff had and so on. All of these stories were moving and touching to us.



Gathering at *Kozoji Church*

Hearing Mr. Kokubo's speech was a good opportunity for us to achieve this term's goal 'Let's get to know the institutions we support!' as was visiting 'Ayumi-no-Ie' (Tarui-machi, Gifu) in March.

West District Women's Group **-Live in Preparation-**

Sumie Kuniyoshi, President

In early July, we had the second gathering at *Nishinomiya Church*, *Okayama Church* and *Zion Church Yanai Chapel*. We prayed, worshiped, and discussed as we usually do at the gathering. The discussion theme was 'Live in preparation'. Three panelists started the discussion at each church, then participants exchanged ideas.

'For what and how are you preparing?' Regardless of age, a variety of preparations were stated; preparation for death, natural disasters, self-management, the new liturgy and so on. Some said they aren't preparing for anything, yet actually they were ready for anything simply by being a Christian. I think the discussion the West District, to attend the services conducted by Pastor Takeda, Pastor Kano and Pastor Mizuhara and briskly sing hymns in unison on sunny days during the rainy season. Allow us to express our gratitude here again.

Well, the West District Women's Group has less members than the other districts. As a solution of this situation, we have started a campaign called 'Plus One' with the hope that each women's group in the West District will have 'one' more fellow member.

May our prayers help prepare us for the future.



Time of sharing at *Yanai Chapel*

Kyushu District Women's Group **-Turn weakness into Power-**

Miho Hirayama, President

- **Fukuoka Area Gathering** (*Hakozaki Church*, May 17)

We invited Brother Guillaume of *Communaute de Taize* (Taize Community, France), who is engaged in activities in Bangladesh, to our gathering 'Meditation and Prayers'. He said, "Many Bangladeshi are in poverty, yet it doesn't follow that they are unhappy. Their source of power comes from the prayers they make three times a day." His words encouraged and inspired us a lot.

- **Celebration of the opening of a café** (*Kagoshima Church*, June 8)

We celebrated the opening of a public café which used to be an assembly room. Due to deterioration over time, the room was renovated into a café. Reconfirming the mission sent from God, young members and college students of our church are in charge of running it. The support offered by *Oe Church* (Kumamoto) was both materially and mentally encouraging to us.

- **Chikugo Area Peace Service** (*Amagi Church* (Asakura-city, Fukuoka) August 24)

We watched the DVD introducing Dr. Tetsu Nakamura* who devoted himself in Afghanistan to the construction of agricultural irrigation channels to turn desert into rich farm land.

*Dr. Tetsu Nakamura was shot to death by an armed group in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan on December 4th, 2019.



Chikugo Area Peace Service at Amagi Church

• **Action Plans Published on ‘Michishirube (Signpost) No.105’**

Members from *Oita*, *Kagoshima* and *Nagasaki* Church contributed to ‘*Michishirube*’ along the theme (“Let us turn our eyes more to society.”)

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Thanks to the warmth and the energy we shared through exchanging, we could step forward.



Feature on Children

Let’s Pay More Attention to the Needs of Society

Recently, we have been hearing more and more heartbreaking reports on TV and in the papers in which children are involved. Children, who are supposed to be protected because of their vulnerability, are now exposed to abuse or are in danger of losing their lives.

Hoping to turn our eyes to the status of children, we requested Mr. Kokubo, facility manager of ‘*Makiba-no-Ie* (Pastures Home)’, who lived with children every day in Denmark Pastures in Fukuroi-city, Shizuoka, to contribute to our Newsletter. The following is the kind contribution from Mr. Kokubo.



“Children living separated from their parents”

Hideki Kokubo
Facility Manager
Orphanage *Makiba-no-Ie*

Cows in Denmark Pastures lead stress-free lives grazing in a state of utter happiness. Boarding students at the free school ‘*Kodomo-no-Ie* (Children’s Home)’ run by the church have been working with the staff members to raise dairy cattle, sheep, horses and more.

The Children’s Home once stopped its operation in March, 2007 after 25 years of history, but its principle and practice were succeeded to the Social Welfare Corporation, Denmark Pastures Welfare Community. Adapting to the changing times, we have been establishing facilities that society requires such as an independence support home, an orphanage, a child psychiatry clinic, a special elderly nursing home and an employment support type B facility.

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Let me write about the ‘Pastures’ first, the core of the corporation.

Boarding students of the independence support home and the staff members work hard together for raising dairy cattle and other animals. At 5:30, a little before dawn, they fetch cows from the meadow and bring them to a milking parlour, rubbing their sleepy eyes. After checking on the physical condition of the cows, each of which has a name, they milk the cows with gratitude. The raw milk is processed at the low temperature of 65°C and is bottled without being homogenized. (The layer of cream would be turned into butter if mixed.)



Work on the pasture / Loading hay onto a truck

365 days a year, rain or shine, they clean up the cows' dung and feed them hay. There is a wide range of labor on the pasture. They look after the cows when they get sick or have babies. Shipping cows is also their work. They are required to be always watchful and careful because it's living creatures that they are attending to. Under such circumstances, with both the students and the staff needing to fully use their bodies and minds, there are, naturally, conflicts as well as cooperation between them. Feeling close to other living creatures' life, holding awe and respect to nature, and facing their own attitude to life, the students and the staff try to learn how to compromise with each other.

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30 children lead their lives in an orphanage '*Makiba-no-Ie*'. For different reasons, they live separated from their parents. One thing that is clear is that living in '*Makiba-no-Ie*' was not their choice, but due to the convenience of adults. The children are not to blame.

After school is over, they come back to their 'home' bearing inevitable envy toward their classmates who go back home where their family members are waiting for them. Growing older, they vaguely start to learn why they can't go home or live with their families, but none of them are convinced of the reasons.

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They often fight claiming righteousness. Living in the same limited space, they must express their discomfort with their 'homemates'. They often fight, attempting to accept others, putting themselves into others' shoes. If the staff were to arbitrate fight, children immediately speak back, "you guys tell us nothing but right thing, huh?" They seem to grow by working out differences among themselves.

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The staff members are helpless in addressing the children's emotional outbursts, which are simply expressions of the difficulties of their daily lives. Their direct output of emotions, such as fretting, abusive language, violence or neglect, badly hurts the minds of staff members. They are constantly asked about their own attitudes towards life.

Children can detect grown-ups' superficial understanding or fake kindnesses. They sniff out pretendings as they grow. After all, neither children nor adults can grow without working through frictions between others. The more friction they experience, the more desire they have to understand others better, in order to become warmhearted people.

Nowadays, we can survive without building relationships with others. In consequence, we rarely have opportunities to learn about so-called 'morals' or 'etiquette'. I am of the opinion that our indifference to others has been leading us to the exclusion of inconvenient people or the affront to the dignity of others.

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I believe the environment of Denmark Pastures provides us with a unique prospect, where children can express themselves freely.

As yet, I don't know what it is, but someday, if I earnestly keep on listening to the children, I think they will teach me what to do and how to do it.

I hope to rich-heartedly grow with the children with the help and encouragement from church, communities and facilities concerned.

Welcome to the Japan Lutheran College / Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary

Motoo Ishii
Principal
Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary

Entering from the east gate, a well-maintained grass area spreads before one's eyes. Over it, we see a chapel with a cross nobly standing over the front gate. The chapel, designed by architect Togo Higashino, looks like a fort, combining upright concrete boards and a curved wall. It is located in the center of the school campus and is surrounded by laboratories, classrooms, and athletic fields.



110 years have passed since the establishment of the school, and 50 years since it was moved to its present place in Mitaka, during which time the appearance of the school buildings have changed. Yet the chapel, both in name and reality, has been the center of the seminary.

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We can see two newly installed stained-glass windows behind the chapel altar on either side of the cross. The left represents 'Water of Creation' from the Old Testament and the right 'Water of Life of Jesus.' The pipe organ, installed several years ago with great help from Lutheran churches, echoes as if making the whole chapel an instrument. On weekdays, the students and the teachers get together for the service around noon to share the blessings of the Lord.

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The Seminary needed to expand its facilities after obtaining authorization as a college, so it moved to Mitaka in 1969. This move was also a great opportunity for the seminary to reconfirm its mission. In 1976, the Christian Social Welfare Course was established, which was later reorganized into Social Welfare Department with a graduate school attached. In 2005, the Department of clinical Psychology was set up. Up until today, our college and seminary have not only been producing pastors, but also educating students wishing to serve people in difficult circumstances.

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An oil painting on the wall of the first floor in the main building is the memorial of one of our graduates, Ms. Lutsuki Fujisaki. She hoped to work for the poor in Asian countries after graduation. She went to the Philippines to study more, where she lost her life trying to save two Philippine friends of hers who were drowning in the sea. The brilliant color of a golden wheat field, which had grown from a single grain, has been affirming students' resolution not to forget Lutsuki's life and will.



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We have four seminarians now, three of whom are women from the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC.) There are currently nine women pastors in the ELC and the number of women pastors is increasing over the world. The roles of these pastors will probably change in accordance with the changing world. We have high hopes for their future impact on society.

We have started a general course for the public and three retirees are currently studying in this course. They not only learn about the Bible, faith, or history, but are also given time to reconsider what the Lord, religion, and life are. We hope the course is regarded as educational for the congregation. It would be great if we had some students from JELCW.

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With the view of raising professional resources to understand human mind, spirit and welfare, we reorganized the Department of Human Welfare Psychology into five courses. Our college is such a small school with no more than 100 students in each grade, but it is our pleasure to know that the college has been sending out a number of graduates who are resolved to realize a society where all life and dignity is respected for people with different backgrounds to co-exist. We are very happy to know that they are doing excellent jobs in communities, facilities, hospitals, and schools across the nation.

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There stands a small monument in front of the chapel along a pathway, which says 'Blessed is the life in which one loves and serves, not himself, but his neighbor'. Let us send these words of Luther to our graduates.



Report from Donation Recipient

-Supporting a primary school on a sandbank of a big river-

Kazuko Matsuzawa
Representative
Live Life Together (LLT)

The Brahmaputra River which flows into the eastern area of Bangladesh from the north of India is dotted with sandbanks (called 'char' in Bengali) of various sizes. The width of the river is 10 kilometers at its widest. The number of habited sandbanks is said to be over 400, but even the government doesn't grasp the exact number of the sandbanks nor of the inhabitants because some of the sandbanks have been submerged. Some are thought to be hundreds of years old. People living on them are poor farmers having no farmlands on the mainland and they are constantly scared of floods. Most adult men go to the mainland for work while married women and the elderly remain at home.



We have been supporting children on these sandbanks by giving them opportunities to study since 2001. We built a tin-roofed and tin-walled one-classroom school where 15 boys and 15 girls study for five years using government-designated textbooks. As of last year, we have sent out 990 graduates. Students must take graduation exams after finishing five years of education. Fortunately, no students have failed and more than 30% of the students have achieved A grades.

It's a very small number of children that we are supporting but we sincerely hope that this support of ours will be of some help for them to get out of the state of extreme poverty that their parents have long lived in.



TNG

-The 21st TNG National Children Camp-

Rev. Tomono Miura
Leader
The Next Generation

Young children, teenagers, and the youth sent out to camps organized by TNG go back to their respective congregation after going through various things at a camp, which takes place only once a year and is consequently something very special for them. Their everyday lives of faith are based on their church lives.

It is our great pleasure to know some participants are led to baptism, confirmation, and devotion through the activities of TNG Camp. Needless to say, however, they are nurtured in each congregation by pastors and people of the church. We therefore regard it crucial to have a close relationship with their individual churches. TNG encourages our participants to obtain the consent of their pastors and also to report back to their congregations about their experiences in the camp.

Due to the development of social media (SNS), such as internet, our society seems to have become more and more complicated. Meanwhile, it makes the world narrower and closer to each other. TNG staff can obtain a good knowledge of young people across the country.

We hope to keep on cooperating with pastors and congregations for the present and the future of our young people. We will always remember with a gratitude that back in 1999 the first camp called 'International Camp for Boys and Girls' at that time was realized with a great effort made by JELCW.



The first camp in 1999 (The name of camp was "International Camp for Boys and Girls")

Sabah Support

-Welcoming Mr. & Mrs. Ken Phin-

Sae Koizumi
Shugakuin Church

My sister in Christ and I, who once had visited Sabah Theological Seminary (STS), decided to raise money when we learned that Mr. & Mrs. Ken Phin hoped to come to Japan privately to enjoy cherry blossoms.

They planned to fly to Tokyo on April 4th and stay in the *Kanto* district until April 11th, then visit the *Kansai* district until the 16th and go back home on April 18th.

Our concern was whether they would be lucky enough to enjoy the blossoms at their best, because it's getting less predictable when the flowering season is, due to climate change. All we could do was just watch the flowering time forecast on TV and pray for the perfect timing every day.

Fortunately, we could view beautiful cherry trees everywhere we went; Lake Biwa Valley on April 12th, Kaizuosaki on the 13th, the pathway on site at the Osaka Mint Bureau on the 14th after attending the service and Yoshino area in Nara. We stayed at *Horai Kurenai-no-Ie* with some of the old and the new board members of JELCW as well as those of some dioceses.

Hearing that Mr. Kawano, whose wife, who used to teach how to use computers, was sick, Dr. Ken Phin cancelled the schedule in Yoshino and made a one-day trip to Kumamoto to see him.

Dr. Ken Phin most happily exclaimed "Photo! Photo!" every time a marvelous scene came into her sight. This happened, for example, when she commanded a view of Lake Biwa from Mt.

Horai beyond the undulating waves of blossoms, when she saw the images of 2000 cherry trees along the Kaizuosaki Lakeside Promenade reflecting on the surface of the lake, when she found the blossoms of Osaka Mint Bureau bigger than those of the other places, and even when she had Chinese noodles in a tent of food stalls.

Thanks to the beautiful '*sakura*' that seemed to be welcoming Dr. Ken Phin and her husband everywhere they visited, we were very much refreshed and enjoyed sharing a variety of great sceneries and a wonderful time together.



On Mt. Horai in Shiga Prefecture