

The 26th JELCW Newsletter

No. 169. October 20, 2024
Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church Women
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Overall theme: **“Looking up at the rainbow bridge”**
Subtheme: **“For Peace, Generosity, and Diversity”**

Scriptural theme:

“I am putting my bow in the clouds. It will be the sign of my covenant with the world.” (Genesis. 9:3)

To you,

A Sign of Covenant

Rev. Kimiko Hiraoka
Pastor, Houya Church



God says, “I am now making covenant with you and with your descendants” (Genesis 9:9). God creates everything in Genesis. But afterwards the world, once created by God, filled with love and reciprocal consideration, begins to completely collapse! Humans begin to betray God. Neither men nor women, symbolic existences of difference, admit sin and people eventually start killing each other.

Genesis describes humans’ deviation from God, which meant the end of the world which was once full of mutual love. Our desires went far beyond human society, leading the earth, its nature, and animals to perish. The Bible says God grieved to see it. “When the Lord saw how wicked everyone on earth was and how evil their thoughts were all the time, he was sorry that he had ever made them and put them on earth. He was so filled with regret.” (Genesis 6:5-6). God grieved over the word of his own creating, so He caused a flood and covered the earth with water. Yet the Lord did not terminate the whole thing, because it is a story of creation. He let Noah and his family survive.

Here is God's will. After the flood, He puts a bow in the sky as a sign of promise that a flood would never happen again. “As a sign of everlasting covenant which I am making with you and with all living beings, I am putting my bow in the clouds. It will be the sign of my covenant with the world.” (Genesis 9:12-13) The bow has become an eternal sign of covenant between the Lord and his creations.

The overall theme the 26th JELCW has chosen is based upon these words of God. What is it like, this rainbow bridge that JELCW is looking up at? God put a rainbow in the sky as a sign of new contract, which does not necessarily mean that humans abandoned bad ideas or desires. It is that God has changed his mind to forgive us and to invite us to an everlasting contract. This story of recreation in Genesis reminds us of baptism, a contract with Christ. “The few people in the boat—eight in all—were saved by the water which was a symbol pointing to baptism, which now saves you. (1 Peter 3:20-21a)

I pray that the activities of the 26th JELCW firmly stand on the covenant with Christ to achieve peace through forgiveness, generosity towards others, and unbiased judgement of diversity as a good fruit born from evangelism. May the rainbow bridge, which JELCW is looking up at, give hope and courage to those who do not have words or powers!

< The 26th JELCW's Theme and Action Plans >

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- Action Plans -

1. Practice of prayer in society
2. Publishing “Newsletter” and “Hibiki” twice a year each, to provide up-to-date information via our website
3. Studying the Bible on independently to appreciate words of God for us to grow
4. Practical support both domestic and overseas through offerings
5. Succession of faith to the next generation and sharing at missionary with varied generations
6. Support in solidarity to both domestic and foreign disasters

< Self-introduction of the 26th JELCW board members >

Let us build up a rainbow bridge with prayer.

Kazue Taniguchi
Chairperson
Matsumoto Church



How do you do, my friends?

I am Kazue Taniguchi, chairperson of the 26th JELCW. I belong to Matsumoto Church in the Kohshin district of the East Diocese. I am originally from Hakozaki Church in the Kyushu Diocese.

Several months have passed since I received a baton from the 25th JELCW board members. “What is JELCW?” I, who had little knowledge about the organization, started my role, unsure of my footing, by reading “Newsletters” and “Hibiki” in the past as well as asking senior members some questions.

Of the six plans I mentioned above, I think what characterizes JELCW is its connection and solidarity with other organizations. We act not only domestically but globally as well. For instance, we supported the Sabah Theological Seminary for many years and there are a good number of pastors in Malaysia now. We decided to finish the support this spring believing we did long enough to bear fruit. Also, I consider it essential for us Christians to be with the people hurt by natural disasters and wars as well as to pray for them and express solidarity through our offerings.

The issue of shortage of pastors in Japan has been long discussed. To support the Lutheran Theological Seminary and the students studying there is one of JELCW's crucial works. We will continue to help young Lutherans physically and spiritually through the activities of TNG (The Next Generation). Let us unite our hearts to support the seminary and TNG.

We would like to share activities and information with you all via “Newsletter” and “Hibiki” while nourishing our faith by studying the Bible. To be honest, I am continually astonished to see how widely the activities of JELCW cover.

I believe that we would be greatly blessed by God when we connect ourselves to diocese and JELCW, not just to individual churches. It is very regretful that more and more churches are taking a recess for different reasons, but we are determined to make every effort for the coming three years, to be always close to you and work with you. God put his rainbow in the sky for us. Following that, let us put our rainbows out among people and nations on this planet!

Motoko Numazaki
Vice President & Treasurer
Kyoto Church



I am sorry to have been absent from the General Meeting in June due to a sudden illness of my family member.

I was born and raised in Shimonoseki. I belonged to Kokura Church for seven years and I have been a member of Kyoto Church for 17 years. This is my first time to be a board member of the West Diocese, and I feel so nervous. But I am ready to work hard for the next three years, learning the history of JELCW. I hope I will be smiling with joy when I fulfill my responsibilities as a vice chairperson and treasurer three years from now. Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated.

I am married. I have twin sons and a turtle. I enjoy taking photos of flowers and “sudoku.”

Shion Murohara
Secretary
Koromo Church



I transferred from UCCS (The United Church of Christ in Japan) to JELCW over 10 years ago. In spite of that, I was appointed one of the JELCW's board positions this time. To learn the history of JELCW, I read the “Newsletters” retained in Koromo Church. They told me the extraordinary efforts made by the board members in the past, which made me feel a lot of pressure. When the board members of the 26th JELCW first met, however, all my worries and concerns vanished. Instead, I was filled with God's blessings, feeling myself ready to step forward with the help of God.

I am from Kyoto, married, and have four cats. My pastime is growing vegetables in my garden.

“Let us run keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom faith depends from beginning to end.”

(Hebrews 12:2)

Chimako Nakashima
Public Relation Officer
Tamana Church



How do you do? I am Nakashima in charge of public relations of the 26th JELCW.

I belong to Tamana Church in the northern part of Kumamoto Prefecture. I worked at Tamana Lutheran Kindergarten for many years. After retirement, I served as a delegate at church, then a board member of JELCW. Is the Lord telling me to be helpful to you all?

I doubt I will be of any help to you all, but I am determined to try my best for the next three years, supported by you all, and former board members. I am looking forward to working with you all.

The 25th JELCW Board Members

President	Kumi Yagi	Vice President	Yumiko Tokuhiro
Treasurer	Terumi Tateno	PR Officer	Miyuki Hirose

We appreciate your hard work during the difficult times of COVID-19. Please take a good rest.
May God lay blessings on you all!

Our Future

For JELCW to move forward, the following were adopted at the 26th General Meeting in June.



~ Supporting Sabah Theological Seminary ends ~

Back in 1994, JELCW started to financially support the seminarians of STS as the commemorative project for our 100th Evangelical Anniversary. The project was supposed to last for 10 years, but 30 years have passed since its beginning.

For these past years, we have helped a number of seminarians with their learning and lives. It reminds us of the days when JELCW was supported by oversea countries at its beginning. It is certain that we were blessed to have been provided this long time of support by passing the baton of prayer to STS.

We have chosen to put an end to financial support, but the friendship between us will continue, praying for each other as the vessels to convey Christ's words.

Lastly, we would like to ask you to support the students still enrolled in STS through your offerings. (Thank you.)

~ Supporting seminarians in Japan starts ~

The 26th JELCW has adopted the motion that we will support the seminarians of Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary.

It is crucial to help future pastors because of the current shortage of pastors. Let us talk about how we can support the students so that we may have as many new devoted servants as possible.

~ JELCW's Strategic Planning Committee has been set up ~(Arikata Committee)

Reviewing Committee

The future of JELCW has been a big issue over the years. Nevertheless, we have not reached any solution for it yet. It is partly because the General Meeting is held every three years, which could be one of the reasons for its slow progress. In fact, a number of churches, particularly in the East Diocese and the Kyushu Diocese, have temporarily closed. It is unquestionable that we are in a critical situation.

There must be variety of reasons for these closures, including decreasing involvement in each diocese and JELCW. First, the committee needs to know what exactly the problems are to find out what could be changeable, and to change them boldly. Some churches in Hokkaido are now in unstable situations. We have to find a way for these churches to survive.

We are waiting for your ideas and opinions for JELCW to step forward, regardless of age or experience. Let us work together for the following generations.

– Centennial Anniversary of JELCW –

JELCW will be 100 years old in 2028. We would like to introduce five female missionaries from abroad who dedicated their lives to preaching the gospel in Japan. In this issue we introduce Ms. Martha B. Eckhard, the first missionary who devoted herself to education for girls in Japan.

• Visiting Martha B. Eckhard •

■ Her early life



Missionary Martha Boujon Eckhard was born on April 17, 1887 in Tennessee, U.S. as the second daughter of Abel and Aida. ^[1]_{SEP} Around the year 1887 (Meiji 20), when Eckhard was born, Japan was trying to take in a variety of knowledge and technologies from western countries. In the same year, Lutheran churches in southern America decided to send missionaries to Japan.

Ms. Eckhard's grandfather was a pastor and her father was a pious Christian. She was raised in a religious home filled with love. "Be kind to the less fortunate," "Do your daily work properly," and "Accomplish the mission delivered from God" were the home disciplines. Ms. Eckhard earnestly followed the disciplines. She lost her parents when she was 13. She and her siblings were looked after by their father's aged mother. With great help from her grandmother, she could get over the sorrow and studied very hard.

She went on to college, which was rather unusual for girls back in those days and there she encountered the magazine "Tidings." It was this publication that made her interested in Japan and she strongly hoped to be there someday as a missionary.

■ Mission work in Japan

In 1913 (Taisho 2), she was called to a mission Work in Japan. She left the Port of San Francisco in 1914 and arrived in Yokohama Port when she was 26. She learned the Japanese language for 2 years before working at Saga Kindergarten in Saga Prefecture for a year. She moved to Fukuoka city to work as a principal of Nampaku Kindergarten. Around that time, a night school of English was open at a church in the Hakata area as one of the missionary works. She was a kindergarten principal during the daytime and a teacher at night. She occasionally taught cooking as well. Those were the busy and fulfilling days for her.

■ Establishing a girls' school

In 1921 (Taisho 10), Lutherans in America started to donate hoping to establish a girls' school in Japan. Ten years before this movement, a boys' school, Kyushu Gakuin, had been established, an achievement which naturally stimulated the movement. Female missionaries in Japan of those days agreed to the movement as well.

In 1922 (Taisho 11), the establishment of girls' school was officially adopted. A preparatory committee was formed and Ms. Eckhard and Mr. Jiro Murakami, an English teacher at Kyushu Gakuin, were chosen to bear full responsibility. Lutheran churches started raising money for the project with a target amount of US \$175,000. Two years later, the figure reached US \$256,000. Over 300,000 people donated to make the project happen (US \$5 in 1923 was worth ¥50,000 in 2005, so US \$256,000 was worth ¥2,560,000,000) It is just incredible.

Thus, the establishing of a girls' school in Kumamoto started. JELCW purchased a plot of land of 10,600 square meters on a hill in Murozono in the suburb of Kumamoto City. The school building was the largest and most modern girls' school in Kyushu. Ms. Eckhard and Mr. Murakami now had to recruit teachers for the school, and it was not an easy job to do.

In 1926 (Taisho 15), the school, Kyushu Jogakuin, opened. The school motto was "Women blessed with love and light." Principal Eckhard and Vice Principal Mr. Murakami selected the textbooks, the level of which was almost the same as that of Kyushu Gakuin's. In April, 70 girls entered the school.

■ From war days to postwar days

There was a sign of war even at school. In 1941 (Showa 16), Ms. Eckhard went back to America from Nagasaki Port. In 1945, (Showa 20) when the war ended, Vice Principal Mr. Eto wrote to Ms. Eckhard. Receiving the letter, she came back to Japan with great difficulties in 1946 (Showa 21). In December of that year, the school had a Christmas service and Christmas pageant after five years' absence.

A "6-3-3" system was introduced at the school; six grades for elementary, three grades for junior high (compulsory education), then three years of high school before moving on to university. The school's name, "Kyushu Jogakuin," which had been forced to change to "Shimizu Girls' High School" during wartime, was restored. A junior high school and a senior high school were also established the next year.

■ Interaction with other facilities

Ms. Eckhard was suffering from joint pain for a long time, but she attended services at the chapel, led Bible classes, and performed volunteer work. She often visited leprosy patients to comfort them, taking students with her. Kaishun Hospital for leprosy patients was built by Hannah Riddel, a mother of sorts to leprosy patients, and was located within a 10 minute-walk from the school. She was a board member of the Kyushu MTL, a supportive association for people with leprosy, and of Jiai-en, a social welfare facility, established by Mode Paulus who belonged to the same Lutheran church as Ms. Eckhard.

■ Farewell to Kyushu Jogakuin

Ms. Eckhard put an end to her long educational activities in June of 1955 (Showa 30) and left Kyushu Jogakuin. More than 600 people gathered at Kumamoto Station to see her off on the day she left Kumamoto. There arose a large choir on the platform when the train she was on started to move. The song was Hymn 405.

She was called to heaven at an elderly home in Washington D.C. in May of 1969 (Showa 44). The ceremony to commemorate her death was held at the chapel of Kyushu Jogakuin where a great number of graduates completely filled the chapel. Ms. Paulus closed her condolence speech by saying "Death is a precious gift from God."

■ Current Kyushu Jogakuin

Kyushu Jogakuin has changed its school name to Kyushu Lutheran Gakuin. It is now co-educational and includes a nursery school, a junior high school, a senior high school, a college and an international school. It will be 100 years old in two years. Ms. Eckhard's spirit has been properly handed down, and good education and management which fit the times are being done every day.

We hope that Kyushu Lutheran Gakuin, with its long history, will continue to progress under God's blessing.

(Compiled by the 26th JELCW BOD)

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