

The 26th JELCW Newsletter

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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 covenant with the world."
(Genesis 9:13)

To you,

Christ is the foundation



Rev. Chitose Sakamoto
Pastor, Houya Church

But the people there would not receive him, because it was clear that he was on his way to Jerusalem.

When the disciples Jacob and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" Jesus turned and rebuked them.

(Luke 9:53-55)

Jesus taught 'generosity' to the disciples, who were filled with clannish passion, hoping that others would feel and act the same as they do. We tend to expect people around us to agree to our ideas, understand them and work together when we are earnestly engaged in activities. What happens to us when we are rejected by people? There might rise inside us feelings of loneliness, bitterness or even resentment. These misunderstandings do happen in ordinary daily communication, and it could occur in church as well. We, who have the same faith, are apt to reckon that we completely and correctly understand each other, which is only a wishful expectation. It is inevitable for us to see it collapse in front of us, wondering why it happens despite sharing the same faith.

We should always keep it in mind that our foundation is not ourselves but Jesus, if we truly wish to be free from the question above that is hard to answer. Instead of placing ourselves in the center, we need Jesus to change us through difficulties, temptations, conflicts, numerous setbacks and repentance so that we may place Jesus in the center. What should be done at church to achieve it is that each of us shares procedures and prays on behalf of others. Chosen and gathered by Christ, our one and only foundation, we have met each other. Still, it is easy to fall into the misconception that "since the foundation is the same, everything else must be the same. Here Paul says, "The material of each one's foundation is different." He writes in Corinthians, "For God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid. Some will use gold or silver or precious stones in building on the foundation; others will use wood or grass or straw. And the quality of each one's work will be seen when the day of Christ exposes it." (Corinthians 3: 11-13). Jesus Christ has already placed our one and only foundation, and each of us builds a house on it. The personality we are born with, the environment in which we are

raised, our path of life, or the activities we are engaged in all vary enormously. God bestows on each of us different gifts and talents. Making the most of them, each of us creates a unique and special life. When each one's gifts and talents make a perfect harmony and beautifully decorate the foundation, the relationship in Jesus would be tremendously rich and broad, appealing deeply to individual existence.



— 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, following Martha B. Eckhard, we introduce Elsbeth Strohm who exerted herself to establish 'Kibou-no-Ie' (House of Joy and Hope) in Kamagasaki, Osaka.

• ‘... that still bear fruit in old age...’ •

(Psalms 92:15)

■ Preface

On October 6, 2022, an email was sent to Kamagasaki Kibou-no-Ie. It was from Bodo Walter, who used to be a missionary. The email informed us that Ms. Elsbeth Strohm had passed away at five o'clock in the afternoon on October 5th in her room of an elderly home. She peacefully ascended to heaven eight months after her 100th birthday in June.

The email went on to tell us that Ms. Strohm's 30 years' devotion to the people, especially in Kamagasaki, who are on the periphery of the society, was not just a blessed but an awfully difficult and constrained yet creative work as well. The significance of the work has been succeeded by a lot of people, starting with the workers at Kamagasaki Diaconia Center 'Kibou-no-Ie' established by Ms. Elsbeth Strohm.



■ Her early life

Elsbeth Strohm was born on Feb 2nd, 1922, as the eldest daughter of five siblings in Fleinheim, Württemberg in southern Germany. Since her parents belonged to a prisoners' supporting organization, they charged themselves with the responsibility of temporary homestay for prisoners released from prison, she repeatedly moved within Germany with her family.

In 1945, the Strohm family had to move from Breslau (present Wrocław, southwest of Poland) to southern Germany due to the worsening war situation and approach of the Soviet military. After the war was over, Elsbeth studied at a bible school and also had contact with a Christian organization which worked on prostitution issues.

▪ **To Japan, then to Kamagasaki**

Elsbeth was sent to Japan as a missionary to engage in the prostitution problems, but she found out that the circumstance regarding prostitution in Japan was too different from that in Germany for her to get the results she had expected. She temporarily returned to Germany, and came back to Japan in 1960. She decided to quit 'Midnight Mission' after some consideration. Instead, she sought to serve at JELC.

She visited Lutheran churches in various places to find a place to practice diaconia. When she was shown around Kamagasaki, Osaka in 1963, she was reminded of the newspaper article about riots of Kamagasaki two years before. This is how she first encountered Kamagasaki.

▪ **Days in Kamagasaki**

She decided to work in Kamagasaki. She rented a house in Sannoh-chou in April of 1964, where she looked after infants and little children. That was the beginning of the nursery school 'Sannoh Baby Center. (Sannoh Kodomo Center, currently)

In 1970, she established an ecumenical group 'Kamagasaki Association.' (Currently, Emmaus Osaka Centre) with the missionaries, pastors and Christians who had been working together in the area. They helped people in need to survive the cold winter and so forth. Around 1973, they started to tackle the issue of alcohol addiction and established an anonymous meeting group, 'Musubi-kai.' They purchased an old warehouse residence for this activity. This is the very residence that was turned into 'Kibou-no-Ie' Strohm established.

In 1977, JELC's pastor Nobuyuki Shigeno was sent there to work with them. Here are the words of Pastor Hideo Nagayoshi (JELC Tokyo Ikeburo Church), who was a 12th grader then, "I saw Elsbeth Strom holding a baby in her each arm in the dark at the baby center while Pastor Shigeno was in charge of an alcoholic anonymous (AA) at an old wooden building, 'Kibou-no-Ie.' Overwhelmed by the gravity of life, all I could do was just standing still. "Go home," Strohm said to me. "Go home if you keep standing without doing anything." That was my start.

▪ **Back to Germany**

She returned to Germany after retirement. She settled in Braunschweig (Brunswick) where she learned acupressure and got a license when she was 80 years old.

In 2003, she moved to Schloss Schwanberg and started acupressure treatment. The next year, however, she got sick and spent the rest of her life at an elderly home in Kitzingen from 2005.

The following are the words of Pastor Walter. "Ms. Elsbeth lived with a firm belief and worked filled with blessings. 'If we live, it is for the Lord that we live and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (Romans 14:8)"

She had prepared the scripture for her funeral. 'I saw his star. It was not over Jerusalem, nor the shrine, not above King's Palace, but it was shining above a stable and I followed it.' (Matthew 2)



Lastly, let us introduce the answering letter from Strohm to Pastor Hitoshi Akiyama, representative of Kibou-no-Ie, who wrote to celebrate Strohm's 100th birthday.

‘Dear Akiyama-san,

Thank you very much for the letter, the watermark card and photos. I put them on a desk near the window so that I always enjoy looking at them. I feel so happy and grateful for these big presents.

It doesn't matter that I received them after my 100th birthday, I am so pleased to know that I still have some friends who kindly write to me.

How is Kibou-no-Ie? I am glad that you let me know how it is doing and that the activities are going well.

I am age-appropriate fine. Once in a while, I recall my days in Osaka and Kamagasaki, wondering how the areas are now or if everything will stay the same as it has been.

I hope that truly needed works you would acquire through your own experiences will go well.

I am sending my sincere greeting to your co-workers and people I have never met as well. May God bless you all and be always with all of you who work in Kamagasaki every day. Please give my best regards to my old acquaintances, if there are any.

Elsbeth Strohm’

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We express our deepest gratitude to Missionary Elsbeth Strohm for her dedicated work in Kamagasaki. We pray that she will rest peacefully at the Lord's side forever.

(Edited by the 26th JELCW)

※ This article is based on Kibou-no-Ie Newsletter #209 & #211.

< Reports from JELCW Supporting Members >

• Self-introduction & Action Plans •

‘Itsukushimi’ (Affection)

Kanto Area: Akiko Nemoto

Kansai Area: Akie Momiyama



Ms. Nemoto

I am Akiko Nemoto from Ohmori Church, East Diocese. To be honest with you, I accepted the position with little understanding about Itsukushimi. I am in the middle of studying about it. Thanks to the predecessors' documents, I have learned that Itsukushi used to be connected so closely with women of Korean and Taiwanese churches that they sometimes hold a joint study meeting. I was totally amazed at the prominent speakers of the meetings. I will try my best to make a good plan along the activity policy under restrictions of budget and persons.



Ms. Momiyama

I am Akie Momiyama from West Diocese and I continue to be in charge of Itsukushimi. I plan to have a meeting with the members of Kinki Evangelical Lutheran church in person to discuss Yearly activities. We would appreciate it if you kindly pray for Itsukushimi.

LWF/WICAS (Lutheran World Federation / Women In Church and Society)

Tomoko Saito

I have accepted a role of supporting WICAS, a subcommittee of Lutheran World Federation, with little knowledge about what exactly WICAS does or what is the reason of its existence. I have been learning the past activities with a help of predecessor and information on website.

I have nothing specific to report at present, but I will make an effort to understand the meaning of my role and to share the needed information with you all. This is my first time to be involved in JELCW. Appreciating this opportunity, I will try my best to be of some help to you all.



NCC Women's Group (National Christian Council)
Yamato Yasuda



I am grateful for the time of prayer I shared with many Christians across Japan on World Day of Prayer held on May 7th. Let me inform you of the gatherings we have planned.

- ① April 26th : Bible Forum 'Reading the bible from my point of view' at Conference room of Japan Baptist Union (Online streaming available)
- ② October 8th : Sakuramoto Field Trip
Tour of Kawasaki History Museum to learn intercultural cohesion at KCCJ Kawasaki Church

NCC always remembers the people in difficulties, prays for them and acts for them. We would appreciate your cooperation and participation.

ACWCJ (Asian Church Women's Conference Japan)

East: Chiemi Shinjo Takiko Kishida
West: Aiko Miyake Tamaki Ohguro

ACWC is an organization connected by the forgiveness of sins on the cross beyond nations. 19 countries assemble every 4 years. Domestically, one-day seminar is held both in Kanto and Kansai districts. There will be a service at KCCJ (The Korean Christian Church in Japan) in Kansai District on Friday, October 3rd, and at KCCI Tokyo Church on Friday, November 7th. The country in charge of an assembly prepares the text for a service for all 19 countries to use.

We share the blessing and gratitude to look up at Jesus Christ despite the difference of language. We would like to see many of you at the church.

(Chiemi Shinjo)

< Financial Support for the Seminarians >

— The first grants were handed over —

The ‘financial support for the seminarians of Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary’ adopted at the 26th JELCW General Meeting has started. The donation rose to ¥217,000 and we handed it over to the seminarians in person. They were very grateful for JELCW's warm support.

Let us keep on helping our future Lutheran pastors together! It is so good to know that we are having a freshman in 2025.

We plan to give grants in June of 2025 and in January of 2026.



Jun Sumimoto in the left



Pastor Tomoko Yamato in the center

◆ Questionnaire ◆

- ① What is your favorite scripture? and why?
- ② What made you decide to become a pastor?
- ③ What kind of pastor would you like to be?
- ④ What food do you like and don't?
- ⑤ What is your pastime?

Jun Sumimoto



- ① ‘Do not be afraid - I am with you.’ (Isaiah 43:5)

I am encouraged by this scripture every time I feel insecure or worried or struggle with something. It is such a short scripture, but an empowering one which gives me peace only God can bestow. I can walk forward and start over again, believing that the Lord is always with me.

- ② It is not easy to put it in a word, but I would say that I thought it was my turn as well as my mission to convey the blessing I have

received from the Lord to people who have not received it yet. Besides, I feel so much happiness at church despite a variety of problems there. I was sure that no other place could replace church.

- ③ For the present, I am striving to become a pastor who firmly stands on the words of God. I also think it crucial to educate the following generation and communicate actively with people outside church, taking advantage of my youth and energy.

④ I like delicacy cuisine.

Large shellfish is not my favorite.

⑤ I enjoy eating with my friends, playing basketball, handball, futsal and so on. For wellness and relaxation, I exercise at a sports club. Lately, I have been a reluctant club member though

Tomoko Yamamoto

Ms. Tomoko Yamamoto was ordained on March 2nd. She will start to serve as a pastor at Kurume Church, Tanushimaru Church and Futsukaichi Church from this April.



◆ Congratulations ◆

① If I have to choose only one scripture, it would be Proverbs 16:9, 'You may make your plans, but God directs your actions.' It has been always this scripture that encouraged me when I had to make a decision.

② I am afraid it would be too long a story to tell in a few words, but let me try to make it short. The school I worked for was temporarily closed long due to COVID 19, during which time the prayers of every morning were streamed on YouTube. By reciting and listening to the messages at a service, I was inspired and comforted as well to get over the pandemic, which I had never experienced. After retirement, I chose to devote myself to church, hoping to continue to convey the words of the Lord

③ I would like to deliver the gospel to as many people as I can by listening to both the spoken and unspoken words of the congregation.

④ I came to prefer fish to meat, and Japanese dishes to western cuisine as I have become older. I love cooking and I am sure everything I make is delicious. I don't make anything that I don't like to eat.

⑤ I was crazy busy as a teacher at school and as a student at a seminary for 4 years.

Housekeeping, working and studying did not allow me to have any free time. I enjoy making elaborate dishes, gardening, and playing the flute, on which I have made little improvement after years of practice. I exercise as well. They help me feel refreshed.

♥ Supporting the 32nd Spring Teens Camp ♥

< Theme: Our daily bread >

The 2025 Spring Teens Camp was held in Ebino-city, Miyazaki, far away from Chiba where camp was held three years in a row after COVID 19.

Instead of succeeding discussion-oriented camps, we tried experience learning by means of agriculture. We stayed at an accommodation which used to be a school building.

We were excited about farm work, but unfortunately, the scheduled day was rainy and we had to change the plan, instead visiting a poultry farm. The owner of the farm practiced 'cage farming' and 'cage-free farming.' He told us how our daily food reached us, which gave us a good opportunity to think about what we eat every day. We fed the chickens and enjoyed the eggs they laid.



We studied about Manna in 'Exodus' and the Lord's Prayer as well to learn about the blessings from the Lord. We shared various blessings that each member had experienced. Some were visible, some were invisible, and others were seemingly unacceptable. At a closing service, Pastor Adachi preached to us that 'our daily bread' did not mean just 'food' but 'Jesus' as well, and that we were supplied both with bread and Jesus prior to our prayer.



Thanks to the prayers by the churches and the people related and the supports from the dioceses and JELCW, we had a fully blessed spring camp. Here I express my gratitude representing all the participants.

Satoshi Morita
Camp Leader