

The 26th JELCW Newsletter

No. 172 April 15, 2026

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 9:13)

“For the Lord is with me”



Rev. Yasushi Murohara

Pastor
Koromo Church
Kariya Church

**[The Lord Our Shepherd]
The Lord is my shepherd;
I have everything I need.
He lets me rest in fields of green grass
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water
He gives me new strength.
He guides me in the right paths,
as he has promised.**

**Even if I go through the deepest darkness,
I will not be afraid, Lord,
for you are with me.
Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.
(Psalms 23:1-4)**

As the year 2026 was about to start, I was thinking over the next year's church activities and my physical condition as well. I am in my late fifties. I have come to feel my age and talk about wellness more often than before with my friends. I am occasionally tempted to resist the decline of my strength.

I suggest to my congregation at gatherings that they accept everything that happens, but I must admit that I feel ambivalent about it when I am not well. In such times, I convey God's word not only to my congregation but to myself as well, and I am very much encouraged to witness my congregation surrendering to Jesus.

Three women of the congregation ascended to heaven between mid-January and early

March. Each had an illness and was spending everyday with it.

Ms. A felt a symptom 20 years ago. She went to see a doctor for an examination which revealed that it should have been supposed to be difficult for her to become pregnant and have a baby. She said that it was a blessing of God or a miracle that she was given two children. Ten years after the first symptom, she sensed discomfort in her body and visited a doctor again. The doctor told her that the illness relapsed. He advised her not to hold or lift anything heavy. Since that day, she had to live a life of fear that she might be called to heaven at any moment. I often heard her firmly saying to the church people that the Lord was with her and that she was cherishing every single day. The day before she passed away, she spent a peaceful day surrounded by her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Ms. B was a preacher in her 40s and went on to serve at church when retired. She lived on her own after she got an illness and attended service to pray mostly for others. She kept singing hymns and praying until the last moment of her departure.

Ms. C received a terminal prognosis in 2025. Under such circumstance, however, she cared about serving the church and also took care of her mother till she died. On the day of her mother's interment of ashes, she was walking with steady stops. It was one week later that she was called to God.

None of these three women struggled with their illness. Instead, they accepted and regarded it as time of the grace of God. I am certain that their faith that the Lord was with them enabled them to live in peace until the end of their lives. They were guided by the belief that “your shepherd's rod and staff protect me” throughout their lives.

The 26th JELC-W's Action Plan “Practice of prayer in Society”

Living as a Christian in Society



Living as a Christian in Society

Kazue Taniguchi

“Peace” is defined as follows:
A stable state of society free from wars, violence, discrimination, poverty and bullying. It is a circumstance where people can live with security and dignity.

By this definition, aren't we awfully far away from peace both domestically and globally? We humans have never seen a war-free world and it seems that we will have to witness other wars breaking out. A great number of lives have been lost including those of children. There are refugees, insecure in foreign countries without any guarantee of safety. When we look around us, there are people barely managing to survive without food for tomorrow, or a place to live.

Jesus descended to bring peace on earth with the love of God. Jesus was always there for the weak, standing by and encouraging them. We Christians are the people who seek for peace through prayers. It is essential to pray when we think about peace, yet I believe taking actions is no less crucial than prayer to achieve peace. Various actions are being taken inside and outside church. There are people waiting for our help. Why don't we keep our eyes and ears open to receive a sign from needy people in our society: We might find something that we can do, and if we find any, let's take actions, shall we?

In this issue, three people who are taking actions with prayers in their hearts are introduced.

(26th JELC-W Chairperson)
Matsumoto Church



Seeking for True Peace

Kyoko Tawara

We are now in Lent according to Liturgical calendar of 2026. I am grateful for the salvation brought by the profound, immeasurable love of God through the events of the Atonement and the Resurrection of Jesus. I believe in the infinite power of Word of the Lord which provides people in ordeal with love and peace and quenches a source of conflict for us all to live in peace.

In reality, however, the rapid growth in the fields of science and technology for the past quarter century seems to have spurred the deterioration of the environment. The nature created by the Lord is being polluted and destroyed. Also, conflicts over interests and rights between nations are in a constant state of spread supported by 'me-first' nationalism and patriotism. I am indignant and sad about US-Israel joint military operations against Iran. The current government of Japan supports the two nations instead of admonishing them that they are against the International Law. The government also appeals that Japan needs to strengthen its defense power as a national security strategy. We should be aware that Japan is now in a critical situation, expanding nationwide armament from Okinawa to Hokkaido.

Japan went through a number of wars in 79 years from the Meiji Restoration until the end of the World War II in 1945; the First Sino-Japanese War (1894.7~1895.4), the Russo-Japanese War (1904.2~1905.9), the Annexation of Korea (1910), World War I (1914.7~1918.11), the Siberian Intervention (1918~1922), Manchurian Incident (1931.9~1932.2) the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937~1945), and the Second World War (1939~1945). World War II brought many conflicts, including the Battle of Okinawa, random air raids across Japan and the atomic bombings onto Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But since World

War II, we have never experienced any war for over 80 years.

Why? It is because of the world-famous Pacifist Constitution of Japan which declares the renunciation of war. This January, however, our Prime Minister announced a snap election and achieved a landslide victory. Encouraged by it, Liberal Democratic Party administration has begun to prioritize the Japan-US Security Treaty and value the protection provided by the US nuclear umbrella and military training under the command of the US Army. The establishment of the National Intelligence Council and Anti-espionage Law, and the amendment of the constitution (explicit spell-out of Self Defense Force in Article 9, Paragraph 2, addition of Emergency Clause, etc.) are in progress.

It seems that prewar days are coming back. How can we trust a local government that reserves judgement by making an excuse that the national defense issue is an exclusive prerogative of the government. Every one of us is a sovereign citizen and has to speak up instead of leaving the issue to administration and doing nothing. Assuming Taiwan contingency, the government is strengthening defense capa-

bilities. The Type 12 long-range missile that covers 1000km distance to attack targets is planned to be deployed at Kengun SDF Camp in Kumamoto by the end of this fiscal year.

The construction of an ammunition depot and an underground shelter for headquarters is about to start. The government explains that strengthening defense acts is a deterrence to war and protects people's lives and safety. But how victims are saved in case of war is not at all simulated nor discussed. The Peace Constitution was enacted to prevent Japan from repeating the mistakes it made in wartime. Now is the time for us Japanese to relearn about the constitution of Japan with sincerity. We have to raise our voice against questionable issues.

The following is the Declaration of Peace Kyushu Diocese issued on March 21st, 2016.

"We, as peace-loving Christians, respect the spirit of the Peace Constitution and disagree with military buildup and construction of military camps or bases, and aspire to peaceful relations with neighboring countries based upon trust and reconciliation."

(Murozono Church)



Out of Darkness into Light

~ through supporting Gifu DARC~

Mariko Saitoh

On a certain day, 20 years ago, a woman visited a parsonage. She talked about her strenuous days of drug abuse and earnestly appealed the establishment of a rehabilitation center for addicts. That was how I met Ms. Tohyama, director of "Gifu DARC". It didn't take long to start "Gifu DARC" thanks to the support from churches in the city. The chairperson of the supporters club was my husband.

Members of DARC gradually increased. They spoke about their experiences and sang at churches of the city, sometimes mowed the grass and helped us with the church fair. We tend to have an anti-social impression for those addicted to alcohol or drugs, but the truth is they are people living with family issues or difficulties. The members help and encourage each other to tackle their addictions.

20 years have passed since my husband and I started to invite the members to our house who had no place to spend Christmas day or summer holidays and share dinner and happy times. It is a great pleasure for me and my husband to see them so happy just like children enjoying their homecoming.

The connection between the church and DARC has been strengthened. My husband is now studying the Bible with one of the members who hopes to become a pastor. May his dream come true!

Each and every member of the DARC was "called out of darkness into his own marvelous light" (Peter 2:9). My husband and I are privileged to learn and witness their experiences firsthand. We are allowed to feel God's work. Nothing could touch or delight us more. God has been greatly blessing us and our church for 20 years through the support of DARC, and we hope to go on living with them, our buddies.

(Ogaki Church)



Am I his friend?

Yushi Ichihara

In March, 2021, Ms. Wishma Sandamari's sudden death at the Nagoya Regional Immigration Services Bureau was widely reported in the media. I was so indignant about the incident that I started to follow the news on it. By that time, I had witnessed the difficulties that foreign people faced residing in Japan. I had known the refugee acceptance rate of Japan was extremely low, but I had not taken any actions against these matters. Why did I get interested in this incident so abruptly? It was because I was frustrated and bored due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Through this incident, I came to know the term "the regressive revision of the Immigration Control Act". I would like you to look into it in detail.

At the beginning of May of that year, I participated in a sit-in protest against the "Revision of the Immigration Act" held in front of the National Diet Building, where I met Mr. I. and Mr. P. They were from Africa and applying for refugee status. They displayed the photos of their country, desperately appealing its miserable state. They had been in Japan for more than 10 years, working, paying taxes, committing no violation of the law nor crimes. They had been living much more earnestly than I had, but they had their applications for refugee status rejected twice. As a result, they couldn't get jobs and were cut off from income. We

exchanged contacts and I told him to let me know when they got in trouble.

A few months later, Mr. P. called me saying that he wanted me to be a guarantor for his provisional release, which enables foreign people to live at their houses instead of being taken into custody. But various conditions will be imposed on those granted permission for provisional stay. They are not allowed to be employed. Yet, it is better than detainment. A guarantor needs to pay ¥100,000 as a security deposit, which was not easy for me to do, but I talked it over with my family and went through the procedure for him. The application was approved and Mr. P. could avoid detainment.

After realizing the situation of foreign residents in Japan as well as the immigration issue through these experiences, I began to earnestly read articles and columns about the issue and became fully aware that I, who had been indifferent to these problems, was doubtlessly one of those sustaining the present immigration law. I once had a similar guilty feeling when I learned about sexism in Japan. I couldn't help but feel guilty again over my indifference. I am being involved in these issues from a sense of guilt rather than a sense of mission. I worked hard with my congregation to support Mr. P., who eventually gave up applying for immigration and chose to take another way to go. It turned out to be a blessed relief when he kindly said to me that he was happy to meet me. I pray for his better and happier life in the future.

Pastor
Kamata Church
Yokosuka Church

< The Next Generation >

- Aiming at passing on the faith to the next generation and sharing missionary work with every generation -



TNG Committee

Taichi Takeda

Chairperson
Pastor(Tennohji Church)

I sincerely appreciate your constant prayers and supports for the TNG Committee. TNG consists of 4 groups; the Infants' Division (aged 0~5), the Children's Division (grade school students), the Teens Division (junior & senior high school students) and the Youth Division (college students ~ 35-year-olds).

Depending on the age, programs for evangelization are different. Each group has members to convey blessings to the next generation. We occasionally ask JELC followers or the pastors to share blessings and gifts from the Lord by sending us messages. TNG is mainly supported by its committee members, but also by the JELC followers across Japan.

Currently, the number of members is decreasing, but we are determined to not stop passing on the Word of God to young people, believing the Lord is always with us to provide hope and act as a guide to us.

We would appreciate your continued prayers and support for TNG.

TNG Committee



Infants Division

Satoshi Morita

We publish the 'Kohitsuji Letter' (Lamb Letter). twice a year. The articles are a brief message from a pastor, 'The World of Picture Books' recommending good ones, 'Thank you, God!'

We enjoy eating your blessing which recommends useful recipes for daily meal plans, etc. We make birthday cards, Christmas cards, and Kohitsuji (Lamb) stickers to sell. We would be very happy if you would purchase and use them at home or at daycares and preschools.

Pastor
(Ohmori Church)



Children Division

Takafumi Ikeya

Our main activities are holding 'Luther Child Camp' and making 'scripture cards' according to the Lectionary. The cards are used at JELC churches and kindergartens, and more than 200 sets have been ordered this year.

The Children Division consists of 7 followers and a pastor. There are volunteers for the camp and an illustrator for scripture cards. With their support, we have been sharing the blessing of God with children.

I would like to thank you for your continued support.

Pastor
(Hakata, Fukuoka-Nishi
Futsukaichi Church)



Teens Division

Tomoki Nakajima

Our division holds 'National Teens' Camp' at the end of March every year. That is a meaningful opportunity for the teenagers who don't have a lot of chances to talk about the Bible and Jesus with people around the same age to their hearts' content. The staff for the camp warmly watch over them. We hope that the experiences they go through will take roots in each one's heart and bear a lot of fruit.

Pastor
(Tonan Church)



Youth Division

Satoshi Tada

Applying age standards of LWF (Lutheran World Federation), the division is intended for people from 18 to 35. To organize a training session,

which started for the next generation in 2019, is our main work. It once stopped due to COVID 19, but resumed in 2023. With the help of the Okinawa Christianity Center, we learn about Okinawa's history of past days and present days.

What is the world? What is peace? What is it to live? The Youth Division values the opportunity to discuss these themes.

Pastor
(Kohshi Church)

– Centennial Anniversary of JELC-W –

JELC-W will be 100 years old in 2028. We have been introducing female missionaries from overseas who dedicated their lives to doing missionary work in Japan helping people in need.

In this issue, we would like to introduce Missionary John Bowman and his spouse Bernida Bowman, who

established 'Ayumi-no-le' (House of Progress) and other similar facilities in Gifu Prefecture. They spent their lives supporting people with disabilities, providing places for them to lead their lives encouraged by Mr. and Mrs. Bowman.

“I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me.”
(Matthew 25:40)

John Bowman was born in 1924 in Goodland, Kansas. In 1945, he first set foot in Japan as a soldier of U.S. Occupying Forces. What he witnessed was the horribly scorched earth from bombings

and the people who were suffering from the shortage of food. He was awfully heartbroken and began working to feed children. As he was leaving for America, a small child asked him to please return to Japan one day. It was that moment that he decided to become a missionary and fulfill that child's wish.



After marrying his wife Bernida in 1950, Mr. Bowman came back to Japan with her. They mainly worked in Yugawara, Kanagawa Prefecture but also ran camps for orphans from the Sanya area of Tokyo. In 1965, they moved to Ohgaki City, Gifu Prefecture, where the Ohgaki Lutheran Church was established, answering years of prayers by the Christian people of the city.



The original Ayumi-no-le

“I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Moved by this scripture, the hopes of Mr. Bowman and his congregation were realized in the construction of the 'Ayumi-no-le' (unauthorized home for the needy, no support from the government) in Tarumi, Fuwa County, in 1971. The land for the facility was donated by Mr. Nawa, a member of the congregation, and the construction was financed by a bank in the region.

Mr. Bowman would often mention how much he appreciated the support of the bank President despite him being a foreign citizen with few funds. The 'Ayumi-no-le' opened on April 3rd of that year. Three children with disabilities from the neighboring town of Sekigawara were the first residents.



In those days, as the Ayumi-no-Ie was the only facility for the disabled in Seinoh district, not just children in need but also adults with various disabilities came for consultation. In order to help them with their problems and fulfill their wishes, Mr. Bowman established the 'Paul Center' and the 'Luther Home.' To build these two buildings, he drove his truck back and forth along the Tohmei Expressway, collecting salvage materials in Tokyo, and transporting them back to Seinoh. The 'Paul Center' was a working place for processing quail eggs to sell, and the 'Luther Home' was a place for disabled people without anyone to care for them to lead their lives.

As time went by, people experiencing different difficulties came to gather in the Ayumi-no-Ie; children who had disabilities too severe to go to school, and others with physical, intellectual or mental disorders. To answer the wishes of these people, Mr. Bowman did everything he could do to raise money; street fundraising, calling for offerings, teaching English, and so on.

Before long, the number of service users and work forces increased, and financial management became difficult. After discussing the problem over and over again with prayers, Mr. Bowman chose to make the Ayumi-no-Ie a social welfare corporation. Moreover, with the help of people from the town, Gifu Prefecture, mass-media and city council, the Ayumi-no-Ie obtained approval from the government in October 1978. It has a day center, a residential care facility, an adult day-care facility and a group home now.



Mr. Bowman's car

Mrs. Bowman made cookies and cakes to sell at the city fair. She also opened a charity shop in 1988 with the church congregation. She donated all the earnings to the Ayumi-no-Ie till September 20th when the shop closed.

Mr. Bowman passed away on March 22nd, 2004 at the age of 79. He had come back to Japan as a missionary in 1953 and spent the remaining 57 years of his life in Japan. His 33 years' service at the Ayumi-no-Ie, his warm and compassionate gaze towards those less fortunate, as well as Mrs. Bowman's sincere support to her spouse, are deeply engraved in the hearts of everyone who has been involved with Ayumi-no-Ie.



Japan Evangelical Lutheran Ohgaki Church (Old chapel)



The present Ayumi-no-Ie

< Supporting Seminarians' Living >



(left to right)
Ms. Murohara,
Ms. Numazaki,
Ms. Nakashima,
Ms. Taniguchi
(Board Members)
Sem. Sumimoto,
Sem. Sumi,

Allow me to express my deepest gratitude for JELC-W's continued financial support.

I am in the final year of the seminary, so I have to work on my graduation thesis, do my teaching practicum, and attend lectures as well. To be honest, I have countless concerns about the future, but, strange to say, I feel less worried when I think of the support given to me by JELC-W.

I will go on doing the best I can to respond to JELC-W's love and prayer.

Jun Sumimoto

I am Kazuya Sumi, a sophomore at the seminary. I am always grateful for JELC-W's prayer and support.

I did my practicum at Ohokayama Church last year, where I witnessed and learned that 'church' heavily depends on each followers' gift bestowed by the Lord and his/her caring heart for others. I would like to become a pastor who creates an environment in which the congregation willingly offer their gifts to love and help each other.

Kazuya Sumi

The project 'Supporting Seminarian's Lives' was adopted at the 26th JELC-W General Meeting in 2024. We handed the donated support fund to two seminarians at Ichigaya Church on January 19th. We hope this project will last long with your continued support.

Translators



~Braille Translation~

Megumi Ando

The progress in IT devices and AI technology has been astonishing and the way the visually impaired get information has changed remarkably. Braille is becoming less and less necessary, but I would like to be of some help to those who need my work.



~English Translation~

Yuki Kai

JELC-W Newsletter covers a variety of topics, which sometimes not only increases my English vocabulary but provides me with an opportunity to learn about matters unfamiliar to me. I will keep on trying my best to convey contributors' true feelings and thoughts as properly as I can.