

Remembering the sisters who were affected by the Kumamoto Earthquake

Letter from Megumi Ando, Kengun Church

I will never forget that day. The foreshock on April 14th was 7 on the intensity scale. The actual earthquake on the 16th at midnight was much stronger than the foreshock. It was as if a giant was shaking my house. For the first time in my life, I thought “I might die today.” I had finally realized that I previously had not had the slightest clue as to what the victims of Hanshin and Tohoku earthquakes had experienced.

Kengun Church is near the town of Mashiki, the epicenter of the earthquake. There were many collapsed and half-collapsed houses in the neighborhood. The interior of the parsonage and the dishes in the church kitchen were destroyed, but the buildings themselves withstood the shocks.

We confirmed the safety of church members and told them to come to the church if they needed. If they could make it to the church by themselves, we asked them to. If they could not come by themselves, we went to help. The church was a designated temporary evacuation center, so the people from the neighborhood also came. “Please help the panicking families at the wide-area evacuation center.” “Can you accept the people who we have trouble communicating with? They have not eaten for three days.” We tried to respond to their voices and accommodate those people, as many as 50 at one point. For one month, Kengun Church was used as a private evacuation center. There were men and women, from 3 years old to 93 years old, of different nationalities and some with handicaps. We lived together, praying at and eating from the same table every day. The days without running water and propane gas led us to think creatively. Those with time went to stand in line for water trucks. Older children

took care of younger children. Kengun’s churchwomen and other evacuee women cooked meals from the food left in the church or in the refrigerators of other evacuees and emergency supplies delivered to the area. Newcomers to church gradually opened out to us and started to help with the after-meal cleanup and sweeping of the floors. Some people who kept their distance at first also began to offer their hands to guide the blind people. While everyone was fearful of the many aftershocks and worried about the future, we even shared the burden, like a real family.

A support team organized by the pastors from the Shimonoseki and Fukuoka areas took detours on the severed roads to drive to our church. They made many trips to deliver supplies and always encouraged the evacuees. We cannot thank everyone enough for the prayers, donations and supplies sent from the supporters from other Christian denominations across Japan, from friends, relatives, and the JELCW sisters. The donation from JELCW were given to those who were injured and forced to move out of their homes or expected to pay large amounts of money to repair their homes. “Thank you. This will help us greatly,” they said. “[His] power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). I think it’s true.

