

## The 24<sup>th</sup> 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

### As a Helping Hand of Your Prayers



**Rev. Ichirō Mizuhara**  
**Pastor, Zion Church**

Under the leadership of Rev. Matsumoto, the head of the Western District, with the support of the members of Zion Church, and prayers from churches around the country, we went to *Mabi-cho* in *Okayama* Prefecture and *Yasuura-cho* in *Kure City*—two cities that were hit by The Western Japan Torrential Rains in July, 2018. The members of this mission were Pastor Daichi Takeda and Pastor Yoshihiko Ito, clergy members of the Anglican Church, various Lutheran Church members, other concerned folks, and myself. We worked hard for about 40 days to clean the devastated areas. After working vigorously in severe temperatures higher than the ones of human bodies, I always ended up with salty sweat and slime.

When I came home exhausted, my wife glanced at my salty, sweaty, slimy work clothes and ordered me, “Wash them by hand!” and continued to say “AND help children take a bath!” When I called our elder daughter who was smiling with her back teeth shut tightly (age 7), she said “Dad, you stink, No! Don’t bathe me!” Also, our younger daughter (age 2) hid behind the curtains. Anyway, the present and the future members of the women’s group sent me back there pinching their noses.

A lot of other disasters occurred last year also. It is heartbreaking when we see the filmed footage of the damages. But those who suddenly became victims have been forced to live long under smelly and muddy conditions which films wouldn’t be able to convey. What could we do for them? Our work was to tell you about the smell there, and bring prayers from all over Japan to the victims. What were we? We were just the ones who moved heavy blocks as a helping hand, representing all of you who were praying for them. That is to say, you were there, too.

Primarily, “The Lord is at the site of the devastated areas. He stands close to the victims now and in the future.” I think this is the Lutheran Church’s theology. I appreciate that I am supported by people all over Japan, neighboring pastors and church members who share the same background. I pray that disasters will not strike again. But if they strike, I would like to be the one who runs to help whenever necessary.

## Reports from the Districts

### East District Women's Group A Step Forward

**Naomi Ichikawa, President**

About one year has passed since I became an officer of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church Women organization. In this year I have discovered how much I never knew about the women's groups' activities. Each church is facing various circumstances. For example, at one church, the proportion of aged members is increasing, and at another, the number of church members is decreasing. One piece of good news was that our booth at an event was very successful. Many women's groups brought goods or things they made and cakes they baked to sell at a church event, and people there were greatly pleased to buy those things. Their donations became offerings. People could feel love through each thing or cake.

The other day, we three officers, visited Tokyo Nursing Home. On the way, I'd been thinking of various ways I might be able to do something helpful for older people. That day, we learned rules for beginning volunteer work. We sang songs with the residents, talked and got along with each other. I deeply felt the importance of listening to each elderly person and of learning what to do from the nurses and faithful caretakers who knew better than we did. The nursing home requested us to schedule continuous visits there even if it was occasional.

Members of women's groups are doing volunteer work at many places. While we share experiences of our work with each other within the group, we hope you will also share our feeling about these activities, through women's gatherings or these newsletters. With of "Bringing our overflowing love to others" as our goal, I hope we can make a step forward.



Lively discussion at a presidents' meeting

### East Pacific Coast District Women's Group Looking Back at "The First Gathering"

**Shigeko Sakai, President**

On Saturday October twentieth last year, we held our women's gathering in the *Eikō-Shimada* Church.

We had not held our women's gathering in the *Eikō-Shimada* Church for quite some time. But since the Church members including the woman who was over 102 years old expressed their hope that the next gathering might be held there, we decided to do so. The church was full of 90 participants and unexpected guests.

This event succeeded not only through the effort made by the sisters of the venue, the members of *Eikō-Shimada* Church and *Eikō-Fujieda* Church, but also through the brothers' generous help. We felt the wonder of God's plan.

The theme of Dr. Toshiaki Takeuchi's lecture in the morning was 'Getting close, Healing, and Life.' He talked about examples of patients suffering from mental disorder. In the lecture, he told us nature had healing power, appealing to the five senses.

In the afternoon, there was a tenor concert. We were enchanted by the healing space surrounded by Mr. Masato Suzuki's singing voice. Then, we sang hymns louder than usual, directed by Mr. Suzuki. I was deeply and truly grateful for everything from the bottom of my heart.

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The next gathering will be held on Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup> at *Kōzōji* Church. Pastor Shingo Naitō from *Minorudai* Church will give a lecture about nuclear power plants.



At *Eikō-Shimada* Church

## West District Women's Group Liaison Committee of three areas

**Sumie Kuniyoshi, President**

On supporting the disaster-stricken area hit by The Western Japan Torrential Rains, we cooperated with our own mother church and delivered aid, as possible, to the victims. We also prayed together for the on-site assistance team (Pastors Ito, Mizuhara and Takeda.)

The Western District consists of three areas: *Kansai*, Eastern/ Middle *Shikoku*, and Western *Chūgoku*. We waited for the completion of the railroad restoration, and then we held the Liaison Committee meetings in all three areas. I attended these meetings as president of the District. In addition to 'services, worship, and conference,' Sister Sae Koizumi from *Shūgakuin* Church reported on the visit to Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia.

In the services in each venue, Pastors Ōshiba, Suzuki, and Takeda respectively offered suggestions to the women's groups for their future and blessing. We requested members of each church to lead hymns, and joined in song. In the conference, though it was limited in time, we mainly discussed the activation of the Liaison Committees in the three areas. We were inspired by the comment, "As long as even one person is studying at Sabah, it is important for her to work for others, even though it be under difficult conditions."

Going to the three different areas, I could feel the unique characteristics of each. I really appreciated these opportunities.

We held the officers' board meeting in December at *Yasuura-cho* in *Kure* City so that we could support the victims of the July, 2018 Western Japan Torrential Rains.



Singing hymns (at *Mihara* Church)

## *Kyūshū* District Women's Group Praying Together in Confidence

**Miho Hirayama, President**

We completed a year of "The Path With the Lord." Thank you for your support.

In order for us to feel closer to the recipients of our special offerings, we started our activities from the very first of the year (especially the *Kyūshū* District). Ninety-two sisters got together in the *Kengun* Church at the "Presidents'/ *Kumamoto* area meeting" in September of 2018. We thankfully listened to the story of how God cherished the Rainbow House in *Saga*. We are planning the meeting this fall, looking forward to seeing you smiling again.

\*



Presidents' & *Kumamoto* area Autumn meeting  
in 2018 (*Kengun* Church)

We are going to hold the 25<sup>th</sup> JELC Women's General Meeting in *Kumamoto* in June, 2021. The women of the *Kyūshū* District would like to wholeheartedly do their best to prepare for it. Also, I hope this occasion will deepen exchanges within our *Kyūshū* District.

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Many women's groups keep remembering elderly members who are not able to attend services, or the women who are ill. We would like to lend our support to each other for living in this society.

## Feature on Disasters

### Let's Pay More Attention to the Needs of Society

To live quietly is more difficult than it seems. This is even more true when people are forced into unpleasant and difficult living situations. It is easy to live trying not to be aware of others who need help, but we wish to follow the Lord, who stands close to the weak. The first feature is about disasters.

### Rescued by One Scoop of Mud at a Time —Victimized by Western Japan Torrential Rains

T.T., Hiroshima Chapel, Hiroshima Church

I am grateful for the prayers and support from every church member all over Japan and abroad. We are still in the midst of recovery, but I would like to express my deepest gratitude to you for having supported us. I would also like to report on the situation thus far.

By the Western Japan Torrential Rains, my house in *Yasuura-cho* in *Kure* city was flooded above the floor twice. The first of them was at about 21 on Friday, July sixth. Water came into the house and immediately soaked my feet, so I hurried to the second floor. I was relieved when the water went out at one o'clock in the middle of the night briefly, but at about four in the early morning, the water began to flood above the floor again. The force of water was so great that the road in front of my house changed into a muddy stream and more water raised the level of the flooding when I looked outside. Frightened, I made an emergency call 119, but they said they were unable to come to rescue me immediately. While I was listening to the sound of the heavy rain, in the moment I thought I would be washed away together with my house, "the Lord's Prayer" came to me. I prayed it again and again in the darkness of blackouts. When dawn broke, it stopped raining, and the water began to recede. Tears of relief ran down my face in the morning sun, knowing that it was okay and that I had survived. I walked the flooded streets and escaped before noon.



When I came home on the next day, the front door of my house was washed away and my treasured piano, the furniture, and the electrical appliances were all muddy. It was like a hell, and I was at a loss, but on July 11<sup>th</sup>, Pastor Ito and three others from Hiroshima Church ran to help victims in *Yasuura* by boat. Because our water supply was cut off, we could not use the bathroom. It was extremely tough to work in the mud. The heat of the summer hindered us from making everything alright. We had successive difficulties which we could not put into words. On July 13<sup>th</sup>, pastors from churches in *Yamaguchi* and *Okayama*, and on July 19<sup>th</sup>, those from churches in *Kumamoto* and *Hyōgo* ran to help us work. During the summer vacation, high school and college student volunteers came to us and they also could help my neighbors.

We owe much to those who helped us, one sweaty scoop of mud at a time.

It was the summer in which I surely felt Jesus' Presence in each one who helped us make everything alright.

I am truly grateful.

### Our Thoughts and Prayers are With the Victims —Northern Osaka Earthquake and Typhoon No. 21

Ayako Akiyama, Toyonaka Church

A lot of natural disasters occurred throughout Japan last year. By "the Northern Osaka Earthquake" in the morning on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018, we didn't have noticeable damages at our church, but *Toyonaka* city office ordered us to remove the concrete-block walls surrounding our church yard so that they

would not collapse. During the quake, there was a tragic accident caused by concrete-block walls collapse. An elementary school student was killed by the collapsed walls located on school property in *Takatsuki* city, Osaka.

In addition, on September 4<sup>th</sup>, Typhoon No. 21 hit *Toyonaka* city, Osaka. Blackouts went on for seven days in some areas. At our church, the outer walls of the sanctuary fell down and seven windows broke during the storm. All of the church members picked up the fragments of broken glass on the sanctuary floor. We thought about the victims and prayed for them.



Damaged *Toyonaka* Church

## Listening and Praying

### —Volunteering at the Devastated Area Hit by the Western Japan Torrential Rains

**Izumi Hiraoka, *Tokuyama* Church**

I visited *Yasuura*, *Kure* city in August. A month had passed since the heavy rains, but there were still signs of the damage caused by the typhoon. In early morning sunshine, we could see that the dried-off roads raised clouds of dirt. The air was filled with the scent of the ocean along with the smell of earth and sand.



Work in  
*Yasuura-cho, Kure*

The big house with an earthen floor looked like ours in my hometown. I took the father-of-the-house's collections of books out of the shelves and put them on the floor. I worked trying to make sure whether I should put each of the damaged books into sandbags to be discarded or not. The mother's wisdom-saying that you should keep your important stuff on higher place made sense. During the storm, even the cupboard was covered by the water. I washed the dirt off the survived dishes carefully with water.

The father must have been tired making a recovery of his house every day, but he talked about his experience positively. He reminded me of my parents but I couldn't say anything at that time. I felt that he left me a task just to listen to people and keep deeply in mind what I have heard from them and go on praying.

## Amazing Grace!

### ***Kumamoto* Earthquakes—our private shelter became home**

**Megumi Andō, *Kengun* Church**

We had two big earthquakes in *Kumamoto* in April, 2016.

*Kengun* Church was very close to the epicenter, and, as many of our neighboring homes suffered, we hurriedly made our church a private shelter. At first, we received about fifty people and provided them with beds and meals three times a day. Half were church members and the other half were newcomer neighbors ranging from three years old to ninety-three years old. We had various kinds of people: people from abroad, sexual minorities, isolated elderly who fled to big gymnasiums. We shared everything, caring for each other like a family; thus, we reduced the fear in the aftershock days by half, and doubled the happy things.

Soon, anyone and everyone naturally began to help the challenged one, and a person who was full of anxiety began to smile at the end. Now s/he sometimes comes to chat and come to our church bazaar.

We are really glad that some of the newcomer neighbors began to attend services and they got baptized at a later time. We didn't intend or expect that, but God's plan is beyond ours.

## Bound to the Lord—Abroad Germany

### We went to Braunschweig!

#### Setsuko Yoneda, Osaka Church

We visited Braunschweig for nine days from October 25<sup>th</sup> to November 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2018. Pastor Hitoshi Akiyama already wrote a detailed report about the visit to Germany in the “*Ruuteru*” (Japanese Lutheran) January issue. They kindly added me to the visiting group as a member of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and as an officer of *Ruuteru Houjinkai Rengou* (the Association of Lutheran Corporations). When I first heard about the visit, I simply thought “I want to go to Germany!” but after deciding to join the visiting group, while I was preparing this or that, the objectives and goals of the visit gradually became clear.

They do not usually introduce Braunschweig in ordinary tour guidebooks, but when I went there I knew it was a quiet very German town with its own history.

The biggest event of our visit was a special service on the Reformation Memorial Day held at Braunschweiger Dom. As it was a joint service with the Catholic Church, the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese also attended it in addition to Director Meins of the ELKB (Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern) and Bishop Ōshiba of JELC, so I was really moved to be able to be there.

We also had an opportunity to visit the head office of ELKB, and on Sunday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, we attended the special service commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our mutual churches’ partnership.

Considering our Church’s commitment to social welfare, we also visited institutions and houses for the elderly and the challenged, an institution to help mothers who are raising children, as well as institutions supporting refugees and people who are in need.

After the service, the church members treated us kindly with their homemade meals. Interchange using gestures with each other was enjoyable.

Everyone in Braunschweig treated us as if we had been state guests and they gave us a great blessing. I hope our churches will be able to pray together in the future, too.



Toasting with German beer



A row of houses and streets in Braunschweig



Special service on October 28<sup>th</sup>, last year, commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the partnership promise between ELKB and the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church.

## Visiting Sabah Theological Seminary

### Interchange to share blessings

#### Kyōko Ishihara, *Ichigaya Church*

In 1993, the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church commemorated its centennial in mission. We had long been supported by foreign churches, for example, the churches in the United States or in Finland.

The JELCW (Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church Women) at that time wanted to express its gratitude by helping them carry out Christian mission in Asia. Thus, the JELCW decided to give grants to the students studying at “Sabah Theological Seminary”, which Dr. Thu En Yu established in the trench that Japanese soldiers had used.

After a twenty-five-year interaction, last year in July, the original four officials of the JELCW, Ms. Umeda as an interpreter, and I visited Sabah. Reverend Ken Phin, the go-between from the beginning, kindly scheduled an interview with four grantees of this year’s scholarships, and visits to three churches where former recipients are doing pastoral work.

This year’s recipients were grateful for the JELCW’s support. They relayed their hope to preach in farm villages to people who did not know the Lord’s love.



Reverend Yuen, the first recipient who became a pastor, and Mr. and Mrs. Ken Phin



This year’s four recipients

Two churches we visited were on hillsides where wild trees of durians and mangos were growing. What was common was that these two churches begin with gathering people by events, and lead them to services afterwards.

Reverend Yuen, the first recipient of our scholarship, became the pastor of the second largest church in Sabah. He said “My mission is based on the prayers and support given by the ELCW from Japan. I would like to teach people about Christianity not only in my country, but also abroad where the mission is difficult. If it is difficult to preach when the regime changes or the young become reluctant to go to church because a new shopping mall in town attracts young families, I see it as God’s grace.”

We recalled his vigorous words when we were studying the phrase “Jesus Christ is the one who does not change yesterday, today, and forever”—the verse assigned as a JELCW January Bible study.

This was the journey in which we experienced and saw the Lord’s blessing and grace on the work of the JELCW’s exchange with Sabah Theological Seminary, which is teaching future pastors in an Islamic country.



A service at the church where a former recipient became a pastor