

## 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 live with him” —  
 Romans 6:8*

To you

### Lord, Will You Touch Us?!



Pastor Satoru Tada  
 Hiyoshi Church

COVID-19 infection continues to spread. Responding to the request for restraint issued by the government, quite a few Lutheran churches temporarily stopped holding services or congregating there. Churches have managed to air their services online. Even though we can hear God’s words via the Internet, still it is undeniable that COVID-19 has deprived us of opportunities to be invited to church and share blessings together. Without a good Internet connection, it is as if the connection to the church has been severed. We have all suffered from the inability to assemble at church, haven’t we?

According to Dr. Juich Yamagiwa, President of Kyoto University (2014-2020), a primatologist and anthropologist, humans are unable to trust others just by sharing the same sight and sound. Being at the same place and time, and experiencing the same smells, tastes and touch together, which in fact we cannot share, humans are able to trust others.

Living in modern society, we in Japan have tended to be timid of touching and being touched by others from long before the pandemic began. The outbreak of COVID-19 has revealed that there seems to be an invisible wall that separates us from others. Jesus Christ first touched the weary, people with burdens, or those suffering from illness, before He spoke to heal them. His hands on them communicated His warmth and kindness. His words are not just words, but actually encouragement and power for living. The words of Jesus touch us even in the physical senses that may not be normally shared among each other.

May Jesus touch you when you are not able to get in touch with people.

## Reports from Districts

### East District Women's Group (EDWG) Together As One

Naomi Ichikawa, Chairperson

When we were about to start activities in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the 24<sup>th</sup> term, we were forced to cancel everything due to the spread of the COVID-19 infection. Under such circumstances, EDWG's newsletter *Rose of Sharon* was published in April, reporting on various topics such as the chairpersons' meeting in the previous fall, some opinions from the questionnaire that had been taken by EDWG, the committee members' situations, and the problems we currently face. The next newsletter will be published in fall, in which I would like to make EDWG more familiar to the members and hope that they will agree to work together so that EDWG will be connected to society and will continue to exist.

We had no meetings in May and June, but in July, we tried remote meetings, and the connection was finally made on the screens of our mobile phones after a trial-and-error process. We were happy to see each other on phone screen after a long time. The meeting did not go as smoothly as an in-person meeting might, but this inconvenient opportunity has given us a chance to learn a new way of connecting with other members.

The women's groups of each area could not hold meetings. Some churches stopped services, which made us realize how blessed we have all been in past days. We think of and pray for the sick and for the current victims of natural disasters.



Online board meeting, July

### Tokai District Women's Group (TDWG) Going on with strength in God's grace

Shigeko Sakai, Chairperson

We issued our newsletter *Agapanthus* in February this year, in which we reported ardent opinions from attendees of the chairpersons' meeting held last year, and issues each church was facing and struggling with. We want everyone to feel connected through *Agapanthus*.

We planned to have a gathering at Nagoya Megumi church in May, asking Pastor Tokuhiko

to be our lecturer. He returned from Brazil, and we were looking forward to hearing about his missionary works there. However, because of the state of emergency declared due to COVID-19, we postponed the gathering until October.

We were finally able to hold our board meeting in July. Pastor Ozawa from Nagoya Megumi Church, who became in charge of TDWG, was present. After discussion, the October gathering was cancelled due to concerns about the spread of the infection. Thus, the women's groups were not able to be active.

So, in the October edition of *Agapanthus*, we will share how everyone of the district lived out their faith during the time of self-restraint.

We want to go forward with God's grace as our strength, despite the concerns associated with declining and aging membership.



At the Board meeting in July with Pastor Ozawa

## West District Women's Group

### Role of Women's Group

Sumie Kuniyoshi, Chairperson

While a state of emergency was in effect, Pastor Mizuhara, the head of the West District, sent out "A Joint Prayer" following the Lord's Prayer every week. As our women's group also wanted to join in these prayers, we sent a simultaneous email via our group Line "Western Wind." We apologize that we were unable to send many of the simultaneous e-mails due to problems with the e-mail environment of my place, however.

Under such circumstances, we took an online survey regarding the postponed district meeting, a way of choosing new executive members, and our visions for a women's group.

Among the answers concerning the future, some suggested that the group should think of new ideas to have working women and the young feel like joining the group. It was also suggested that a new way of life is needed in the church. Others are concerned that the Women's Group may not be able to exist as an affiliate of the Church if the Church's existence itself is in jeopardy.



A message on a church bench asking social distancing saying, 'Welcome back.' (Shimonoseki Church)

Looking back at the origin of the group and facing realities, we want to work for the evangelical mission of each church. For that purpose, we hope that every one of us can be strengthened and encouraged to help each other invite new members to church.

I hope that we will be able to hold the once postponed district meeting in October. As I don't know how to use the Internet, I am looking for a person who can make good use of online and other necessary technologies.

## **Kyushu District Women's Group (KDWG)**

### **Beyond Human Thoughts**

Miho Hirayama, Chairperson

Investigating facilities to which the JELCW could send gratitude donations this term, we have had annual meetings with the Kumamoto District Women's Group in the fall.

We prepared for a gathering in which to learn about "Fellowship of the Little Lambs" this year, hoping that the COVID-19 infection would end, but unfortunately, we had to cancel the gathering. It is not easy in these days to draw a line between "normal time" and that of "emergency." Yet I believe we are always in God's blessing, both in good times and in bad.

The 5<sup>th</sup> newsletter, *Michishirube* (guidepost), of this term was published in July. In response to the activity goal, we reported 'the sharing of divine grace with the elderly.' Answering to the question 'what is church to you?' some sent us very serious and honest messages.

Trying to widen and deepen communication among the members in the newsletter, we also introduced each group's everyday activities as well as their peace studies and testimonies of faith.

The disaster of the heavy rains this summer was heartbreaking and we received prayers and support from across the nation. The executive committee for the postponed JELCW's annual meeting was set up in July. Your prayers have enabled us to keep on walking.

We have clearly understood that God's blessings are realized when we humbly and warmly receive and embrace people's thoughts.



Visiting *Akune* Church in March

## Feature Articles

### Turn our eyes more to society

#### =Nuclear Power Plants and the Aftermath of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station Accident=

Ten years will have passed next March since the Great East Japan Earthquake and the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. We look at issues of nuclear power generation and people struggling to restore a bit of calm to everyday life. What can, and should, we do?

#### The Issue of Nuclear Power Generation is a Challenge of Faith

Pastor Shingo Naito, Minoridai Church

The nuclear power problem is not a difficult issue to discuss. The ethics committee was behind the Germany's decision to opt out of nuclear power generation. Of all others, the committee argued that major accidents can and do happen and the downsides are more significant than the advantages. Moreover, even if there is no accident, leaving radioactive waste for future generations is ethically problematic. Three out of seventeen committee members were Christian leaders. The issue is a challenge of faith for us Christians in Japan as well. Let us see what else is being questioned.

First, we look at uranium mining sites. There remain slagheaps of dug-out earth from which radioactive substances have run out. Those substances affect not only the miners' health but also the ecosystem of the area. Secondly, we see the problem of discrimination. Nuclear power plants are constructed in poor areas far away from big cities with the expectation of hiring laborers who are not eager to work at the plants, yet they have no other choices. There is no secure 'threshold level' from radiation exposure. Only people in need take this risky job. Our government admits the possibility of a nuclear accident. And there is the matter of life (Life Issues). The ICRP (International Commission on Radiological Protection), which was established to protect nuclear industries, does not admit there is such a problem as low dose internal exposure. However, many experts voice an opinion different from that of the ICRP, as do many ordinary people as well. Moreover, there is the issue of peace. Advocating the peaceful use of nuclear energy, the Japanese government has reasoned in the Diet that the possession of nuclear weapons for Defense is legitimate and does not violate the constitution (Article Nine). Amid all of this, it is already proved that we have enough power without nuclear energy. It is good for power companies to supply safe and peaceful electricity which serves the purpose. I would appreciate it if you would use my book *Kirisutosha toshite genpatsu o dookangaeruka* (How to Think of Nuclear Power Plants as a Christian) as a reference book, which is inexpensive and well-read in various denominations.

Lastly, this spring, some (Buddhist) priests and other religious people like me filed a lawsuit to abolish the nuclear fuel cycle business, the worst nuclear problem of all (Search the Internet as ‘Religious People Nuclear Fuel Cycle Case’). The straightforward petition we presented to the court is an epoch-making one referring not only to technical theories but also ethical issues. Will you read this as well? (Purchasable upon request to Pastor Naito.)



Religious people nuclear fuel cycle case press conference on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## All Lives are Connected to the Ocean

### – We Who Resist the Discharge of Contaminated Water –

Terumi Kataoka,

Citizens’ Council for the Prevention of Further Marine Contamination

When cooling water to cool fuel debris caused by the accident at TEPCO’s Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station gets mixed with underground water flowing into reactor buildings, approximately 200 tons of contaminated water increases daily and currently some 1.2 million tons of polluted water is stored in about 1,000 large tanks.

The Japanese government and TEPCO claim that the water will be safe and harmless when processed by ALPS (Advanced Liquid Processing System), except for tritium. Currently there is no more space to build tanks. Therefore, the Japanese government and TEPCO are planning to discharge the processed water into the sea over approximately 30 to 40 years starting in the summer of 2022. However, the density of 70 % of the water in the tanks exceeds standards of 62 radionuclides, reaching 20,000 times of the standard maximum level of safety. The Citizens’ Council for the Prevention of Further Marine Contamination lobbied and petitioned the local council. Twenty-one local councils out of fifty-nine municipalities anonymously adopted opinion calling for onshore storage. Also, a special resolution strongly opposing discharging polluted water into the sea was anonymously adopted both at the General Meetings of Fukushima and the National Fishermen’s Associations.



Marine Day Standing

On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, forty members of The Citizens’ Council made ‘Marine Day Standing’ near *Onahama* port, where they handed out 300 flyers in less than two hours. They soon start negotiating with the government on holding public hearings for ordinary citizens.

## **Supporting Each Other from the Same Standpoint –**

Chikako Chiba, Secretary-general,  
Group Hydrangea, Thyroid Cancer Support Group

Group Hydrangea was founded in 2016 by families affected by childhood thyroid cancer, patients, and supporters. Since then, having received warm support from many organizations and individuals, we regularly exchange information, provide medical consultation, cooking classes, exercises, and lectures. A thyroid cancer evaluation meeting was held on June 15, where 240 persons were reported to have, or be suspicious of having thyroid cancer, and 195 persons who had undergone surgery had been diagnosed with cancer.

Families suddenly diagnosed with cancer are full of surprise and confusion. Both the national and prefectural governments say that the onset of cancer has nothing to do with radiation exposure (there is no causal relationship). Some professionals (experts) say that the cancer is so ‘mild’ that no medical treatment is required. Patients say that they ‘want to know the cause of cancer,’ and ‘think that, because the government has a national policy to promote nuclear power generation, the government also has the responsibility to investigate the possible connection with cancer and make it public.’ We could find out some new facts through working together. Problems such as cancer recurrence, difficulty of going on to higher school and lack of opportunities for employment have been revealed. After thyroid examination, when patients are over 18 years old, as medical expenses are to be covered by insurance, there is a system in which the prefectural government provides support for individual expenses. We together submitted an improvement request to the Fukushima Prefectural Office concerning the discovery of patients who were excluded from this support, the improvement of unreasonable systems, and a review of the reduction of thyroid cancer inspections. This was the first time that patients and their families had faced county officials. We keenly feel the importance of peer support, that one’s experience can help other patients. We are very concerned that the spread of COVID-19 infection and the Tokyo Olympic Games etc. push the nuclear power plant issues aside and cloud them. Fukushima Prefecture is (still) under a declaration of ‘a state of nuclear emergency.’