



Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC)

Congregations in Kumamoto

Rev. Hitoshi and Satoko Adachi
ELCA Missionary and Associate

THANK YOU:

As we write the first official report from Kumamoto, from our bottom of our hearts we give thanks to the ELCA, the Pacifica Synod as well as the South Carolina Synod, Supporting Congregations and Individuals, and our Savior and Lord who does miraculous work in the midst of humanity. After Hitoshi arrived here, he noticed how earnestly and strongly the brothers and sisters in Kumamoto were praying for someone from the ELCA. One sister said, "The fact that Pastor Adachi arrived here is a miracle." A total of 12 people, from a 6-month-old baby to a brother in his late 70s, came to the airport to welcome Hitoshi on April 30th, one month before Satoko arrived. (See the picture above) Four of them came back to the Airport to welcome Satoko on May 28th. We feel joy and simultaneously feel the community's high expectations for our service.

WHERE WE SERVE:

Wherever we are at, if there is a congregation, there is always something interesting happening. There was a baptism at a hospital bed a few weeks ago. A congregation member's (who is a blind) husband expressed his wish to be baptized suddenly. He is also a blind person and received a cancer diagnosis several month ago. Also, there is another woman expressing her wish to be baptized, and it will happen in July. We deeply feel God's blessings and grace.

The place we started to live is in the middle of the area strongly affected by the earthquake two years ago. Within a few minutes distance on foot, there are several signs of the Lord's quiet grace: a house badly damaged and left as it is, even two years later, many temporary housing are still occupied by those that lost their



homes, a family living in a small - one story - house that is labeled "Dangerous" but its backyard is filled with many beautiful hydrangeas encouraging the people in the neighborhood, a spring from which you can drink clean and tasty water. Even in the chaotic situations left by the devastating earthquake we, again, feel very blessed by God's mercy.



WHAT WE SERVE FOR:

Lutheran Church bodies in the United States have been continuously sending missionaries to the Kumamoto area for more than 100 years. The ELCA is now sending 9 missionaries to this area and seven of them are English and Music teachers. Hitoshi is serving as pastor for two congregations and chaplain for one large social service organization that manages various levels of senior and child care homes as well as two pre-schools. In addition, he serves as chaplain for one kindergarten (that includes a preschool accepting infants.) Satoko is already serving as Organist for Matsubase church. In Japanese culture, Business Card etiquette is very important, and we were wondering how to best indicate our serving area. Hitoshi is thinking about it, he made the first version business card.



ONE-DAY RETREAT IN SOUTH KUMAMOTO CONFERENCE: “Love Locally like Jesus Did”

On Saturday, June 9th, six congregations in the southern part of Kumamoto got together for a one-day retreat. The theme was “Love Locally like Jesus Did,” but the primary focus was to learn about the history of Minamata and its namesake disease (condition caused by sustained mercury poisoning). The guest speaker, Mr. Hajime Sugimoto, whose parents and grandparents got Minamata Disease, told the real story of their experiences. Also, one of the Minamata Lutheran Church members, Mr. Nakajima, told his story to the church as well as how people dealt with the disease. Although we knew about Minamata Disease, we did not know what the local residents experienced and thought about the impact of the disease on their community. Listening to people directly effected by the disease was a first for us and very meaningful.



In the city, a company called Chisso was producing an organic chemical compound called “Acetaldehyde” which was used to produce many kinds for plastic products and their business contributed wealth to the city since their business was growing rapidly together with the Japanese economy during a couple of decades after WWII. However, as part of their production process, they discharged wastewater contained many pollutants and toxins including mercury. In the beginning, no one thought about the long-term consequences of dumping toxins into local streams and rivers.

Fishermen unknowingly caught fish that ate mercury, and people in Minamata ate the contaminated fish. The disease (named Minamata Disease) expanded in the city. The symptoms of the disease are terrible, the body trembles and not only impairs physical function but also cognitive function. When people first started showing signs of the disease, it’s cause wasn’t understood. As such, the city government ordered a large-scale disinfection of effected people’s homes. People were thought it was an infectious disease and families effected by Minamata disease were shunned by society and they lived painful, alienated lives for many decades.

Eventually the researchers at Kumamoto University as well Chisso found that the cats who ate mercury-contaminated fish had the same symptoms as Minamata

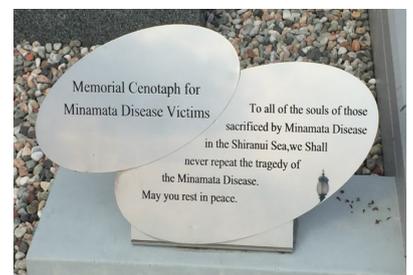
disease, and the cause was found to be Chisso’s mercury waste dumped into local river. However, neither the government (that had jurisdiction over the university) nor Chisso announced their findings or that the mercury dumping continued. The reason for halting the mercury dumping, in the end, was not because it caused Minamata disease but because it became possible to produce the intended plastic products without using acetaldehyde.

After that, volunteer organizations supporting Minamata disease patients sued Chisso, the prefecture, and the country, and litigation lasted many years. Naturally, the plaintiffs won the case. However, some unscrupulous people falsely claimed they had Minamata disease. Actual Minamata disease sufferers expressed their dismay with the statement “They [the charlatans] are claiming illness just for the money.”

The pastor of the Minamata Lutheran Church was involved in the efforts to attract Chisso to do business in the city at the beginning of the last century. Furthermore, Chisso's employees’ families were church members. Minamata was a community in which perpetrators and victims coexisted. Therefore, while Minamata disease was widely discussed in the newspapers, it was taboo to talk about Minamata disease in church.

After a long court battle, Eiko Sugimoto (mother of the guest speaker) who was a Minamata disease patient said as follows. “Although I thought that even now I should take revenge, hating people is not good for both mind and body. We cannot be healed from our illness. We have been continually humiliated, been discouraged and discriminated against so far. Then, if we consider “forgiveness”, you free yourself from the symptoms of hating others. We can do it all together and live better lives.”

Interestingly, guest speaker Hajime Sugimoto and Eiko are not Christians. However, we are witnessing that the Lord Jesus worked among perpetrators and victims of pollution-related diseases such as Minamata disease. Even during instances of human greed and cruelty, God’s mercy and grace are present. Amen.



ELCA Global Mission Support & Contact Information

You can give through your synod office or mail your check to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Gift Processing Center, P.O. Box 1809, Merrifield, VA 22116-8009. Make checks payable to “ELCA Global Church Sponsorship” with “(Hitoshi and Satoko) Adachi GCS2051” in the memo line.

By credit or debit card, see <https://community.elca.org/Japan> or call 800-638-3522 and specify “(Hitoshi and Satoko) Adachi GCS2051”. By automatic monthly bank withdrawal, or to establish a covenant of prayer, communication and support: Contact 800-638-3522, ext. 2657, or globalchurch@elca.org.