



## Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC)

Congregations in Kumamoto

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ELCA Missionary and Associate

### PLEASE PRAY FOR JELC MATSUBASE

Hitoshi and Satoko are serving at various places, but in this article they will focus on JELC Matsuhase Church. It started in 1951 as a home Bible study in Matsubase, and in 1960, a sanctuary dedication service was held. After taking many winding roads during their pilgrimage, 45 years later the new sanctuary was built and it accommodates over 100 worshippers. Prior to Hitoshi's appointment, Pastor Sumimoto who is also the pastor of Kuwamizu Church has been presiding and preached once a month, and for other Sundays they had services led by lay people. Number of worshippers is usually around 10. In recent weeks after Hitoshi and Satoko started serving Matsubase three times a month in addition to Pastor Sumimoto's monthly service, the number of worshippers is still 10-15 people. However, on the Sunday before this article was written, there were 25 worshipers attending. It was crowded with students of Luther Gakuin because students were instructed to attend worship at Christian churches, as an assignment, during summer vacation.



While Hitoshi was serving as the assistant to the Bishop in the Pacifica Synod, for many redeveloping churches, "Three Great Listenings" were recommended by the Synod office. What are the three listenings? The first is to listen to the word/scripture. The second is to listen to the people who are currently at church. And the third is to listen to local people in town where the church is located. Even at Matsubase, Hitoshi and Satoko are to listen to these three. From July, after the Sunday worship when Hitoshi preached, people gather and alternatively read the Gospel of Luke, listen to God's words together and reflect upon and share what they think God is telling to Matsuhase Church. In addition,

they listen to the thoughts of the members gathered at Matsuhase. And, especially, in August Hitoshi was walking around the neighborhood, where Matsuhase Church is located, and began to talk with local people and listening to them. While doing the three great listenings, Hitoshi and Satoko wonder about and pray for God's continuous guidance for Matsubase Church.

### WEST JAPAN FLOOD RELIEF EFFORT IN JULY

In late July, Hitoshi joined a volunteer team helping clear/dig mud out at Sister T's residence and her neighborhood in Yasuura Village, Kure-city, Hiroshima prefecture, that was damaged by the West Japan Flood – that killed more than 200 people and caused widespread destruction in early July this year.



Photo by K. Kozaki

When Hitoshi arrived at the house, watermarks left on the walls meant that a large volume of muddy, gravel-filled water came up to over 4 feet above floor level. Everyday items such as furniture, appliances, personal correspondence etc. that had been under water level were destroyed. Hitoshi wonders how devastated Sister T was and still is.

As a missionary who has lived in Kumamoto since May, in the central area of the devastating earthquake two years ago, Hitoshi is listening to people's feelings of fear at the time of the severe earthquake and during its many aftershocks. In reality, in addition to the Kumamoto earthquake, spiritual caregivers listened to people's pain, troubles, and continuous laments in various places, due to other disasters that occurred in Japan. Hitoshi feels the importance of the long-term presence of many Christian caregivers who were trained to listen to and care for those effected by various disasters. And hopefully and prayerfully may these disaster victims find the presence of God's grace and mercy in the midst of their hardships. Amen.

## TWO FUNERALS & A WEDDING

In the previous news-  
letter, two baptisms  
were reported. In this  
issue, two funerals and  
one wedding are  
briefly reported. In the  
beginning of August,



on the 2nd and the 7th, two people in Kuwamizu Church, Brother G and Brother A, died one after the other. After having meetings with each man's family members, there was a vigil service on the 4th then a funeral on the 5th and another vigil on the 9th then another funeral on the 10th. As for Brother G, whose wife Sister T passed away in February this year, therefore people felt that Brother G followed his wife. As a remarkable fact, Brother G was Korean, Sister T was Japanese, and they were married shortly after World War II. While listening to the stories from their children, Hitoshi learned that there was prejudice against Korean people in Japan and it was a very difficult time during the beginning of their marriage life because Sister T's parents didn't accept it at all. However, Brother G as a Christian, showed his love to Sister T's parents and took care of them when needed, even though he was unloved by them. At the funeral service, the in law were also present. Hitoshi reflected upon the fact that Brother G seemed to show his love even for his enemies as Jesus commands. Hitoshi remembered that one week before the funeral, Hitoshi and Satoko were attending a wedding between a Korean and Japanese person. In recent

years the relationship between Japanese and Koreans has improved since the post-war period. Behind this movement, people may notice Jesus' love among people who dislike each other like Brother G loved his Japanese in-laws despite their hard feelings towards him.



## SOME SUMMER EVENTS

**Kyushu District Summer Bible School:** Even though Hitoshi was busy preparing for the first of two funerals, there was a summer Bible School from the evening of August 3rd until noon of the 4th at YMCA Camp Site in Aso. He served as lecturer for the school. Over 20 people attended. The theme was "Come and See" from John 1:35-42.

**Kuwamizu CS - Middle and High School Camp:** It was held on August 15th through 16th at National Aso Youth Friendship Center. Seven students at Jiaien Kodomo Home attended the camp and some CS teachers including Hitoshi accompanied them. They enjoyed games, a campfire, and breathtaking nature, in Aso, that the Father created.

### Joy After Radio Exercise Every

**Morning:** Please look at this picture. People watching above are not expecting Jesus' second coming but... It is a custom started many decades ago that people get together in parks all over Japan at 6:30 AM and to exercise together while listening to the radio during summer vacation (from July 20th through August 31st). After the exercise some people gathered at the park where Hitoshi and Satoko visit go to the courtyard of a Japanese shrine, next to the park, and look at a couple of brown hawk-owls that laid their eggs in a small hole of a very large tree. In early August, the eggs hatched and two hawk-owl chicks came out. While socializing with people, Satoko and Hitoshi found that many of the people they meet are graduates of Lutheran preschools.

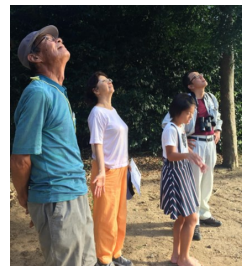


Photo by H. Tokunaga

## THANK YOU FROM A VERY HOT CITY, KUMAMOTO

Although it is extremely hot and humid here, we are deeply grateful to ELCA, synods, congregations, and individuals supporting Christ's ministries in Kumamoto. Even for those living in Kumamoto for many years it seemed the hottest summer in their lives so far.

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