

Greetings of peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

November 2020

It has now been eight years and eight months since the great disaster that struck the Tohoku (northeastern) region of Japan in March of 2011. We are so grateful for the prayers and support which we received from churches of the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ ever since the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. Our 84 churches of the Kyodan (another name for the inter-denominational United Church of Christ in Japan) in this region have found healing and encouragement in your messages, as we continue to do God's work of accompanying those in our society who are weak and powerless.

Following the disaster, the Tohoku Conference started two relief projects; the Emmaus Disaster Relief Center and The Nuclear Radiation Task Force "Izumi." The former focused on relief for tsunami survivors, and the latter was established to face the enfolding realities of the nuclear disaster. Needless to say both of these projects were humanitarian aid provided for all of God's children. The Emmaus Center relief activities were concluded in March of this year, while the work of Izumi continues even to this day supported by your prayers.

75% of our churches, parsonages and church related kindergartens sustained damage from the disaster. In particular, 19 of our churches sustained considerable damage and had major work done on them. We are pleased to report that all of these churches have now been rebuilt thanks to giving from churches all around Japan. All through this process your churches have continued to walk with us through the work of Common Global Ministries. Allow me to thank you once again for this very meaningful ministry you have provided to us at a critical time in our history.

There is still great sadness and suffering in our region which will not subside easily. Physical damage will one day be overcome thanks to recovery efforts, but the ills of radiation poisoning will only appear more prevalent with time. In particular, when we witness the health risks for our children, and the many issues that are connected with this reality, we cannot help but find ourselves in a spirit of despair.

I am sure you have already heard of the issue of thyroid cancer. This is the one sickness that has been internationally recognized as being a direct result of radiation poisoning. The international medical community has thus far agreed that this rare disease is seen in only one out of ten million children. Over the past several years of thyroid testing in Fukushima prefecture, 240 children (as of June 12th, 2020) have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer or symptoms of high possibility of thyroid cancer. Prior to Fukushima the number of children with thyroid cancer were one or two in 10 million, but in Fukushima we are looking at 600 in 10 million children. We are left speechless. Nevertheless the government keeps repeating that; "These figures are by no means a result of the nuclear disaster." We all know that radiation pollution in Fukushima needs to be analyzed and substantiated according to scientific research. However, the environment which will deeply affect our children has been skewed as a political issue. There is a scheme to treat this matter as if "the nuclear disaster never happened" and that "there is absolutely no health risk for children living in the area."

The 2019 summer Olympics which were to be held this year have been "postponed." Reports of the spread of COVID in Europe have been taken up by our news media almost daily. It is clear that the pandemic is far from being resolved. And as we hear about the situation in the United States, our hearts go out to you. In our Tohoku Conference we have churches that have decided not to hold worship in the sanctuary, but to hold worship online, or in family gatherings. And we have other churches that gather on Sundays but have decided not to celebrate communion for the time being.

The invitation to hold the Olympics in Japan were based on a lie by the Japanese prime minister who said, "The radiation is under control, and Fukushima is safe." We do not think that it is realistic to hold the Olympics here next year. The Japanese government is trying to fool the public by using the phrase "treated water" instead of "radiated water" as they move forward with plans to release this poisonous water into the ocean. The move will not only lead to more health hazards but will damage the environment and all living things created by God. For this reason, we must do all in our power to resist these plans.

We pray that elected leaders in both the United States and Japan, will lead us in the righteous ways of God. We pray for them to lead us in upholding life, democracy, and making peace. In particular, we pray for fair elections in the United States, and policies that bring us together rather than divide us.

The original "safety myth" regarding the infallibility of nuclear plants has now metamorphosed into a new safety myth which says that we are safe even if we experience a nuclear disaster. Many children are suffering under these conditions, not to mention the parents who worry for the future health of their children..... We look forward to receiving your messages this year. Your continued prayers and moral support are very meaningful to us.

This year we are looking forward to exchanging Christmas cards once again. It is true that we are far from one another. But when we receive your cards it is almost as if we can hear a heartbeat of love and compassion coming from someone so close by. We feel very close to you. Thank you so very much.

May the peace of our Savior Jesus Christ be with you.

Rev. Etsuya Kataoka
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