

2011.3.11 Great East Japan Earthquake
Local Aid Committee News Letter From Tohoku
24th June 2015 Issue #17

This month, we would like to continue our update on the current situation of Ando district in Otsuchi-cho, Iwate prefecture. The aid work carried out in Ando district, Otsuchi-cho, started early in May 2011. Morioka church has worked to coordinate the aid work. We received many volunteers from churches around Japan. Unfortunately, the reconstruction of Ando district is quite slow compared to other districts. Your continued prayers are greatly appreciated.

Ando Aid Work Report

4 years have passed since we first started visiting Ando right after the disaster in May 2011. Right after the disaster, Ando primary school had become an evacuation shelter for 700 people. The school is only a kilometer away from the coast, but being on a mountain, it was able to escape the tsunami.

Each week the number of people living in the shelter changed. When we first started handing out food at the shelter in June, there were 400 people who were sleeping and waking at the shelter. Temporary housing in the area was built very quickly and the disaster victims were moved to these new housings based on a lottery. In August, the Ando primary school no longer acted as an evacuation center. The sports field of the school was leveled out and was used to build temporary housings. The school building was temporarily used as a public hall and then a nursery. Two years ago it was demolished and is now a vacant lot. On this lot, they will build a public hall.

The citizens of Ando district that stayed at the evacuation center were spread out throughout Otsuchi-cho and were divided into temporary housings. Though the families were finally able to have a place to live just as a family, their neighbors, though also from Otsuchi-cho, were complete strangers to them.

There are mountains goes right up to the jagged coastline. Ando city that was situated on the flat land between the mountain and the coastline was completely washed away by the tsunami. The temporary housing is built far away from the coast in an area where the tsunami did not reach. Because of this, the people that live there cannot go shopping, go out, or see the doctor. The people started living in the temporary housings with a promise that they would live there for “2 years until restoration.”

It has been 4 years since that promise. The temporary housings that were built to last for 2 years are starting to show defects. Once every few months, the government holds a “Restoration Plan Explanation Session”. At the start many people attended these sessions, but now only a number of regulars attend.

We sometimes hear comments such as, “Even if we listen, they always say the same things. They only explain that the dates will get pushed back more and more.” There is a 90-year-old resident who has been counting the days. Maybe tomorrow, maybe in a few days, I will be able to live in a normal home again. He is losing hope for a day in his lifetime where he will be able to live in a normal home again. There are also many people that have decided to leave Ando, despite their deep desire stay, because they cannot see a future where this is possible. The city hall director wonders how many would return to Ando. He guesses that it will be less than half. Even within Otsuchi-cho, the restoration of Ando district is exceptionally slow. The construction of city hall is estimated to be between 2018~2019. This is still 4 years in the future. What is more, the estimate for the construction of residential homes has yet to be set.

The aid that Morioka Church has carried out in Ando district has changed over the years. It started out as aid to the evacuation shelter, then it became aid to the local temporary housing, and now we provide support to the people in the area through the city hall. Currently we provide a café for the residents of the homes, temporary housings and people connected to the Ando city hall. The café has been supported by the Baptist Convention, by churches in Japan, and by people around the world. The people in Otsuchi-cho call it the “Baptist Café”. During Christmas, we have been given permission to tell the Christmas message, because it is “Mr. Christ’s festival”. In Easter we are able to hand out eggs and share the message of hope. They also gladly welcome gospel and hymn concerts. Many people have supported us, allowing the aid work to continue. What is more, it is thanks to the support that the local people have provided that we have been able to continue our work. It has been 4 years and a half since the disaster. Despite this many people still live in the temporary housing. Ando has yet to recover. Please pray. Please don’t forget.

(Morioka Church Osuka Ayako)



July 2011 - Handing out food



2014 - Ando Primary School demolition



2015
Open lot where Ando Primary School used to be

Visiting Ando after 4 Years

June 12, 2015, I took part in the Ando public hall café. The last time I visited Ando district was July of 2011. The change that struck me the most was the empty lot that used to be the primary school, and the construction that was taking place very close to the temporary housings. I also felt that the number of residents and volunteers had significantly decreased. Pastor Ayako had told me that the theme of the café that day was to “listen to stories”. Therefore instead of doing anything special, I just had tea and snacks together with the residents and listened to their stories. Around 30 familiar faces gathered to share the warm environment. I could see that the residents, Morioka church members, and the pastor’s family had built a strong trusting relationship over the years. Osuka Asato who was in the second grade at the time of the disaster is now in the 6th grade. She has grown so much taller. During the café the city hall director called out, “Let’s all listen to Asa-chan’s violin!” The residents all closed their eyes and quietly listened to miss Asato’s violin performance.

During the café, there was an announcement by the director. “In another district, a resident passed away because of asthma. The reason for the asthma is mold. Everyone, please watch out for mold so that you do not get asthma.” On the news there have been reports about mold and humidity causing health hazards and damaging homes. The new city hall construction has made it difficult for people to properly ventilate their homes during the day because of the dust and noise. I pray that God will protect the health of the residents during this summer. The many aid groups that had been in the area have left and now there is only one NPO and three Christian groups including the Baptist convention working in the area. Through talking to the city hall director, I could tell that the people of Ando appreciate the support we provide, and strongly desire to continue our relationship. This visit became a time where I felt the strong support and the passionate prayers of Baptist Convention churches throughout Japan.

Along with your prayers for the health and livelihoods of the Ando residents, please also continue to pray for Koriyama Kosumosu Church, Yamagata Church, the church members of Morioka Church, and the family of Pastor Osuka.

(Local Aid Committee Public Relations Sakura Ushiki)