

## 2011.3.11 Great East Japan Earthquake

### Local Aid Committee News Letter from Tohoku

22 July 2015

Issue # 18

To all churches through out Japan, thank you for your encouragement and support through your daily prayer and donations. The Tohoku area is in its 5<sup>th</sup> hot summer since the disaster. Many living in the temporary housings are spending the hard still unsure of their futures. Please remember their daily lives and pray for them. In this issue, we would like to report about the Nodamura aid and introduce you to “Mini Agora” that is carried out by the Miyagi team.

\*Agora is a word that means open space. It is a gathering where people can come together to talk about disaster, aid, faith, and the Bible. “Mini Agora” is held by the Miyagi team.

### Nodamura Aid Report

The Nodamura volunteer temporary housing visitations started in August 2011. This month (July) marks our 47<sup>th</sup> visitation. Currently we hold tea parties in the mornings at Noda junior high school and in the afternoons at Izumisawa. Lately, many people wait for us in front of the gathering space before we even arrive. What is more, the staff of the Social Welfare Association always set the desks out before our arrival so that we can start the tea meeting straight away. The tea parties initially started with our visitations, but now we feel that it has become an important meeting place for both the residents and the volunteers. It is now a tea party that we create together.

Most of the people that take part in the tea party are women. But lately, we also see men coming to the tea parties time to time. Everyone always looks forward to the tea snacks and presents that are sent by churches throughout Japan. While sharing the snacks together, we tell people about the churches and the individuals that sent the snacks. Through this we are reminded that many people support this work. “At the time of the disaster, many people visited, but now you (the Baptist people) are our only frequent visitors.” Perhaps the people here are sad and worried that the disaster is starting to be seen as something in the past.

In August the Nodamura volunteer temporary housing visitations will be in its 4<sup>th</sup> year. Recently the number of residents at the temporary housings have been slowly declining. When we first visited in August 2011, there were 195 households (in 5 areas). In our last visitation, there were 78 households (in 3 areas). In Nodamura, the people that were devastated by the tsunami were moved to high land. The biggest place for this is the “Jonai district high land complex” (Shinmachi). The construction there is ongoing. The construction is planned to be completed by March 2016, when people can move into the new houses. I heard one resident saying, “If we wait just one winter”... This shows me how much they long to live in a different situation. My heart aches.

The coastline seawall restoration continues. You can no longer see the ocean where the coastline seawall has been built. I was able to see the beautiful ocean whenever I visited Nodamura. I am filled with mixed emotions when I think that this is a sign of reconstruction.

The residents in the temporary housings are slowly moving out into the restoration housing and rebuilding their homes again. While it brings me joy to see the residents leaving the temporary housing and starting their new lives, I am also sad that I cannot see those that I used to know, and that the tea parties are getting smaller in number. It seems that people at the tea party are also feeling the same thing. Some tell me, “Even when there is just one person, please continue the tea party.” Others say, “Please hold a tea meeting at the place I am going to move to.” I pray for wisdom to know the best action to take for the people here. I thank the many people that have supported us. Please continue to pray for the continuing aid work, and most of all for the people living in the temporary housings and for the people starting their new lives.

(Same Baptist Church Kennichi Hayashi)



Tea Party at Noda junior high school

Meeting Hall



Izumisama Meeting Hall Tea Party



Jonai district high land Construction

## **Mini Agora**

It has been 4 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake. Though the reconstruction continues, in the devastated areas there are many problems and also new hardships.

The Miyagi team has hosted several “Mini Agora” gatherings and has continued to discuss about the issues concerning radiation. This time, we held the gathering in Sendai church on June 12. The theme was, “think about radiation pollution.” We watched a clip that talked about the radiation map. We also had some time to freely discuss, mingle, and share.

Through the radiation map, we learnt that the radiation pollution from the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant accident had spread not only to the Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures, but also all the way to the Kanto area and past national borders into other countries. We also learnt about how we do not even know how the radiation pollution affects the ocean. Those that learnt about these things for the first time expressed their shock and many felt that they had not been informed in enough detail about the areas they lived in.

We are also deeply concerned with the new data results of the Fukushima prefecture thyroid examination health check (for residents that were under 18 during the accident).

It has been 29 years since the Chernobyl power plant disaster. To this day there are still people that suffer from radiation exposure. I believe we must carefully learn from our past experiences.

Through living not in Fukushima but in “*Fukushima*” after its nuclear disaster, there are many realities that I have come to see. I believe that for those that bare the pain of “*Fukushima*”, the church is

crucial. To listen to the Word of the Bible and to pray together. To share and to listen to each other's thoughts and beliefs despite differing opinions. I feel that "Mini Agora" is such a place. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we are given the grace to pray together, and to walk together, to share together and work together.

Fellow Churches and people in Christ, it would bring me great joy if you could continue to remember and pray for us.

(Nankodai Christ Church Kinuko Kasamatsu)



January 2015 - The First "Agora"

Tsutomu Furukawa, who had been a member of the Local Aid Committee and in charge of the North Japan Committee Construction, passed away on Friday July 10, 2015 at 5:29pm. Brother Furukawa damaged his brain during an accident at home and his brain functions slowly declined. He had been in hospital. Our brother was especially involved in and was central to the construction around the Otsuchi-cho temporary housing meeting hall and in making benches. We thank brother Furukawa for his work and pray that this family will be comforted.



(Local Aid Committee President Makoto Kanamaru)

Local Aid Committee News Letter, Published in July 22, 2015

Japanese Baptist Convention Great East Japan Earthquake Local Aid Committee

President Makoto Kanamaru (Sendai Chomeigaoka Church)