Japan Summary Report
September 4-11, 2013
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Japan Baptist Union (JBU): September 5-8, 2013
I spent the first 4 days in Japan with OasisLife CARE, the relief organization founded after the 3/11 disaster by Oasis Christ Church. OasisLife CARE became the main body through with JBU did it’s relief and recovery work.

Oasis Christ Church is located in Rifu, a suburb of Sendai City, which is the city closest to the epicenter of the earthquake that struck on 3/11. Sendai is a four hour drive north of Tokyo and two hours by bullet train. The church has about 100 members and is therefore one of the larger churches and thus able to galvanize the relief work for an extended period of time as it had a large pool of volunteers it could rely on compared to the average Japanese church of 30 members.

The church itself did not suffer any damage but it owns a campground about 7 miles away and some of the buildings were badly damage and the main building that houses the community hall and cafeteria was condemned. The campground was also used by relief organizations and volunteers who poured in by the hundreds to help with the clean up after the disaster. I visited the following places while I was with OasisLife CARE members.

1. **Shizugawa**, a small fishing village about 2 hours north of Rifu that farms octopus. Oasis had a small income generating project involving about a dozen women. The women make leather bracelets, key chains and lanyards to hold mobile. Oasis helps with designing, marketing and selling the finished products.

2. **Yori-Iso**, a tiny fishing village with 300 households, one third of which was washed away by the tsunami. Oasis partnered with another NGO, Friends of the Ocean, to help the fishermen rebuild their fishing industry. The fishermen specialize in farming sea squirts.

3. **Camp Morigo, Rifu.** I visited the campground after worship on Sunday to see the place. The outside of the buildings look run down but when you step inside, the floors are kept immaculate and shiny. They have indoor slippers for every room you enter so you don’t dirty and soil the place. The main building that was most damaged was one that was built with the help of BWA and Asian Baptist Youth. An old logo of BWA sits above the fireplace.

4. I was given a tour of **Ishinomaki City** that had the largest debris, one third of all the debris from the tsunami was from this city. It also had the most widespread destruction. The tsunami waves came 6 miles inland. There are still see mountains of debris in the city. I also toured many small coastal fishing villages near Ishinomaki City.

Japan Baptist Convention (JBC): September 9-15
I spent 7 days with JBC and my time schedule was very full.

1. **JBC Forum, Urawa, Saitama, Sept 9-11**
   I traveled down by bullet train from Sendai to Saitama, about an hour and a half by bullet train. I was met at the train station by a JBC staff and the General Secretary and taken to their headquarters where I met the staff, visited the Japan Baptist Women’s Union office and with the General Secretary. After lunch we headed for Urawa Baptist Church to participate in the Forum on the 3/11 Disaster and Reflection on the 1995 Kobe Earthquake. I was given an opportunity to bring greetings and reflect on what I had heard and seen so far on the 3/11 disaster.
The forum occurred on the backdrop of the announcement of the selection of Tokyo as the location for the 2020 Olympics. JBC leaders and pastors were really upset over the remarks the Prime Minister gave to the Olympic selection committee about the Fukushima nuclear plant. They were also afraid that their government will now focus on building facilities for the Olympics and beautifying Tokyo instead of focusing on rebuilding the areas that have been devastated by the tsunami. Those from the Fukushima area were hurt by the PM’s comments about the nuclear plant there, as he brushed off the seriousness of the problem and showed a total lack of concern for the people who have been impacted by the disaster.

2. Tohno Volunteer Center, Iwate Prefecture, September 11-13
After the forum I drove with the JBC staff for coordinating the relief work, and other pastors, by van from Urawa to Tono city in Iwate Prefecture. We spent the following two days visiting temporary settlement homes in various locations. The places I visited on this leg of the trip are Otsuchi, Kiri Kiri, Unosumai, Kamaishi towns along the coastal area.

3. Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, September 14-15
Visited one temporary settlement that house evacuees, 130 families, from the Fukushima city with JBC volunteers, observed and participated in their activities. Koriyama Baptist Church was our base during this visit. I worshiped at Koriyama Baptist Church on Sunday morning and brought greetings.

Koriyama is 40 km west of the Fukushima nuclear plant and continues to be affected by the radiation. Deacons keep a daily log of radiation measurements in the church and surrounding area using a Geiger counter. The public park across the church is too contaminated with radiation for children to play in anymore. The church had paid for the top soil to be removed and have the area decontaminated but they no longer allow children to play in the park. It was raining on Sunday and I was about to step out of the car in the rain and run in the church when Chikayo warned me, be careful about the rain (meaning the water could be contaminated with radiation especially if it came from the east).

Incidences of cancer is on the rise in the whole state. Children especially are more vulnerable to radiation exposure. Parents are stressed out and anxious. They feel guilty that they cannot protect their children. Those who can afford have moved out of the area. But many do not have the means to move their entire families and so the poor are the one who pay the price and suffer the most. It is a very sad situation.

Overall, I logged over 1,600 miles in Japan, traveling by train and car. It was a productive trip and I learned a lot and was able to get a better picture of the magnitude of the 3/11 disaster. It was also inspiring to see the resoluteness and compassion of the Baptist churches to help and assist those in need. However, there is weariness, and sometimes a sense of feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the disaster. They need our prayers and continued support.