

The Bencke Family in Japan

Volume 29, April 5th, 2011



In the wake of disaster

As the days and weeks have passed since March 11th, two themes regarding the earthquake and tsunami continue to be the focus of most conversations. One theme is that of solidarity in our grief and in mourning the tremendous loss of innocent lives. Not just solidarity within Japan, but in response to the outpouring of love and support from so many people and organizations around the world. It is amazing to me how well people can come together and be supportive of one another, despite political rifts and historical precedents which have created animosity.

Another theme that is emerging is cooperation in response to the question, "How can we be helpful?" This is happening at grass root levels of individuals and small organizations (like schools and churches) as well as at the corporate level. It is inspiring to see young people take up the challenge of standing side by side their fellow Japanese citizens to provide the material support they need to survive in shelters. The Lutheran churches have been sending materials north to Sendai ever since the roads became passable. Over 5000 kg (that's about 12,000 pounds) of rice have been donated by the Lutheran churches.

I know there is incredible suffering around the world – suffering endured by the innocent and whose lives are made unbearable by natural disasters (drought, earthquakes, floods, etc.) or man-made acts of horrifying magnitude, and these issues are difficult to deal with when those questions arise. I sometimes feel like I need to "defend" God, especially when someone asks, "How could God let this happen?" My response is often bathed in quietness, but centered around the fact that while we want and yearn for security, God doesn't offer that. Instead, He offers us something much better – Hope.

Meanwhile, those whose lives have been completely devastated continue on, day after day, and while they try to pick up the pieces of what is remaining – and that is often very, very little. Often only the non-profit organizations and churches continue to look at these people and ask, "How can we be helpful?" To this end, I am proud to be a part of this network and am grateful for the opportunity and count it a major blessing to be able to be on the giving end.

The Lutheran churches of Japan have combined their resources to create the **Japan Lutheran Emergency Response (JLER)**. This agency has already begun delivering material aid and will continue to do so. In addition, further phases will include providing for counseling (especially of children), livelihood assistance, and community building. Some of the Lutheran-based agencies such as the network of schools, colleges and social welfare agencies throughout Japan will be partnering in these efforts as well.

Another area of need that is not widely recognized is for those individuals who are not supported by government-based programs, such as refugees, foreign students, foreign agriculture workers, and other non-Japanese individuals who call Japan their home. There are many people in this 'category' who live in northern Japan, particularly in the area of agriculture. The **Japan Evangelical Lutheran Association, Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, and Lutheran World Federation** are combining efforts in a separate venue to address these needs. Please continue to keep Japan in your prayers. *Thank you* for all you have done thus far. Your generosity is appreciated by so many.



Prayer Corner

We give thanks to God for the blossoming of cherry trees. They are beautiful reminders of the fragility of life and how important it is to stop, look, give thanks to God, and commit to making every moment of our lives count.

Prayers are requested for our students as they prepare to start the new school year. May they continue to experience God's Word and compassion in their daily lives.

Prayers are requested for workers who are donating their time to travel to the north and provide assistance. May they run and not be weary.



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Missionary Sponsorship

For more information on ELCA missionary sponsorship, please contact:

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www.elca.org/missionsponsorship

Did we miss anyone?

If you know anyone who might like to receive our newsletters, please have them send us an e-mail requesting to be added to our mailing list.

ELCA— Global Mission

If you are interested in learning more about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's global mission, please visit:

www.elca.org/globalmission

JELC: Mission in India

The Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and Japan Evangelical Lutheran Association work together to create opportunities for young Japanese Christians and those who are 'seeking' to participate in a life changing outreach program in Jamkhed, India. If you wish to support these efforts, please send donations to Rev. Twila Schock (address above). **Please make sure to mark donations as "Level 2 funding (JELA): Helping Children in Need."** A gift of \$25 will buy materials for an artificial leg for someone who cannot afford that expense on his/her own. This new leg will allow an individual to return to work in his/her fields, go back to a job, take care of a family, or go to school. The loss of a leg in India is usually due to car accidents, leprosy, or in some areas, land mines.

TRANSITIONS

In Japan, March is a time of transitions. It is the month when the school year ends, graduation ceremonies are held, and transitions within the employment sector are done. That usually means that if a transfer within a job is to occur, it will likely take place at the end of March. We have grown accustomed to this, and personally, I really enjoy starting the new school year in April (vs. September). It seems to be a natural fit as the trees and flowers blossom, and the season seems to be 'fresh.'

At Kyushu Lutheran College, graduation was held on March 15th. About 200 students received their diplomas in Psychology, Career English, or Early Childhood Education. As I quietly played what is commonly referred to as "BGM" (background music), I prayed as these students go forth from this institution, that they will carry with them the Christian truths they have been taught either directly in their coursework or through the discipleship of Christians on the faculty (including us). It is often very difficult to know whether students have been touched or have grown spiritually. I would liken it to the parable of the mustard seed. After that seed is planted, it remains underneath the soil, hidden. During this hidden-ness, a mystery of growth and expansion occurs, providing that it receives nurturing water, warmth and protection.

In a similar way, the seeds of faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ are planted during the students' time at Kyushu Lutheran College. While they are there, they are nourished and protected. Then, four years later, they leave the college. Some continue to seek that nourishment by remaining connected to a Christian church and grow and mature in their faith, and they may even be baptized during their college years or shortly after graduation and become active members of their parish. Others remain "hidden," sometimes for years, until they are ready to blossom. Perhaps it's because of maturity, perhaps an internal yearning brings them back to the church, or perhaps it's because they are released from the grip of parental control and are allowed the freedom to pursue their faith. We know of many who fall into this latter category.

Today, we welcomed 200 new students to Kyushu Lutheran College. Please pray with me that these young adults may be touched in a deep way by the gospel, either through the words of our mouths or the works of our hands.

KLC Students gathered for convocation**Lights, camera, and..... action!**

Our home assignment is still a year and a half away, but learning technology takes a LONG time for me. So, I thought I'd see if I could get the ball rolling to make a short video presentation in time for 2012.

I was wondering, however, if I could solicit some ideas from you, our readers, about what to include. What would *you* like to see or hear about regarding our work and/or life in Japan? Please feel free to send ideas to jackie@bencke.com. Please include the words "video ideas" within the subject line. This might be a good project for youth groups, too! We love to address the thoughts of the littlest ones in the congregations! ☺