

Report of our first visit to the Northeastern Presbytery (in order of churches visited)
General Assembly Diaconal Action Committee "Emergency Response Headquarters"

Dates: March 21~24, 2011

Sendai Canaan Church (Sendai City, Rev. Keisuke Yoshioka)



All of the local members are all right, and there was no great damage evident to the church building. The church didn't lose water or electricity, and the families from six neighborhood homes moved in for about a week to take shelter. Gas has not been restored (It is estimated that it will take about another week). The visitation team was welcomed and offered a place to sleep here this time. Rev. Yoshioka took us around to visit the other churches. Rev. Yoshioka will be serving as assistant to Rev. Takashi Yoshida, and he will also be serving to give care to Ishinomaki Church, which is difficult to reach, and engage in other various kinds of activities as well. Please pray for Sendai Canaan Church and Rev. Yoshioka!

Sendai Church (Sendai City, Rev. Takashi Yoshida)



All of the local members are all right. However, one sister has not been able to reach her family members, and she is experiencing great sadness. There are many cracks in the plaster walls in the church and places where large pieces have fallen off. Rev. Yoshida is not only the head (moderator) of the Reformed Church, but also has the role as head of the Sendai Church Alliance. Realizing right from the start that the nature of this disaster called for action not only by the Reformed Church, but by all the churches in unity, he has made efforts to bring the pastors of various denominations together for exchange of information and the distribution of commodities. For that purpose, a special web site was set up on the 28th (<http://tohokuhelp.com/>). Commodities are reaching the centrally located refugee shelters now, but the needs of the elderly and families with small children who are unable to make it to shelters, those residing along the seacoast to the north, the rescue and support of those in Fukushima still need to be addressed. Very striking this time is the phenomenon that while some areas look like they weren't affected at all by this disaster, right in the same vicinity there are neighborhoods where people have lost everything or where it looks like nothing was ever there. There are great needs to care for these people who have lost so much, and the true work of the church will focus here from now on. This work will go on for a long time and require long-term efforts. Please pray that in this situation Rev. Yoshida will be able to devote himself to providing the necessary spiritual leadership. The elders are also providing individualized care to people one by one. Pray for Rev. Yoshida and Sendai Church who are carrying a great burden!



Kita Nakayama Evangelistic Station (Sendai City, Rev. Norio Sakamoto)

At present all of the active members are all right. But four relatives lost their lives and so some of the members are deeply grieved. Please remember them. The day after the quake, relief good from the OPC arrived, and we were very thankful for this rapid response. Since then, the family of missionary Lauer has come with four truckloads. We heard a very happy report that as the church shared the goods they received with neighbors, some of whom had not been friendly to the church, they were joyful to receive this help and now act as though they are dear old friends. The church building is not on a very firm foundation, and they have determined that there seems to have been very serious damage there. There is also bad damage in the area of the entrance and it is rather dangerous. About 100 meters away from the church building, there had been a landslide, and someone perished there. We felt that Rev. and Mrs. Sakamoto need some emergency help for their situation, including their housing. Please pray for Rev. & Mrs. Sakamoto and for an appropriate solution for the difficulties with the building.

Higashi Sendai Church (Sendai City, Rev. Akira Tateishi)



There doesn't appear to be any great damage to the church building, but the outer block fence around the property collapsed. All of the church members are all right, but some have lost relatives, and some have sustained serious damage to their residences. Please remember them. Some members still continue to take shelter living together at the church. Rev. Tateishi called on the neighbors immediately after the quake to see if they were all right, and on Saturday went to several shelters and, seeing the situation there, felt that he had to do something. As he got in touch with the OPC and Rev. Yong Yul Ma and other mission organizations and built relationships with them, relief supplies began to arrive, and in cooperation with people in the community association, they are pushing ahead with distribution to those who are isolated and those whose needs aren't being met. The number of people in shelters has gradually lessened, and those who remain are almost all elderly folks. As the numbers are reduced, it will become more possible to focus on the needs of individuals who remain. They hope to pursue this. Please pray for Rev. Tateishi and those who are with him sheltering at the church building.

Sendai Megumi Evangelistic Station (Sendai City, Rev. Hideo Ogata, Rev. Murray Uomoto, Rev. Calvin Cummings)



All of the resident members and guest members are all right. At first look the building seems to be all right, but climbing up to the roof, it can be seen that the building is leaning a little. Members of the OPC from Kanto and members of the Reformed Presbyterian quickly delivered relief supplies, and then Rev. Lauer's family came with 4 truckloads of goods, so beginning with helping the local Reformed Churches, in consultation with the city government, they also delivered things to local shelters. Mrs. Cummings baked bread and gave it out to neighbors and deepened friendships with them. Please pray that God will abundantly bless the work of the pastors and the work of Sendai Megumi Church.

Sendai Eiko Evangelistic Station (Sendai City, Rev. Gun Bei Lee, evangelist Yuichi Yamanaka)



There doesn't seem to be any damage to the building. All of the members are all right. Rev. Lee temporarily returned to South Korea to report on the situation. After consultations between the elders of Sendai Church and Itayado Church, Rev. Keiichi Yamanaka was sent, and he has begun to serve while living at the church. As the city churches and especially the younger pastors develop their cooperation, and as we foresee the implementation of volunteer programs, we think that Rev Yamanaka will play a very important role. Please pray for blessings on the work of Rev.

Yamanaka and that of the work of Sendai Eiko Church.

Ishinomaki Evangelistic Station (Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, Rev. Keizo Shiratsu)



We went to the shelter at the Hebita Elementary School where Rev. & Mrs. Shiratsu and their son have been taking refuge, but they were not there. So we went to the location of Ishinomaki Church, and we found them there working at cleaning things up inside the building. When the earthquake hit, they were away in their car, and this saved them. However, the first floor of the church had been flooded with seawater, and this got mixed with heating oil stored at the entrance, and this caused severe damage to the interior. Water and electricity have been restored, but since the interior is saturated with saltwater, it is too dangerous to use the electricity. They use



propane gas, but since heating oil is all through the building, it's too dangerous to light any fire. Even the telephone can't be used. On the second floor there is space where they could sleep, but it is packed full now with clothing and other things. On the outside, stucco siding has fallen off large areas. Rev. Shiratsu looks well, but he is concerned about his blood pressure problem. His wife and son are also exhausted. Relief supplies have hardly begun to be delivered to the shelter there. We suggested that they allow us to try to find a better place for them to take shelter, but

the security situation there is deteriorating, and squatters are taking over vacant buildings, so they didn't feel they could leave the church building at this juncture. We were deeply moved by Rev. Shiratsu's deep love for the church and his strong sense of calling as an evangelist. But we are very concerned for the health of him and his family. Some emergency arrangement needs to be made. We have requested that Rev. Yoshioka of Sendai Canaan Church continuously care for them, and we ask you all to pray especially for the Shiratsu family's health to be sustained. In regard to the church building and the future work there, major decisions will need to be made and a great deal of assistance will be necessary. Please pray for the future of the Ishinomaki Church.

Watari Evangelistic Station (Watari-gun, Miyagi Prefecture, Rev. Shigeo Hayashi)



The church members and kindergarten children are all okay. Because of lack of gasoline, a member in a local rest home had not been visited, but we were able to visit her together and confirm her wellbeing. The church and kindergarten building do not have serious damage, but there were many things strewn around inside. So they were unable to have the usual “graduation” ceremony. There is damage to the roof of the parsonage, and there is concern about the second floor of the kindergarten building, since it is an old structure. With Rev. Hayashi, we went to the shelter set up at the Yamamoto-machi Yamashita Middle School to try to meet a member who was baptized last year, whose wellbeing had not yet been confirmed. We didn't see him there, but we did confirm that he was registered there and was well. We were very impressed with how orderly things were at this shelter. The bread shop that this member ran that was being used as a meeting place was completely wrecked by the tsunami. The entire town has sustained great destruction, and there are cars and mud and debris everywhere. Rev. Hayashi had intended to continue evangelistic work in this place even after his retirement. Please pray for Rev. Hayashi and the Watari Evangelistic Station, for the destruction and damage which have wounded the church member, and for the residents of the town, for the healing of their hearts and for their recovery and the rebuilding of their lives.



Morioka Evangelistic Station (Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture, Rev. Shoichi Kubota)



The church building is new, bright and attractive. The ground is firm in Morioka, and the shaking there was limited to 5 on the Japanese scale. There wasn't any damage to the building, but there was a bit of difficulty related to the shortages of gasoline and daily necessities. All of the present members are all right. They have not yet been able to determine the wellbeing of an absentee member who lives near the seacoast. Please remember this person. Rev. Kubota told us, "Because of the gasoline shortage, I haven't been able to move around much, but I expect soon to be able to head to the coast area and see how things are. We want to pray to know what our church should do now." Please pray for healing for the hearts of people and for the advance of the Gospel, and that Rev. Kubota and the Morioka Evangelistic Station will be abundantly used for these things.

Hachinohe Evangelistic Station (Aomori Prefecture, Hachinohe City, Rev. Chiharu Fujimoto)



We were able to meet Rev. & Mrs. Fujimoto. He said, "On Sunday the 13th, there was no electricity, so I couldn't print up a bulletin. But on the 20th, at last the power returned and I was able to turn the heater on again. Until then we used candles and a kerosene stove to get by." It seems that the church building was all right, but when their home was examined, they were told that it was about 11% damaged. We encouraged them to have the church building examined too. Rev. Fujimoto said, "There have been tsunami and earthquakes here from antiquity, and whenever an earthquake hits, people have the habit of fleeing to high ground." The church members, seekers and the family members are all safe. However, the eastern area along the seacoast has been overrun by the tsunami, and one person who had been to the church 2 or 3 times told of the water of the waves reaching right up to the ceiling of their residences, which were severely damaged. Rev. Fujimoto has been going there from time to time to help with cleaning up what remains. But it is hard to know even where to begin, and that person just stares vacantly at the scene. "I pray to know how to tell the Gospel to these people, what words to use to comfort them. What can I do not just to give moral support but so that God's glory might be revealed? That is what I am praying to know." Please pray for Rev. Fujimoto and the work of the Hachinohe Evangelistic Station that they may be abundantly used and that God's glory will be revealed in that area.

Yamagata Evangelistic Station (Yamagata City, Rev. Kazuhiko Yaegashi)

We were not able to visit Yamagata because of the route we were traveling and the limited time we had. So we made contact by telephone to ask how things were going. We heard that all the people were well and that there was no damage to the building. There is no problem getting food, but it is hard to acquire gasoline. Rev. Yaegashi visits the shelter set up at the local sports center 2 or 3 times a week and delivers much needed supplies. Please pray for God's blessing on Rev. Yaegashi and the work of the Yamagata Evangelistic Station.

Aomori Evangelistic Station (Aomori City, Rev. Kenji Kando)



We visited the Aomori Evangelistic Station. We were able to join the members at the Wednesday night prayer meeting and give our greetings and pray together with many of them. The members, their residences and the church did not incur any significant damage. But the situation still even now continues where it is difficult to get gasoline and heating oil. It snowed the day we were there, and not to be able to get heating oil in Aomori is a very serious problem. The members of Aomori prayed fervently for the other congregation in the Northeastern Presbytery. And they are

considering very practically what they may be able to do in this situation. When we were preparing to leave the next morning to return to Sendai, the members quickly brought us Aomori apples and "onigiri" rice balls for us to deliver to Ishinomaki Church's Rev. Shiratsu and to Higashi Sendai Church. Aomori Evangelistic Station presently is without their own pastor, but Rev. Kenji Kando of the Sapporo Evangelistic Station is serving as their counselor and keeping things going. The person scheduled to preach the following Sunday had told them he was not going to be able to come because of problems with the transportation system. Please remember and pray for the folks in Aomori Church.

Shiroishi Keiyaku (Covenant) Evangelistic Station (Shiroishi City, Miyagi Prefecture, Ref. Takashi Yoshida)



We visited the Shiroishi Keiyaku Evangelistic Station. We hadn't had much information from the town of Shiroishi, but we found that a great deal of damage had been incurred there. Many roads had gaping cracks and many homes were damaged by the shaking of the earthquake. When we visited on Friday the 25th, most of the stores had not reopened.

We examined the church building, and while we didn't find much more than many small cracks in the walls and didn't see any major damage, we saw that the block fence outside had collapsed. Rev. Makoto Mochizuki and seminarian Hikaru Kuniyasu, who had recently served in a summer assignment there, visited the home of members Mr. & Mrs. Aihara. They told us that many of the members had damage to their homes because of the violent shaking. There are some who live alone, and some folks haven't yet been able to clean things up. Although now without a pastor, they have continued to hold worship services. Retired pastor Rev. Shojiro Ishii finished cleaning up the pieces of the damaged fence and then left to take shelter with his daughter in Tokyo.

Fukushima Evangelistic Station (Fukushima City. Rev. Takashi Yoshida, Candidate Kenji Kurihara)

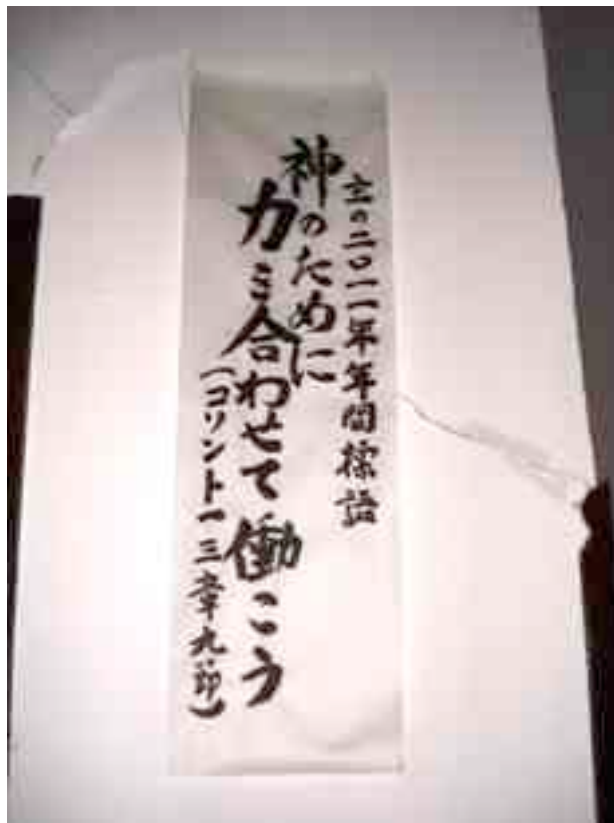


We visited Fukushima Evangelistic Station, which is under the oversight of Sendai Church, and we were able to meet up with steering committee member Mr. Satake. The members and the church building have not suffered serious damage. But we did see much damage to some of the residences nearby. As has been reported by the media, they are very concerned about exposure to radiation from the damaged nuclear electrical generating plants. They are pretty far away from there, but the radiation levels continue to be rather high. So quite a few of the local residents have sought refuge in neighboring prefectures. Ministry candidate Mr. Kurihara and his wife have also gone to take shelter in Shizuoka. On the 20th, they held worship reading the message that Mr. Kurihara had sent them by fax. Steering committee member Mr. Satake seems to have been hurt by the rumors flying around about the nuclear plants. Please pray for God's protection and guidance for the members and that each time their worship will be blessed.



Rokunohe Evangelistic Station (Rokunohe, Aomori Prefecture, Rev. Shigeo Hayashi)

We were unable to visit on this trip, but we contacted steering committee member Mr. Matsuda and inquired about how things were going. “The members and the church building are all okay,” is what we heard. Please pray that the worship will be continued and blessed, though they are now without a pastor. (Correction from #3 news release: We had reported that “We visited all the evangelistic stations except Yamagata,” but we also were not able to visit Rokunohe.)



Sendai Church's slogan for 2011 (We'll combine our strength and work for God)