

Journeying with Hope

Throughout the world, wherever Caritas is involved in situations of conflict or disaster, local people say words that remain in our hearts: “Don’t forget us.”

The fact is that over time the victims of even big disasters are forgotten as media coverage lessens and world attention is drawn to other events. As time goes by, people begin to feel that they have, indeed, been forgotten.

Four years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake. In order that the people of Tohoku not feel forgotten, men and women from throughout Japan continue to give long-term service to assist rebuilding their lives. At their February 2014 meeting, the Catholic bishops of Japan resolved to continue the Catholic Church’s involvement in reconstruction efforts for a further three years. Even so, as time passes people in the affected area are feeling they have been forgotten.

Caritas Japan continues to work with the local Catholic Church which is not a newcomer to the area, but has been there since long before the disaster and continues to be part of the community. Caritas Japan is involved in various activities to give hope for the future to those who lived through the disaster and still live with its aftermath. We will remain engaged in such activities that touch the

hearts of people, assuring them that they are not forgotten.

Caritas Japan’s support is not limited to Church activities. We support local people whose needs may be overlooked by public agencies that focus on large-scale programs and projects. Caritas walks with those people and is prepared to continue to do so.

Caritas Japan will continue to explore paths of hope with the people of Tohoku, working to build a society that nurtures God’s gift of life.

We at Caritas Japan want to thank you for the support you have given this effort in the past and we hope that we can continue to rely upon your understanding and cooperation in the future. We have prepared a report for you describing our fourth-year activities so that you will know how, with your help, we show the people of Tohoku that they have not been forgotten.

March 11, 2015



Bishop Tarcisius Isao Kikuchi, SVD
President, Caritas Japan



The Great East Japan Earthquake & Tsunami Activity Report of Caritas Japan March 2015

With the Diocese of Sendai as the center of activity, Caritas Japan, supported by the whole Catholic Church in Japan, has cooperated in reconstruction activities following the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster.



Tea Salons

In Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures, tea salons known as "Ochakko" continue to assist the regeneration of communities. Caritas bases started to support, upon request from local Social Welfare Associations, arranging community events and tea salons in the areas where new housing has been erected.



Fisheries and Agricultural Support

For four years, Caritas has joined with fishers and farmers to restore their livelihoods. "The people affected by the disaster must be the ones to run reconstruction," and "aid is meant to assist their efforts," continue to be the basic principles behind Caritas Japan's efforts in our fourth year of operations.



Children's Programs

Caritas Japan continues to provide play programs and other facilities for children as well as programs for those who remain in temporary housing.



Fukushima Support

Caritas Japan accompanies evacuees in temporary housing, goes into areas where restrictions are lifted during daytime in order to clean up houses and gardens, and responds to requests for other assistance.

Caritas Japan offers warm thanks to everyone who has supported our efforts.

The Current Situation in the Disaster Zone

The number of those living in temporary housing, facilities considered equivalent to temporary housing* or staying with relatives or friends as of September has decreased from 280,000 a year ago. However, according to the government's Reconstruction Agency, somewhat more than 240,000 people continue to live as evacuees. Of that number, more than 120,000 are from the Fukushima area. While 78,000 of them remain in Fukushima Prefecture, some 46,000 live as evacuees outside the prefecture.

Construction of new housing for victims of the disaster is underway in line with reconstruction plans, but because of the difficulty in finding suitable sites and shortages of labor and materials as well as soaring costs, reconstruction is behind schedule. Many who have been forced to remain in temporary housing are experiencing stress-related health problems.

People who had to evacuate following the nuclear plant disaster in Fukushima still have no idea when they might be able to return to their hometowns. When they first evacuated, they hoped that they could soon return home, but increasingly that hope has been replaced with despair. Among voluntary evacuees, many families have been split up among different locations, adding the burden of maintaining multiple households. The number of people who feel they have reached the limit of their endurance is increasing.

* This includes housing provided by employers and housing rented by the government.

Reconstruction Assistance Activities of Caritas Japan

Caritas Japan's relief and reconstruction activities have focused on the Sendai Diocese, which contains most of the disaster area. These efforts continue to be supported by the Catholic Church throughout Japan.

The Sendai Diocese developed a "The New Creation" plan for reconstruction. The plan states, "We, the Sendai Diocese, intend to keep our focus upon the many people who were affected by the disaster. We are especially concerned for those who had to move far from their homes and we hope to be a Church that offers them heartfelt encouragement, support, and community."

The first phase of the plan covered the half year following the disaster and focused upon supporting evacuation shelters. During the second phase in the second half year, activities centered upon offering support to people moving into temporary housing. Now, and until March 2016, is the third phase of the plan. This period is a continuation of the second, with four main aspects: rebuilding livelihoods, support for economic redevelopment, psychological care and community building. Special emphasis is given to continuing psychological care and community building.

As we approach the fourth anniversary of the disaster, the basic plan continues to be actualized through eight Volunteer Bases in different communities. The central activity of the bases is the running of tea salons in meeting rooms of temporary housing facilities. The bases also provide assistance to people moving from temporary shelter to new housing. In order to alleviate isolation, the

bases conduct home visits to people who cannot or will not go out to tea salons. Visits are also made to people who have moved away from temporary housing but are not yet part of their new communities. Responding to local community requests, some of the bases also provide facilities for children's activities. The number of activities initiated in response to requests from local governments and welfare agencies have increased. Thanks to the dedicated work of base staff and volunteers in these four years, Caritas has become well known and trusted in the communities where it has put down roots.

The Situation in Fukushima Four Years After the Disaster

Fukushima, which has continued to be affected by the nuclear accident that followed the tsunami, is facing yet more problems and complications.

Evacuees have begun to move from temporary housing into reconstructed homes or new housing. However, evacuees from the exclusion zone still have no idea when, or even if, they might return to their homes. The use of "emergency temporary housing," which was originally expected to be necessary for two years, has been extended to March 2016. But, the facilities, which were not intended to be used this long, are beginning to deteriorate.

The Fukushima disaster zone has been divided into areas that may be redeveloped and a restricted zone. There are areas that will be removed from the restricted list after a few years. However, many of the people who have expressed a desire to return to

them are, in fact, elderly. Even before the earthquake, the ageing of the population in these towns and villages made the future doubtful, and the survival of these communities is even more doubtful now. However, those who choose to not return are considered to be "voluntary evacuees" and are ineligible for compensation, a situation that may have severe financial repercussions for them. Those who opted to be voluntary evacuees early on are financially stretched by having to maintain two households.

As mentioned, at present, there are more than 120,000 evacuees either within Fukushima Prefecture or in other places. Yet in one sense, everyone who lives in the prefecture can be said to be a victim. They face much prejudice and discrimination. Because even experts do not agree on the effects of radiation on the human body there are great differences of opinion among residents. This has eroded relationships in the community.

Media coverage of the disaster area has lessened, various support groups have moved out and the number of volunteers has declined. So, there is a shortage of hands to continue reconstruction of communities. Even so, Catholic groups continue to remain active with support from all over Japan and the rest of the world.

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