



Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC)

Congregations in Kumamoto

Rev. Hitoshi and Satoko Adachi

ELCA Missionary and Associate

BLESSINGS on EPIPHANY and THANK YOU

Hitoshi and Satoko are celebrating their third Christmas/Epiphany in Kumamoto. The year 2020 was a surprising year. Having 20/20 vision means you have normal vision, but there is nothing normal about 2020. However, the Lord is mercifully sustaining their ministry in Kumamoto. Hitoshi and Satoko thank the Lord and appreciate your continuing prayers, thoughts, and support for Jesus' ministry in Kumamoto. And they pray for your safety, health, and peace from Jesus, the Savior and the Lord!



aunt, and uncle in a small three-room house. They have been in a difficult life situation.

Hitoshi and Satoko noticed that they learned how to make paper cranes when they were living at the temporary housing community even though they were just first and second graders. They understand how those paper cranes they make might impact the lives of people who received them.

As a result of collaborative efforts from Japanese communities, sixteen thousand paper cranes are now hung from the ceiling of the hospital now. Hitoshi, Satoko, and children here in Kumamoto are praying that the compassion felt during difficult situations are with the people, in that hospital, through the paper cranes flying there.



SENDING A THOUSAND PAPER CRANES to MINNEAPOLIS

From July, the former Tokyo Lutheran Church pastor, Rev. Kazuhiro Sekino started serving as a chaplain at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis. Pastor Sekino had an idea to send a thousand paper cranes to the hospital from Japan because just one paper crane moved his patient, so he asked Christian communities in Japan to make the paper cranes.

During spring when the schools were closed in Japan, Hitoshi and Satoko made many elementary school friends, and several of them are still visiting their home almost every day. So one day, in November, Satoko asked them to make paper cranes. Even without teaching them, at least two students (i.e. sisters) could make paper cranes. They were living at a shelter for several months after the Kumamoto earthquake and in temporary housing for almost three years. Even after temporary housing they transitioned to a regular house but together with two other siblings, their mother, grandmother,



MORE CHRISTMAS SERVICES with LESS PEOPLE

Last year and a year before, Pastors Sumimoto and Hitoshi presided over at least 50 services during Christmas season. However, this year Hitoshi counted they presided over at least 60 services. The reason for this increase is to reduce the risk of COVID-19, some kindergartens and day nurseries limited the number of pupils to attend for each service and repeated services once or twice. Even though they presided over more services, Hitoshi is feeling that his physical fatigue level is much lighter because the number of opportunities for social gatherings (i.e. eating and drinking together) in December was almost nothing.



MATSUBASE CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE COMMEMORATING 60 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

At Matsubase Lutheran Church, they had a Christmas Eve service remembering their 60th anniversary from the dedication of their sanctuary in 1960. In recent years, the city coral group was performing right after the service and the number of attendees to come to the Christmas Eve service was increasing. And the relationship between the church and the neighboring community was getting closer.



However, this year due to the corona virus restrictions, they had to cancel the concert portion. Even with that, Pastor Hitoshi wrote a letter indicating their thanks to the community and the congregation volunteers sent it to over 200 neighbors that are not Christians. Due to the fact that the COVID-19 situation was getting worse toward the end of December, the number of Christmas worship attendees was not so different from regular Sunday service attendees, but there were four individuals who sent their donations to the church. Hitoshi is trusting that the Lord is pouring love and impacting lives of neighboring communities.

ANONYMOUS COUPLE'S VISIT and DONATION

There is a couple living at one of US Marine Corp bases in Japan since 2019, and they are members of one of Pacifica Synod congregations. They knew Hitoshi because he was visiting



many congregations while he was serving as an Assistant to the Bishop before he came to Kumamoto. They contacted Hitoshi to let him know their wish to visit the Lutheran churches and social services organizations in Kumamoto. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, even though they scheduled several times to come to Kumamoto, they had to cancel plans.

However, in November, they could finally visit Kumamoto. Hitoshi and Satoko welcomed and brought them to Kyushu Gakuin (junior high and high school), Jiai-en Social Services Center, and Kyushu Luther Gakuin (junior high, high, and university) as well as four Lutheran churches in the city. Because the visit happened on Saturday, they could not see students at schools, but met with children living at Kodomo (meaning chil-

dren's) Home in Jiai-en. They were moved by those who are unable to live with their parents due to family circumstances.

So even after they left Kumamoto, they continued conversations with Jiai-en Kodomo Home leadership through Hitoshi and found that children at Kodomo Home's wish to have a competition quality ping pong table since some children would like to practice hoping to compete at Special Olympics in the future. They donated the table with a score board right before Christmas. Children have already started practicing at the end of 2020.

NEW 2021 VENTURE - Hitoshi's Reflection

Even as 2020 ends, the fight against corona seems to continue. It may be like a baseball game. We are still in the bottom of the third inning. We do not know whether it would continue till the 9th or continue in extra innings. However, still Hitoshi wants to celebrate the Epiphany, that God showed up 2021 years ago and, through his death and resurrection, is forgiving, loving, and not abandoning humanity despite the fact that a lot of us has lost hope.



Psalm 8 is often chosen in the lectionary on

January 1st. The third verse reads: "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established." The place where we live is also a star. From these words, as inserted above, the image comes to Hitoshi's mind that God's hand is trying to protect the earth.

From such an image of the earth, Hitoshi can see how the baby home children in Jiai-en go out in a buggy(stroller). For, we humans on the earth can be likened to children traveling in a buggy. And Hitoshi thinks the teacher who moves the buggy can be likened to the Lord, Jesus. The teacher talks to the children in the buggy in various ways, but few of them are listening. Some are fighting without listening to what is being said, and it seems that some are crying out to the teacher.

They must listen carefully to the teacher, but the teacher who respects the freedom of children is full of love and kindness. And while correcting the orbit, it sometimes bumps and rattles, but the teacher manages to move it safely. In the new year, listening to the teacher's voice, Hitoshi is grateful and delighted to remember that all the people on the earth venture in the same buggy created by the same God. Let's enjoy our travels, learning to repent, and trusting the Lord, our Savior. Amen.