



DIACONAL MINISTRIES OF THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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"Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation." Psalm 68:19

September 11, 2012

Dear Japan Disaster Response Fund Donors and Volunteers,

As we have now come to the 18-month mark (September 11th) since the great disasters that changed both the physical and spiritual landscape of Japan, I felt that this would be an appropriate time to bring you a report on the work that has been done, accomplished through your gifts of money, time, and talent, and through much prayer. This is also an appropriate time to express our gratitude to you for choosing to partner with us in ministering to those who were so greatly affected by this unprecedented tri-fold disaster in Japan.

In God's providence, the OPC has been ministering in Japan, and specifically in Sendai, for at least the past 50 years. As such, when the tri-fold disasters happened in the Sendai area of Japan, there was little question whether the OPC would be participating in the response to this disaster. Due to communications being greatly affected by both the earthquake and tsunami, it took over 24 hours to ensure the safety of OPC personnel in Japan. What a great relief it was to learn that they had all fared well through this disaster of epic proportions!



As God would work things out, it was just days before this disaster that the responsibility for heading up the OPC's disaster response efforts had been handed back to the Committee on Diaconal Ministries (CDM), having now the staff and policies in place to equip its handling of this responsibility. One such policy of the CDM is that when a disaster happens on a field where we have OPC missionaries, we allow them to regulate our disaster response efforts. Of course, in the immediate relief stage right after a disaster, there simply is not the structure nor communication for "mission decisions" on actions. At that stage, we relied on the good judgment of all involved, praying that the Lord would guide us and enable us to move forward in a fashion that the mission would approve.

In the days that followed the disaster, we realized that the best immediate help we could provide was to truck supplies into the devastated area. Since OPC missionaries Woody and Laurie Lauer were living in the Tokyo region, a couple hundred miles south of the epicenter, the CDM encouraged them to do what they could to find trucks, drivers



and supplies and begin the trek north into the Sendai area. We were so thankful for their tireless efforts in those crucial early days post-disaster.

Upon arrival in the Sendai area, these goods were supplied to OPC missionaries Cal and Edie Cummings and Murray and Tsuruko Uomoto who were living within the disaster zone. Their homes, along with the various RCJ (Reformed Church of Japan) churches in the Sendai region, became "Distribution Centers" for relief supplies (water, rice, diapers, fuel, etc.). This small effort on behalf of the church (small in light of the magnitude of the disaster) in turn provided great steps forward in bringing relief and establishing relationships between the churches and those in the neighborhoods

around them.

As time passed, it was confirmed that the Lord had spared all those Christians who are a part of the RCJ churches in the region. God was certainly gracious to His people. The CDM was particularly thankful to learn of several missionary kids ("MK's") returning to Japan to help in translating and in comforting those who were hurting. We recognized these as some of the best immediate responders that could be a real help in Japan (knowing the language, terrain and culture) and thus the CDM willingly helped to fund their transportation costs to relieve some of the burden incurred in their going.



It was not long after the disaster that many in the church began expressing their desire to financially contribute to these disaster response efforts. The Japan Disaster Relief Fund was soon established. Despite the fact that no appeal was ever specifically made to give to this fund, contributions poured in from both inside and outside the OPC. Almost \$550,000 has been received into this fund to date!



Due to the uncertainty of the radiation concerns in the region around the Fukushima nuclear power plants, many residents were evacuated from that region. Thousands of these evacuees were housed in the high school gymnasium in Yamagata, the town where OPC-affiliated missionaries Kaz and Katie Yaegashi have been ministering for the past 30-plus years. Utilizing Japan Relief Funds, Kaz was able to develop an effective deed ministry to these refugees, providing them with shoes, diapers, and other relief supplies. These gifts were well-received by those with whom he was able to minister.

In early May of last year, at the invitation of the OPC Japan Mission (OPCJM), an assessment team from the OPC was sent to Japan to consider the situation first hand, with a mind to provide additional advice to the mission on how best to proceed in responding to the disaster. This team of five was able to visit with our missionaries, interview at least seven different RCJ pastors, attend various ecumenical meetings, inspect several church buildings, and survey several of the devastated coastal towns. In the process, one member of our team, an experienced builder, produced inspection reports for four different buildings, which included recommendations and projected costs.





One recommendation of the Assessment Team was that we send some volunteer teams. It did seem that there was a shortage of volunteers in the disaster region and that the work of the few volunteers was quite effective in touching lives and hearts with that “cup of cold water in the name of Christ.” In June, with the concurrence of the OPCJM, the call went out to the churches and many from across the OPC responded. In August and early September, three 10-person teams of volunteers, representing many churches from across the US, traveled to Japan for 2 weeks per team. These teams mucked out homes, pulled weeds, served hot meals and prepared a building for re-building,



just to name a few things. They sweated together, sang together, ate together and worshipped together. They were knit together in their common bond of Christ and joined by a desire to bring hope to a hurting people.



A second recommendation of the Assessment Team was that we participate with the other reformed mission agencies in establishing some sort of “disaster relief center” which could be a base of operations in the devastated area, from which teams could minister to the affected persons. This, too, received the concurrence of the OPCJM. So, in the course of time, the Lord led us to the town of Yamamoto, a small farming town just south of the Sendai airport, where despite a population of over 20,000, there did not exist any known Christian church. We “discovered” a former dental office that had been flooded with six feet of tsunami water, but was, otherwise, structurally sound.

The dentist did not intend to re-establish his practice in Yamamoto but was very interested to see the building be used in a capacity that would be a help to that community. When he learned of our interest in establishing a presence in Yamamoto which would serve as a ministry to the community residents, he graciously agreed to sell the building for one tenth of its value. Together with the partnering reformed mission agencies, we purchased the building in September. This was approximately six months after the disaster. Providentially, the second and third teams of volunteers were in country at the time, able to apply a good bit of their time and energy clearing out the building, removing the ruined wall and floorboards, and making it ready for rebuilding once again.



During the Fall, the plans were laid for remodeling the building to serve as a community outreach center, with the idea that it be easily converted to serve as a church building when the disaster response work would be complete. Having discovered that the price of building material in Japan was almost twice what it costs in the US, the plans were adjusted to accommodate US building material. The plan was for the building materials to be purchased in the US and shipped to Japan.

A third recommendation of the Assessment Team was that we provide help to the central church in Sendai by assisting them in the repair of their sanctuary, which had been considerably damaged during the 9.0 earthquake and many aftershocks. Upon receiving the church’s favorable response to our offer to help, and with the concurrence of the OPCJM, plans were laid for the construction teams to remove all the lathe and plaster on the walls of this 100-plus-year-old building and replace these with plywood sheeting and drywall.



It was not long before we discovered the many difficulties of attempting to ship building material to Japan. But with the tenacity and gifts (in architecture, shipping and logistics) of several men in our churches, and with the grace of the Lord, two 40' shipping containers were successfully packed in Seattle and shipped to Japan, moving smoothly through customs and arriving successfully at their job sites in Japan literally just days before the first construction team landed to begin the remodeling effort. We thank the Lord! This was in mid-February of this year.

We were very thankful to find that, when we communicated to our church the need for skilled workers in Japan, the response was overwhelming, enabling us to send enough workers to field four 10-person specialized teams, each of which labored in Japan for 2 weeks. It was such a delight to watch the Lord equip the teams with just the right workers and just the right skills for the different phases of the project. The first team was loaded with men who clearly knew how to perform rough carpentry quickly and efficiently. There were also some on this team who could successfully overcome the challenges of navigating between the different systems of measurement utilized by the Japanese and US, particularly as it pertains to plumbing. (Did you know that the only overlapping pipe sizes between our pipes and Japanese pipes are our 2inch pipe and their 50mm pipe; these, we came to discover, are compatible!) The volume of work accomplished by this team was immense!



The second team came in right on their heels to help mud, sand, and paint the sanctuary walls and to complete the rough carpentry and hang most of the sheetrock on the Relief



Sendai Church Before

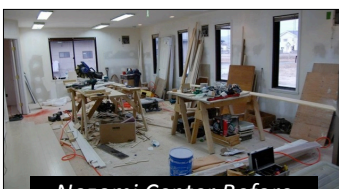
Center in Yamamoto, soon to be officially named "Nozomi Center" (translated "Hope Center"). This team was equipped with men of various skills, but it was wonderful, in particular, to have some good plasterers on this team to enable the Sendai Church walls to be completed



Sendai Church After

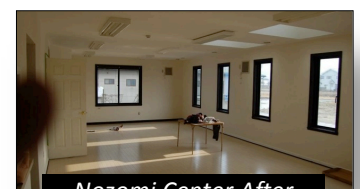
with a professional finish, to the delightful satisfaction of the Japanese church!

Our third team spent countless hours mudding the sheetrock at the Nozomi Center, completing various carpentry projects there, installing kitchen cabinets, and beginning to lay flooring, just to list a part of their work. This team had the fortitude to push on under difficult circumstances with tedious work while living in the dust-filled construction site.



Nozomi Center Before

The fourth team arrived in Japan carrying the burden of knowing there was not a team scheduled to follow them; it was up to them to complete the project. This team hit it hard, equipped with several who were particularly skilled with finish carpentry, and after many 12-hour days, completed the Center, enabling the Japanese church to move forward



Nozomi Center After

with furnishing and staffing it.

One of the joys of seeing these teams go to Japan has been watching the Japanese church embrace our teams, showering them with kindness measured by the volume of food our teams were served. Each morning a vehicle would pull up in front of the Nozomi Center and in would come more boxes of food, far more than could be consumed by a team twice their size. Our team members went to serve and found themselves being served instead! To God be the glory.



Another exciting aspect of the work by these teams is that several articles, written by secular Japanese papers, were written about their work. Church teams



coming from the USA to restore a church building and build a relief center at a time when many other relief agencies were in the process of wrapping up their work in Japan garnered interest by the media. These news interviews created occasions for our missionaries and the Japanese brethren *"to give a reason for the hope that lives within"* (1 Peter 3:15). Nozomi (Hope) Center does not speak to a trite hope, but a true hope for those who have not only potentially lost all that they have in this world, but who *are* lost outside of Christ.

May 5th, 2012, marked the Opening Ceremony for Nozomi Center. Missionary Cal Cummings

described it as *"a time of rejoicing with 84 church and community people in attendance. Many churches were represented from as far away as Nagoya, Yokohama and Tokyo. It was a wonderful ceremony starting with a worship service and singing praises to the Lord and all praying together that this center would indeed be a launching pad for ministers, church members, and teams from all over Japan and beyond to come and to spread the love of Christ, both in tangible expressions and in the proclamation of the Word."*



The "Basic Philosophy" adopted for the Nozomi Center is:

"In obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, 'You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself,' become a good neighbor to the disaster victims who are in the midst of great difficulty, demonstrating the love of Christ by word and deed. Responding to the Lord Jesus' words, 'What you have done for the least of these, you have done for me,' serve the disaster victims and live together with them."

Following is a summarized compilation of the various purposes adopted for the Nozomi Center:

- Offer a base from which a variety of support activities can be carried out based on the spirit of Christian love.
- Carry out humanitarian assistance, material assistance, and events.
- Offer a facility for use by the townspeople for meetings and events.
- Investigate needs in the area.
- Help the weak, particularly the children and the elderly, in that region.
- Provide accommodations for church groups and teams of Christians who might be dispatched to serve the disaster victims.
- Offer a place for Lord's Day worship and other Christian gatherings under the oversight of the RCJ church in that area, Watari Reformed Church.

This summer the OPCJM invited us to send two volunteer teams to work out of the Nozomi Center. These two

10-person teams were in Japan from July 6th – August 9th. Participants of these teams represented 16 different churches and were ably led by two OPC elders. One of our team members described his experience as follows:



"Nozomi Center is in the perfect location for God to work. Yamamoto-Cho really loves the people that work at the center and embraces the teams that come with open arms. This is the perfect building for short term and long term teams....I did not know what to expect...everything was much better and more awesome than what I could have thought up in my mind...The devastation on the beach is what affected me the most. For at least a mile stretch was all just destruction. At first it was exciting, like something out of an apocalypse movie or novel, then real life kicked in and I saw human things like shoes and clothes. This brought me to tears. The videos that I had seen were truly real. God used His

power here. He is in control.

"One of the ways that God showed himself in this trip was how fast He worked in so many people. A couple examples: We weeded a garden for an older lady in the community. Her name was Mrs. "H"...She was so grateful and so curious that a bunch of people from America would help her just because. We told her why we had helped her and she asked "I would like to know more about being a Christian." Please pray that God would work in her and that she would take Jesus as her Saviour...She has so much sorrow from the tsunami because it took away her husband. She tries to put the past behind her but it is just so hard to bury sadness and not know why it happened.

"...This town was just destroyed by the Tsunami. It took away more than people, places and belongings. It took away their pride, their joy and their honor. They have nothing to be proud of anymore, nothing to be joyful about, nothing to take honor in... They saw that we had something that they don't. Just by shining out light people saw that we were different. Not just American but Christian...The people of Japan are no longer closed to help from others including God. They would pray with us every morning and night. They know that we have something that they do not...



"The Nozomi center is in the right place at the right time right now. The people have nothing to really hope for. To have a place called, "The Hope Center" is kind of an obvious beacon for these people."

It is our prayer that the Lord would continue to use, guide and bless the work of the Nozomi Center. A particular need right now is for a Director for this center. Nozomi's board would really like to have a Japanese minister of the gospel serve in this capacity. Please pray with us that the Lord would raise up just the right man for this important work.



Finally, in recent months, the RCJ has asked the OPC to help with another building project. Ishinomaki Chapel was the only RCJ church building in close enough proximity to the shore for the tsunami waters to be able to reach it. This building was flooded with at least 3 feet of sea water, sludge, and kerosene from overturned fuel tanks. Pastor Shiratsu and his wife were forced to evacuate the church building/parsonage and endured life in an evacuation center for 23 days. (This center quickly ran out of fuel and food, making life there very difficult

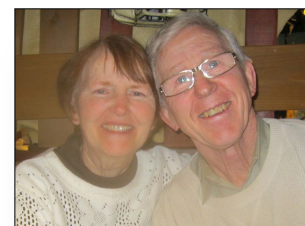
during those cold winter days, particularly for this couple in their early 70's!)

Although this congregation is very small at this time, it is in a significantly strategic location, since the city of Ishinomaki was one of the hardest hit populations. This city was almost 50% covered by the tsunami. Several other mission agencies, having not previously had a presence in Ishinomaki, are now seeking to establish a beachhead in this hurting locality. The RCJ Presbytery is urging the refurbishment of this building, and the OPCJM concurs with the strategic significance of this opportunity.

The RCJ's denominational diaconal committee will be paying for the materials for this project. The OPC is to provide the plans, and the workers, Lord-willing. We anticipate fielding 4 teams of 10 to go for 2 weeks each, beginning in late October with a goal of completing the work by Christmas. As of the writing of this letter, we still have quite a few openings on these teams. Do you know of someone in your church who may have the skills, time, and interest to go and serve for 2 weeks or more? If so, please contact me at nakhla.1@opc.org.

To date, we have utilized \$375,000 of the Japan Relief Fund towards the various efforts described above, and more! The balance of the Fund is ~\$167,000. We anticipate this to be more than enough to fulfill the commitments before us. We have had the opportunity to see at least 75 different individuals from our churches go to participate in these efforts. Of those, at least 14 have served on more than one team. The individuals represent at least 14 of the OPC's 17 presbyteries and include several participants from outside the OPC. This has truly been a church-wide response effort!

Tremendous thanks must go out to our missionaries in Japan, without whom this work could not have gone forth as it has. In particular, Cal and Edie Cummings provided the lion's share of the labor in supporting and caring for the 9 OPC Disaster Response Teams that have gone to Japan since the great tsunami. What gracious and giving servants these are!



Friends, we rejoice in the opportunity to serve the Lord in bringing the compassion of Christ to a portion of the Japanese people at this unique time in this unique way. This work could not have gone forward without your generous gifts of money and of time and talent given towards this effort. We are thankful for the opportunity to partner with you and are thankful for the privilege of working with our brothers and sisters in Christ who live a difficult life standing for Christ in Japan. May the Lord use our efforts towards great things accomplished in his name, especially, the saving of many souls.

We are also indebted to you for all your prayers on our behalf. The Lord has truly led this effort, each step of the way. We praise Him and give thanks for all He has done, through our feeble efforts, towards His great purposes. May His name be glorified in all of this.

Please do continue to pray that the gospel of the Risen Son might truly prosper in the Land of the Rising Sun!

Yours in Christ,

David Nakhla
OPC Disaster Response Coordinator