

Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami on March 11, 2011

What Happened Then and How Things Are Now

Words of Gratitude for Prayer and Support

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Great Earthquake and Huge Tsunami, The Devastation They Caused

The earthquake which struck eastern Japan at 2:46pm on March 11th, 2011, was unprecedented in its scale of magnitude nine, which may happen possibly only once in a thousand years. The damage caused by the earthquake itself such as collapse of buildings and houses was huge. But an even more enormous calamity was the tsunami which reached 40m high and attacked subsequently the fishing ports, housing areas, schools, old people's homes, railway stations/tracks and highways along the east coast lines for the length of 500km. All of them were swept away without traces. Those who tried hard to escape for their lives to the third floor of or even to the roof of the nearby buildings could not save themselves and became victims. On top of this, people had to spend the night in extreme fear, threatened by water and fire which was ignited by gas and petro-chemical complexes in the region. The number of the victims, including the dead and the missing, as of January 2014, reaches 18,524. Those who still live in temporary housing number as many as 280,000. The public services to sustain people's lives such as water-, electricity- and gas-supplies were not restored for a long time.



According to the World Bank estimates, the amount of economic loss caused by this natural calamity is the largest ever in human history.

Disaster and Explosion at Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant

Another disaster and fear we had to face came from the accidents and explosions at Fukushima First Nuclear Power Plant. Approximately one hour after the earthquake,

Fukushima First Nuclear Power Plant, which is run by Tokyo Electricity Co., had to stop its operation due to the loss of all electric power supply. It was unable to cool down the nuclear reactors, resulting in a huge meltdown, and a number of hydrogen explosion followed. We found ourselves in the midst of severe nuclear accidents. Terror and confusion caused by the serious radiation and leakages of radioactive substances in the wide range of area have never been solved until now. Consequently, residents of nearby communities have had to move out to other areas as a whole village and find shelter. They have not been allowed to return to their own homes. Furthermore, many of them have very little possibility of returning to their home towns and villages in the long- term future.

People who had used to live in devastated areas were deprived of their lives, livelihood, beloved families, jobs, and their home communities. There is no doubt that they feel utterly lost even to this day, in a situation where they can see very little prospect of restoring their lives.



Even today, we keep hearing of the number of victims still increasing because of the hardship of the life in shelters, victims committing suicide out of hopelessness, and death as the outcome of the hard labour for those who are engaged in reconstruction work.

As regard the damage to the Diocese of Tohoku, a community in Shinchimachi, Fukushima Prefecture, which includes one of the parish churches, was devastated. Three people in Isoyama St. John's Church lost their lives. Among the three, two were parents of a daughter who lost her life while she protected the kindergarten children during the cold night and lost her body temperature. The parents had been missing for some time, but later they were identified as her parents according to the result of a DNA test.



Responses Made by NSKK and the Diocese of Tohoku

The Cathedral of Tohoku Diocese is located in Sendai City which is near the Pacific coast. I myself experienced the great earthquake when I was in the Cathedral. I went back home nearby and spent a dark and cold night with my family. At the time, I had very little idea about the tsunami and its enormous outcome. Without electricity, we had no TV news, no newspapers, we knew nothing of what was happening around us.

Three days later, it was Sunday, and when I went back to the church, people who could gather there were very anxious to know each other's situation.

That was when I came to know the sheer size of devastation as the result of the tsunami. The liturgy we held that morning became the occasion for the people to

share their news and to confirm each other's safety.

The diocese immediately decided to set up a head office for organizing relief activities.

We started by making inquiries of people's whereabouts and safety. Young people hurried off to the elderly in the community to distribute some water and food. At that stage, we most badly needed petrol. As the roads were destroyed here and there, our activities were severely limited.

A week later, when our food was almost gone, the NSKK general secretary and mission secretary arrived at Sendai office. They had to make a detour due to the destruction of the highway between Sendai and Tokyo. Then, people from other dioceses of NSKK could flow in one after another.

In May, 2011, 'Let Us Walk Together Project' was started for the whole NSKK to get involved in the work of restoration and recovery of our communities. With the Primate Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Nathaniel M. Uematsu as the leader, eleven dioceses stood together as one body. This was the first attempt in the whole history of NSKK.

The name 'Let Us Walk Together' meant for us that we needed to walk together, trusting that Jesus Christ is also walking with us, rather than just the idea of ourselves helping someone else. Its guideline statements read as follows:

We will walk together in respect for all who face hardships arising from the Eastern Japan Earthquake.

We will walk together towards the rebuilding of the lives and communities of the victims.

We will walk together encouraged that Our Lord Jesus Christ who also walks together with us.

At the initial stage, the main activities of the project have been to extend our support to those who stayed in shelters, and later on, in the temporary housing complexes. Particularly, we concentrate our concerns on the homes and groups for the elderly, handicapped, children, foreign residents in Japan, among whom are many Filipinas and their families in the areas. It was our intention to focus our eyes and hearts on those to whom the Government pays little attention.

A great number of the laity of the NSKK churches volunteered and participated in this Project. Approximately ten members became full-time staff and were based in Sendai office to make it a home-base for our activities.



Words of Gratitude for Prayer and Support by the Anglican Communion

I am most grateful for the huge support and prayer given to us by the whole of Anglican Communion. Archbishops, presiding bishops, primate bishops and other bishops as well as laity and clergy from various parts of the world have visited the victims and the affected areas and made a large amount of donations.

In October 2013, we had the honour of a visit made by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rt. Revd. Justin Welby who detoured to Tokyo and Sendai before he visited Korea to attend the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Pusan.

He had a face-to-face conversation with the family members of those three laity who lost their lives in the calamity. He had a time of intimate conversation with them.

Into the Second Stage from 'Let Us Walk Together! Project'

Setting up of a 'Special Project on Nuclear Power Plant and Radiation Issue'

And New Steps of Tohoku Diocese 'Daijini Tohoku'.

The work of 'Let Us Walk Together Project' was run for two years between May 2011 and May 2013. We decided to start a second stage of activities: At the level of the whole Province, we should become more specialized into the nuclear power plant

accident issue. And as the Diocese of Tohoku, we need to be more deeply rooted in the community, encouraging the laity to become more involved to continue our activities. We therefore started a new work and named it 'Daijini, Tohoku'. 'Daijini' means 'Love Each Other' in the dialect of Eastern Japan.

Our involvement in the nuclear power plant and radiation issue is based in St.Peter's and St.Paul's Church in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture. We will pay particular attention and extend our concerns to those who have lost hope for future in their life as refugees. At the same time, we intend to emphasize our deep concerns with radiation and nuclear power problems and actively send information out into other parts of the world.

The activities of 'Daijini Tohoku' is based in Sendai Cathedral. The Support Centre in Shinchi, Fukushima Prefecture, where three people lost their lives, will be continued. It will remain as a symbol for the community there. Some part of the 'Let Us Walk Together Project' still continues, such as cooperation with handicapped people's groups as well as coordinating the visitors from other parts of Japan and worldwide to meet and pray together with people affected. This is because we believe that the most important thing for us is to KEEP PRAYING and NOT TO FORGET.

Keep Praying and Not To Forget

It is said that Japan is one of the super-powers in today's world. Northeast (Tohoku) area in Japan is, however, the most poverty-stricken and marginalized area in its history. It has been an alienated locality. Even before the great earthquake, it has been suffering from an aging population, de-population, poverty, unemployment for the youth, and hopelessness for the future. The whole area had seriously deteriorated.

As of the Diocese of Tohoku, NSKK, the area is as big as the half of England. We have 24 parish churches and 17 kindergartens as well as nurseries. The number of Anglican clergy is as few as 10, including bishop. Several retired clergy are helping us. I am sure that this diocese is to be counted as one of the hardest among the areas for Christian mission and evangelism, as is generally true in Japan. We have

had walked so far with

a great deal of prayer and support offered by friends in and out of the country.

At the same time, we need to remember that in many parts of the world, people are suffering and victimized under natural calamities, war and conflicts.

I would like to express my deep gratitude for the Church of England and the Anglican Communion as the whole for remembering us in your prayers and for the donations offered to us. At the same time, I would like to add my sincere hope that our churches remain walking together with those in suffering as Our Lord is. I trust that you will continue to pray for us in the future.

In the name of Christ.

In Commemoration of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami

These prayers may be used to commemorate the third anniversary of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami at commemoration services on 11th March, at Sunday services on 9th March 2014, or thereafter.

Most merciful and compassionate Lord, we remember before you the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, which took place (____)* years ago. We pray that you will sustain those in the affected areas; those living in places of refuge; especially those who suffer because of the various hardships they experience in Japanese society; and those who have lost hope in the future. (We particularly pray for ____)**In March 2014, the word 'three' may be inserted here.*

We remember before you those who have lost their livelihoods due to the nuclear accident, as well as the damage that has been done to the natural environment. We ask you to protect those forced to live far from their homes; those engaged in dangerous work; and their families. Please lead in the ways of righteousness those in positions of responsibility in government and society.

Help us always to remember those suffering in these situations. We ask you to strengthen the work of the NSKK project "Let's Walk Together Part II" and lead all of us, so that we may join together in body and spirit and continue to walk together with those who suffer.

Lord, source of all life, we ask you to gather in your loving arms all victims of the Great Japan Eastern Earthquake and Tsunami; and victims of war and natural disaster all over the world. Grant them eternal peace.

In the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.