

REPORT OF VISIT TO JAPAN

15-18 September 2015

**to observe the activities of the current GFS World Project
from (Lay) Canon Val Gribble, World President of GFS**



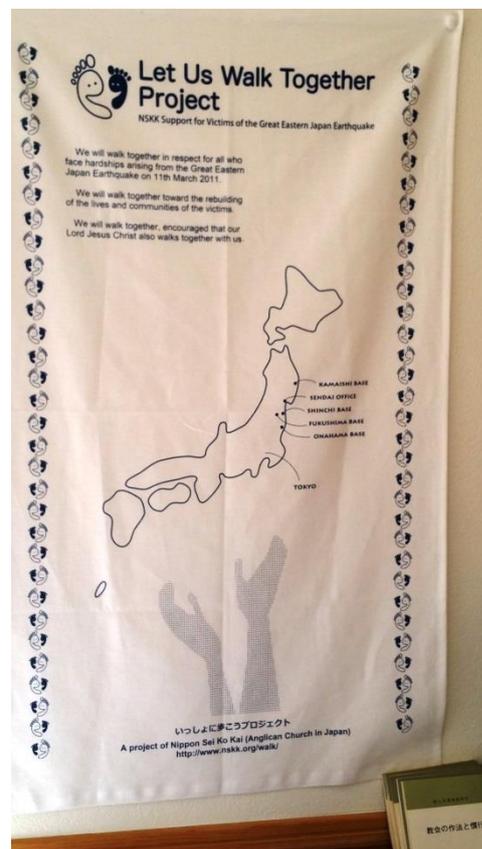
A Park where no children play!

What a joy it was to visit Japan (on my way to Korea for their 50th celebrations) and to see where GFS is working for the current World Project. I came home with much to think and pray about. My heartfelt request is that we support this World Project well, there is so much more that can be done and the funds are needed now!

My sincere thanks to Asako Yonamine (President of GFS Japan and who came from Okinawa Island to travel with me and on to Korea), Yuka Murata, Haruko Mizutani, (President of GFS in Tokyo and a past National President) and Father John Kanzaki from Tokyo, a past National Chaplain and a great supporter of GFS. We drove in Yuka's comfortable car for the 430 kms journey over two days

I hope that the information I give is correct and hopefully Asako will correct me if any is wrong.

The Tsunami of March 2011 is, of course, sealed in our minds but as with most disasters as time goes by much of the interest and support wanes and we think all is back to normal. Not so of course and certainly Japan will continue to grapple with the huge challenges of the tsunami for many, many years. I found it useful to go back to looking at some of the videos of the Tsunami to again challenge me as to the damage that it caused. You will find many on the web. It is also useful to remind ourselves that the Christian church in Japan is very small and the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Japanese Holy Catholic Church) is a smaller part of the Japanese Christian denominations. I don't always put much confidence in statistics on Wikipedia but at the moment it states that there are approximately 60,000 Anglicans over 11 dioceses. The Tsunami affected so many different areas in Japan so I have great admiration for the work that is done by a small church, small in number, but large in faith, service and commitment.



The Project is helping in three main areas. The first is in Tokyo. Many thousands of displaced people were taken to Tokyo and housed in Government high rise units (free of rental charge – but with this program expected to cease in the new year) Fr Kanzaki's parish hosts a Children's Day each month where children from these displaced families gather for a day of fun and fellowship within a safe environment. It is also a time to talk with parents who may also come for the day. GFS Japan, as part of the World Project, provide the leadership for these days.

So my visit began at Tsukishima Seikokai Church where Fr John was a very welcoming host for our first night. The next morning Haruko and Yuka joined us and we set off on our journey north. We arrived at Koriyama at the parish church. Koriyama is 63 klms from Fukushima Nuclear plants and had severe damage from the earthquake as well as continuing to have high levels of radiation. This



parish is the base for support for the Fukushima area. The church was not damaged but the hall and offices beside it were destroyed and rebuilt by the Government. They run a large kindergarten across the road. Many people have left the area because of the radiation issues and so the kindergarten numbers have

declined but the one run by this parish is well supported and parents feel safe using it. There are 80 children enrolled. There is also a very successful after school care program. There is a full cleaning of the kindergarten every morning, with everything carefully wiped down and daily readings taken of the radiation level.

Please read the article at the end of this report, which was printed in March 2014.



It is exactly the same information as I was given. This is not the same kindergarten I visited but is also in the same city of Koriyama. One of the church kindergarten teachers showed me photos of plants and trees that are now growing in strange shapes since the Tsunami. The government has taken much of the topsoil and put into large strong black bags and then set them in large concrete tubs. But they are all piled up around Koriyama waiting for the Government to find somewhere to take the contaminated soil. I was shown photos of splits in some of the bags and grass growing through the split from inside. People are very frightened. They told me the Government provides them with little feedback.

There are 500 temporary houses in this area, rows of what we in Australia would call dongas.

They



are not maintained and people often move out. There are still 50,000 displaced people in the Koriyama area. The Deacon from the church took us walking around some of Koriyama, with a device to measure the radiation. There were often times when the measurement went over the accepted level.

He is concerned about the growing isolation of people. I heard both in this area and in the next place we visited that the women will come to talk (and the parish still organises a café four times a week where

people can gather and just talk and have a cup of coffee). The men who have little work are not keen to talk and there is a growing problem with abuse of alcohol.

GFS Japan now tries to run camps for the children so that they can move away from the area even for a short time and can run and play on grass and in water as for children in normal circumstances. Their first camp was in Okinawa where Asako lives but the next one is programmed for an area on the main island far away from the Radiation areas. But these camps are expensive, as we all know, and so we need to continue to support the Project so more and more children can experience a life beyond their very limited and damaging lives in this area.

That night we stayed at a most wonderful hotel in the mountains and which has hot springs – Onsen as they are called. It was so relaxing to spend time both in the evening and next morning in the hot springs.



And so on to Ishinomaki one of the badly damaged areas and where the Sewing Project is situated, the third part of the World Project. We were greeted so enthusiastically. The ladies are now able to work in a house that has been loaned to them. They are very organised and they are now doing such beautiful work. Asako had asked members in Japan if they had new Obis (the beautiful sashes that women wear around their waist when dressed in their Kimonos). Many were given and the ladies have made these into such enticing items. While we were

visiting many of the areas of Ishinomaki, Yuka and Haruko stayed on to discuss with the ladies the setting up of a web page to sell their goods overseas so we hope we will be able to share this web page with you soon.





I once again found the information I received and what I saw so confronting. It was surreal to see the same sites I had seen on the TV as the waters rushed in. Where once houses and factories were built

close to the water, now there is a large area between the water and buildings and this area will never be built on again. So much was new, but there were few trees. Fire also engulfed so many buildings as gas lines and electricity lines were broken. I saw rows and rows and rows of tombstones in new cemeteries in so many places. There is very little evidence of the damaged buildings etc., but the school where 74 children died has been preserved, still in its broken form from the earthquake. The mountain is just behind the school but the teachers did not think that the water would rise the 24ft and so did not take the children up that mountain. There is a beautiful shrine there and this school will probably be retained as a memorial.



And so after a most thought provoking day we found our B&B for our night's stay. We stayed in a small fishing village, the B&B had been badly damaged but rebuilt and was quite close to the



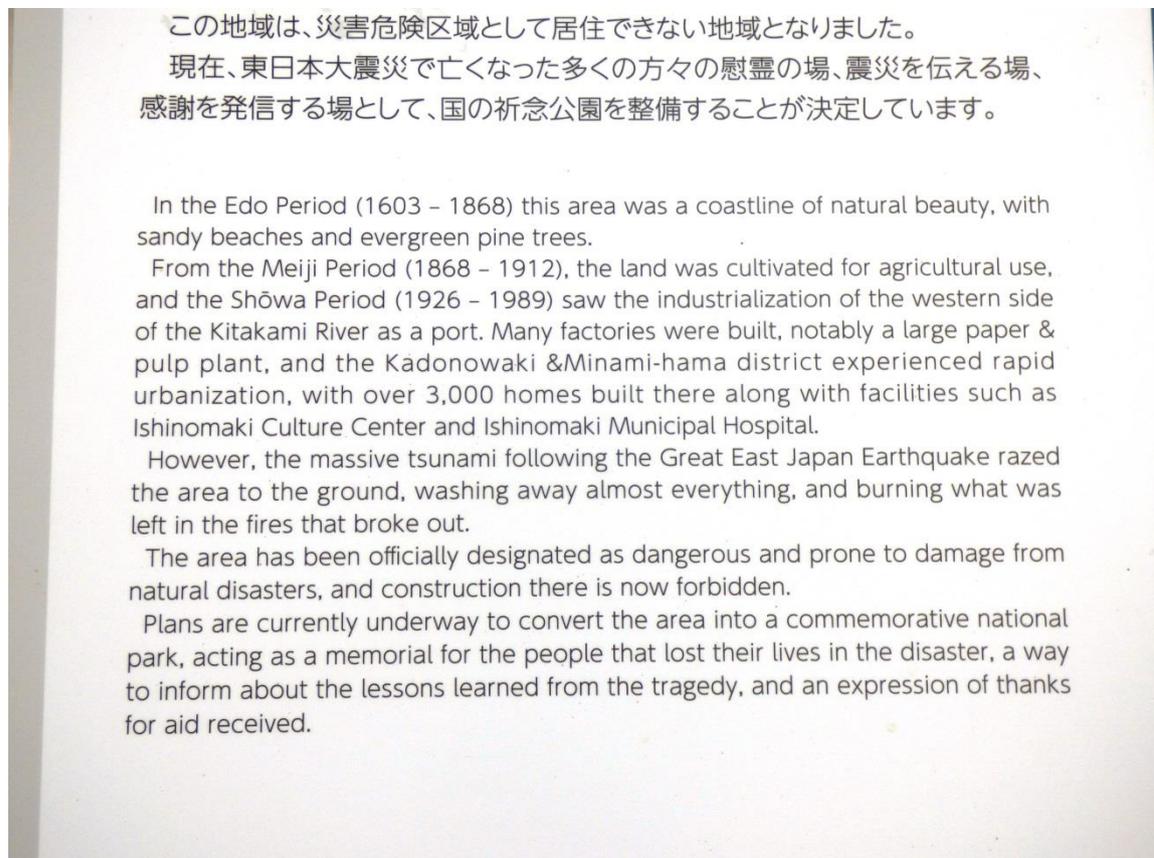
water's edge. The owner of the B&B is a fisherman and so our evening meal was the most wonderful array of fish. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw it all so beautifully arranged. We knew that there had been an Earthquake in Chile and that Japan an in the village and an announcement was made. It was, of course, in Japanese but I knew that someone would come and tell me if I had to

evacuate. The siren went off again at 5 and 6am. We found out that it was an announcement that no one was to go near the water that day. The owner of the B&B said that there are often alarms but I could quite understand people wanting to be



well prepared and it was an experience to highlight the tension of the area.

On our third day, and a rainy day we set off for Sendai – 56 klms away – to fly to Korea. Again a surreal experience to stand in Sendai Airport and to look out at the ocean and to remember the TV shots of the water rushing past.



So what are my observations and recommendations for the World Project?

Firstly I don't think any of us could appreciate the enormity of the disaster without seeing it all and it has certainly left an indelible impression.

- 1 I believe that the Sewing Project will soon be self-supporting which was the aim of GFS Japan - to provide a cottage industry for women who had lost their jobs and may have been displaced in the Ishinomaki area. But we need to keep promoting the Sewing Project and continue to purchase items when we can. I am sure there will be a wide variety of items at the next World Council.
- 2 The monthly Children's Day in Tokyo is so important to offer children and their parents an opportunity for a day of fun and fellowship. It is of course also a way to evangelise and for others to see the NSKK in action.
- 3 It is imperative that the Children's Camps continue and if possibly expand. The problem is the organising and leadership of the camps. Asako told me about the excitement and joy of the children

as they arrived on Okinawa and found they could play in the sand and walk on the grass and play in the water. What a wonderful opportunity there is to continue such an important project.

We have sent \$AUD11.000 to Japan in the first year, most of this from Australia. This has nearly all been used and there is little left in Japan to use for the Project. I am sure other countries have more to send and of course the offertory from the World Day of Prayer Services should be sent for the World Project. If you are a small country and have a small amount collected please keep it and bring to World Council (but let me know how much you have set aside) More financial countries please endeavour to send money to the Project this year.

I cannot emphasise enough the need to keep this World Project moving.

I thank Father John, Asako, Yuka and Haruko for organising this wonderful visit, for making sure I heard the stories and saw what is happening. I am sure if there are any of our young members around the world who would like to help with the children's camps GFS Japan would be very welcoming, even if there would be a language problem. Let me know if there are any young members interested.

I have seen the work of NSKK in their endeavours to assist the many displaced people and affected people of the Tsunami. May God bless them in all the work they do.

(Lay) Canon Val Gribble

GFS World President

September 20

Photos:

Cover	A park and stream in Koriyama, damaged by the earthquake but now not visited because of the radiation levels.
Page 1	“Let us Walk Together” showing the areas where the NSKK is working hard To support people affected by the Tsunami Our Group - Yuka, Father John, myself, Haruko and Asako with Father Koshiyama at his church in Koriyama
Page 2	Kindergarten children celebrating birthdays at Koriyama Containers of contaminated soil waiting to be removed Temporary housing
Page 3	The ladies of the Sewing Project showing us their work A picture of Ishinomaki before the Tsunami and one taken in the same place now
Page 4	The remains of the school where 74 children and many teachers died Father John and Asako standing beside one of the marks of the water height. Remains of a burnt tree Our fish dinner
Page 5	A simple history of the area including Ishinomaki

The children of Japan's Fukushima battle an invisible enemy

KORIYAMA, JAPAN | BY [TORU HANAI](#) AND [ELAINE LIES](#) – MARCH 11, 2014

Some of the smallest children in Koriyama, a short drive from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, barely know what it's like to play outside - fear of radiation has kept them indoors for much of their short lives.

Though the strict safety limits for outdoor activity set after multiple meltdowns at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant in 2011 have now been eased, parental worries and ingrained habit mean many children still stay inside.

And the impact, three years on, is now starting to show, with children experiencing falling strength, lack of coordination - some cannot even ride a bicycle - and emotional issues like shorter tempers, officials and educators say.

"There are children who are very fearful. They ask before they eat anything, 'does this have radiation in it?' and we have to tell them it's okay to eat," said Mitsuhiro Hiraguri, director of the Emporium Kindergarten in Koriyama, some 55 km (35 miles) west of the Fukushima nuclear plant.

"But some really, really want to play outside. They say they want to play in the sandbox and make mud pies. We have to tell them no, I'm sorry. Play in the sandbox inside instead."

Following the March 11, 2011, quake and tsunami, a series of explosions and meltdowns caused the world's worst nuclear accident for 25 years, spewing radiation over a swathe of Fukushima, an agricultural area long known for its rice, beef and peaches.

A 30-km radius around the plant was declared a no-go zone, forcing 160,000 people from homes where some had lived for generations. Other areas, where the radiation was not so critically high, took steps such as replacing the earth in parks and school playgrounds, decontaminating public spaces like sidewalks, and limiting children's outdoor play time.

"There are children in the disaster-stricken areas who are going to turn three tomorrow," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Monday. He told a nationally televised news conference he wanted to invite as many of them as possible to the 2020 Olympics, when they will be fourth-graders, as a "symbol of reconstruction."

Any such revival looks a long way off.

"AVOID TOUCHING THE OUTSIDE AIR"

Koriyama recommended shortly after the disaster that children up to two years old not spend more than 15 minutes outside each day. Those aged 3 to 5 should limit their outdoor time to 30 minutes or less.

These limits were lifted last October, but many kindergartens and nursery schools continue to adhere to the limits, in line with the wishes of worried parents.

One mother at an indoor Koriyama playground was overheard telling her child: "Try to avoid touching the outside air".

Even three-year-olds know the word "radiation".

Though thyroid cancer in children was linked to the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident, the United Nations said last May that cancer rates were not expected to rise after Fukushima.

Radiation levels around the Emporium Kindergarten in Koriyama were now down around 0.12-0.14 microsieverts per hour, from 3.1 to 3.7 right after the quake, said Hiraguri.

This works out to be lower than Japan's safety level of 1,000 microsieverts a year, but levels can vary widely and at random, keeping many parents nervous about any outdoor play.

"I try to keep from going out and from opening the window," said 34-year-old Ayumi Kaneta, who has three sons. "I buy food from areas away from Fukushima. This is our normal life now."

CHILD STRESS ON RISE

But this lack of outdoor play is having a detrimental effect on Koriyama's children, both physical and mentally.

"Compared to before the disaster, you can certainly see a fall in the results of physical strength and ability tests - things like grip strength, running and throwing balls," said Toshiaki Yabe, an official with the Koriyama city government.

An annual survey by the Fukushima prefecture Board of Education found that children in Fukushima weighed more than the national average in virtually every age group.

Five-year-olds were roughly 500 gm (1 lb) heavier, while the weight difference grew to 1 kg for six-year-old boys. Boys of 11 were nearly 3 kg heavier.

Hiraguri said that stress was showing up in an increase of scuffles, arguments and even sudden nosebleeds among the children, as well as more subtle effects.

"There's a lot more children who aren't all that alert in their response to things. They aren't motivated to do anything," he said.

Koriyama has removed decontaminated earth in public places, sometimes more than once, and work to replace all playground equipment in public parks should finish soon.

Yabe, at Koriyama city hall, said parental attitudes towards the risk of radiation may be slowly shifting. "These days, instead of hearing from parents that they're worried about radiation, we're hearing that they're more worried because their kids don't get outside," he said.

But Hiraguri said things are still hard.

"I do sometimes wonder if it's really all right to keep children in Fukushima. But there are those who can't leave, and I feel strongly that I must do all I can for them."