

Earthquake Volunteer in Murakami, Niigata Prefecture & Tsuruoka, Yamagata Prefecture June 18-20, 2019

Kobe International Christ Church
Pastor Yoshio Iwamura

When we, the 97th Tohoku volunteer group of Kobe International Sustaining Organization, started to go back to Kobe from Watanoha, Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, we received an emergency report at 10:22pm on June 18, 2019. We began to receive information about the earthquake and size of tsunami from the office members in Kobe. Information about the numbers of blackout houses, tsunami evacuees, and escaped people at elementary schools at each area in Yamagata Prefecture and Niigata Prefecture delivered to us one after another. Road instructions to Niigata Prefecture and Yamagata Prefecture were in the same direction as the Tohoku Expressway that heading to Kobe. We discussed whether we go to the affected site urgently, and we decided to deliver relief goods to evacuation centers. Along the way to the site, we purchased foods for 200 people and chose to go through the Ban-etsu Expressway because it connects to both Niigata Prefecture and Yamagata Prefecture.

We get used to drive for a long time, because we always pass through Hokuriku Expressway from Kobe to Watanoha Ishinomaki City Miyagi Prefecture by taking 15 hours and 1,100km for one way. On the way, the road was not cut. We kept driving and waiting for indication whether head to Murakami City in Niigata Prefecture or Tsuruoka City in Yamagata Prefecture while listening on time disaster situation from Kansai Office. When I tried direct contacts with Niigata Prefectural Office and Murakami City Office, their reaction were not ready to give decision to accept relief materials to evacuation centers because of confused information. They only kept answering, "We need to wait for a while to know the situation". The people at the evacuation centers had started to send information about number of people at their center, own place and safety through Youtube with images randomly. The government office was keep saying, "We don't know". However, local people at the site were taking action to deliver information, such as where is a dangerous area, number of casualties, detail information about the road condition, images and what people need the most.

Express way was blocked in Tainai City, so we chose a lower road, which was the first road for Chief Murakami of our organization to drive, and headed to Fuya Murakami City. We prepare ourselves for emergency situations, so our car is not equipped an automatic navigation machine. It is because that we have been experiencing many times that there are always no such a road that follows GPS. It was the same situation when we were doing volunteer activities at Hagi Asakura City Fukuoka Prefecture, Mabi-cho Kurashiki City Okayama Prefecture, Kidogawa water flood disaster (September 9 -11, 2015) and Azuma river area (Atsuma-cho, Abira-cho, Mukawa-cho). We always head to the site while listening to the local people, so that we also can know the breath of the affected area at the same time.

Even we purchase food materials and head to evacuation centers, local government office people cannot make their decision to accept support or not since the disaster countermeasures headquarter hasn't established. They cannot respond flexibly like the private sector, because they cannot make decision to act on the actual site.

I recalled the scene after just the 3.11 earthquake occurred at Minato-cho Ishinomaki City Miyagiprefecture. We encountered to see the situation that many Self Defense Forces staffs could not do anything without the command of their superiors; even there was a victim who had a fracture in front of them.



Murakami City Yamakita Sougou Gymnasium. Near the entrance. 4am



Murakami City Sanpoku Sougou Gymnasium

People could not answer immediately what should we do about their breakfast since the number of victims at the Murakami City Sanpoku Sougou Gymnasium decreased to 140 people compared to the 200 peak people due to the release of the warning after the 3am of June 19. After 4 o'clock in the morning, we started to recognize the surrounding situations. Mass media people had a rush on the site. Reporters ask about the scale of damages at the contact information area of evacuation center. They only report on TV that, "There has been not established the plan yet for restoration

from now”. The contact information of evacuation center seemed to deal with figuring the number of mass media, just like they are working as regular work. The reporters themselves were not visiting door to door on their foot since the time was still early morning. The groaning, pain, suffering, anger and vexation of victims cannot be delivered throughout Japan. The truth of the disaster report cannot be delivered only with the image of the site of major destruction.

Because the government office was in a panic condition and the staff at the scratch disaster countermeasures headquarter were suddenly placed on the site to stay and they were not able to go home, so they could not get the picture of actual local situations. I always feel a doubt about an attitude of media people. They trust the office people, who are not fully aware about the entire situation, and they act like as if they knew and understood everything, and they mixed that information with interviews of few victims to produce the made-up reporting. I always put my head in confusion to the way of coverage of natural disasters.

From the inside of evacuation center, images of people who are lying with wrapping themselves in a provided blanket flow through smartphones. However, people are checking carefully about entering people at the entrance of the facility, and it just like the gateways of the Edo period. They try to prevent that situation of inside of the facility flow to outside. At the time of the disaster, what is more important is to manage information rather than human rights awareness. Just like foreign countries, the seed of the feeling to help each other is completely eliminated. The bad habits of vertically segmented administrative system can be seen everywhere.



Kanta Murakami (13 years old), who we became close at the evacuation center, belongs to the baseball club. He was worried about the damage of his house after he reached to the evacuation center. Kaho Ito (16 years old) told me with saying “It is not fine at all”, because she recalled a tremor from the aftermath of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami when she was the first year in elementary school.

Fuya Murakami City Niigata Prefecture. 4am of June 19, 2019

They have interests in photography, so they positively allow us to take their pictures. The same high school student, Kokoro Otaki (first year) seemed to be calmed and accepting the real event of earthquake.

I meet with a convenience store owner Katsuyuki Murakami in Nishiyama-cho every time when I leave from Ishinomaki City Miyagi Prefecture. He told me on the actual day of earthquake occurred in Niigata that, “Immediately after the earthquake, there was sort of a Utopia, which people help

each other. However, as time goes by, situation returned into materialism to regulate things that restrict this and that. It so regrettable.” He groaned about the situation of 9 years after the disaster. He was disappointed that people’s interest that help each other “We should help each other in times of need” without judging others, had gone in a few months. And we received an emergency alert one hour after we had this conversation.

Natural disasters frequently occur in Japan. In case of a large-scale earthquake occurs in the Nankai Trough area, it is impossible to deal and support the affected areas for the central government alone. It is necessary to divide the role and grow the awareness of whole Japanese people to overcome the “national crisis”. You should not just leave task to other people. A spirit of mutual assistance. In other words, we must try to cultivate the field to utilize a love of neighbor’s. We cannot handle the situation by the top-down must-do style manuals, concepts and strategies.

Paul said about 2000 years ago. He said, "Love your neighbor like yourself" is the most precious law (νόμος *nomos*). In that case, Paul used the Greek language “ἀνακεφαλαιῶ *anakephalaioō*” «mean to summarize, sum up, attribute to...» or πληρῶ *plerōō* «mean to accomplish, complete, fill, fulfil completely». Paul stressed, “Even with any other commandments, it is summarized (*anakephalaioū*) in the words 'love your neighbor as yourself’” (Romans 13: 9). In other words, when Christ is most questioned in the law in Matthew 22:37 and Mark 12:33, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” but Paul said the claim of the *nomos* is completely fulfilled by love for ones’s neighbour¹. Also in Galatians 5:14, he said, “For the entire law is fulfilled (*plerōō*) in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”. Jacob also said, “Let the love of my neighbor be my own βασιλικός *basilikos* «mean king, royal». Jacob concludes that to love one’s neighbor is νόμον βασιλικόν *nomon basilikon* «mean king’s law, supreme law, the highest law, the most significant part of the law» to “complete” τελέω *teleō*. (James 2: 8).

Love of neighbor has been consistent from the Old Testament period. As it is shown in euteronomy 10:12-19, to love the weak, poor, and orphan that is pervaded in the whole Bible rather than love God, is the God’s teaching which is given to mankind. Let’s not forget the instruction of our Creator and first show the way we live to help each other when we become victims in disasters.

See “Christian Press” (June 20, 2019) <https://www.christianpress.jp/murakami-city-imamura-yoshio/>

¹ “*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT) ” VI Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich Eerdmans 1968 p.293