

“Essence of the *Volunteer-dō* (The principle way of volunteer)”

September 26, 2022.

Mint Kobe

Director Iwamura Yoshio

Theme Scripture: Acts Chapter 7 Verse 34

I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt. (New International Version)

<Introduction>

From September 18 to 22, we had an enjoyable time with the senior year children of Nagahama Kindergarten (Ishinomaki City Miyagi Prefecture) for rice harvesting of the 134th Tohoku Volunteer. Six members visited from Kobe. It became the 11th of rice harvesting. The activities of the Kobe International Sustaining Organization may provide topicality for overseas volunteers, “Resurrection of Rice Field, Mountain, and Bay”, and various seminars. Today, I do like to report you how we have been unwaveringly focused on and be close to the disaster victims while we are working on “the *Volunteer-dō* (The principle way of volunteer)”.

- (1) Coexistence with mental disability people
- (2) Cooperation with homeless people
- (3) *Kyoshin* (共振: Sympathized resonance) to handicapped people



11th West Japan Torrential Rain Volunteer, Kure City, Hiroshima Prefecture, Toshihisa Honda, Shinsaku Tamura, Koichi Hori, Yoshio Iwamura, Tadashi Nishimoto, Mieko Nishimoto, Yukiko Dote, Shinsuke Matsumoto, and Hiroyuki Honda, November 10, 2019, Photo by Hiroataka Murakami.

(1) Coexistence with mental disability people

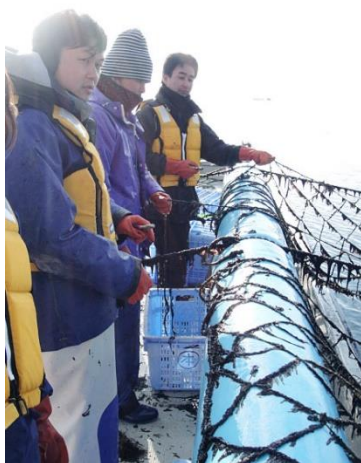
Kobe International Sustaining Organization is a quaint group that a member with schizophrenia is the core person. Among our executive board members, there is an honorary director of Yodogawa

Christ Hospital as a neurosurgeon. Director Shirakata says, “Unlike 20 years ago, medical care for schizophrenia has advanced, and the efficacy of drug treatment, including antidepressant drug, has improved”.

We started with refugee assistance in 2001, when the 9/11 terrorist attack occurred. At first, I met with people from Africa and Southeast Asia who were mentally disturbed due to the poor environment at the detention center in Ibaraki City¹. However, there were no members with schizophrenia in our organization staff members.

In the Ishinomaki City, where was the most affected area by the Great East Japan Earthquake, and 24 patients at Keiai Hospital, a psychiatric hospital located in the Ibaratsu area and 1km from the sea, were died by tsunami². The tsunami flowed up to the ceiling of the 1st floor. The fangs of disaster broke down the weakest parts. In 2012, I was conducting a listening volunteer, I was shocked by the fact that not only neighbors, but also police officers and the local governments could not identify about the lives of people with disabilities³. In Fukushima Prefecture itself, many people in need of assistance lost their lives while evacuating.

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, the member of university students and young people who wish to participate in volunteer from Kobe on a regular basis has increased day by day, and it has become a scramble of various participants. Participants of junior high school students of Zainichi Chousenjinn and foreigners also increased. Matsumoto Shinsuke (32 years old at that time) who participated in the 9th Tohoku Volunteer in February 2012 at Watanoha Ishinomaki City Miyagi Prefecture, was engaged in working in the cultivation of seaweed as fishery volunteer and devoted himself to work in the frigid Ishinomaki Bay. At that time, he was unemployed and looking for job. After returning to Kobe, he voluntarily participated in listening volunteer at the reconstruction housing for the Great East Japan Earthquake victims in front of Hyogo Station. The place we visited was the house of Mr. Yoshiyama Takao (60 years old at that time) in Canal town, Hyogo area, who had been kicked out of Kobe City by filing a lawsuit. The eight young people listened to Mr. Yoshiyama’s difficult situation, who was unemployed and had nowhere to go. Matsumoto, who had meticulously taken notes, was a mid-career employment, and even if he started working, he was repeating to quit. People around him thought that he has an extremely depression, but he was schizophrenic. Until he found his next job, our relationship deepened like a family, and in 2018, he participated in the flood volunteer at disaster affected areas in Yata Mabi Kurashiki City Okayama Prefecture, and Kure City Hiroshima Prefecture.



8th Tohoku Volunteer, Shinsuke Matsumoto is in the foreground. January 17, 2012. Off the coast of Ishinomaki Bay, Miyagi Prefecture. Photographed by Yoshio Iwamura

¹ 2021. My article. *When did you give up being with the oppressed people?* Kobe Shimbun Kaikan. August 30. 3.

² 2020. My article. *Christianity and Welfare-Salvation of the New COVID-19.* Kobe International Christ Church. April 19.

³ 2012. My article. *Connections with People with Disabilities.* Hyogo Christian Association for the Disabled. Shiawase no mura training hall. October 8-9. 4.

On November 30, 2014, Mr. Kawai Kozo (75 years old) brought his son Taku (39 years old) from Kagawa Prefecture to Sunday service.

He asked for consult for his schizophrenic son. And we let his son Taku to participate in our Tohoku Volunteer (December 21-24). It was the Christmas season, so we visited and communicated with seven Shoshinkai facilities for the disabled in Ishinomaki City, as well as elderly people living alone in Watanoha, by dressing in Santa Clause costume.



On the left Taku Kawai in Hitakamien, Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture December 22, 2014
Photo taken by Yoshio Iwamura

You cannot tell that Taku has a disability from his appearance. He can take turn driving a car, active in farming, and makes a good impression on everyone he meets with his smile. He also participated in food distribution volunteer at Mashiki-chō, where was affected by the 2016 Kumamoto and Ōita Earthquakes (April 14, 16, 2016). Oshima Kenjiro (38 years old), who had applied for Tohoku Volunteer, joined the group going to Kumamoto Prefecture. Taku and Kenjiro became close to each other because they have a common disease. They served in cooperation work for preparing 700 meals. Both men are in their early 30s, and have physical strength, intelligence, and quick judgement, and were appreciated by the victims of the disaster. In terms of competence, they demonstrated superior intelligence than healthy people. The office people of the Mashiki Town Hall's Education Division also praised the two men for their sincerity. They became a valuable office member of the Kobe International Sustaining Organization. However, if they start to be bloated that they think they are fine anymore and stop their medication, the symptoms of schizophrenia will become apparent. They fear of abnormal things such as auditory and visual

hallucinations. They have been extremely depressed and there have been several times that they became in a psychological inertia status. Despite this, Kenjiro voluntarily moved to Kumamoto City for three years, worked as a part-time worker 3 days a week, and developed listening to volunteers in his spare time. He still holds a responsible position as the head of Kobe International Sustaining Organization Kumamoto Branch.



"Kobe Shimbun" (June 30, 2016).

Moreover, Tsuji Yoshio (65 years old), who lives alone in Itami City, has voluntarily registered as a foster parent of the Kayoko Fund since 2016. He also started participating in volunteering for 3 years ago. Although he also has schizophrenia, he self-published four books. However, his communication skills are close to zero⁴.



The 128th Volunteer, Yoshio Tsuji Front row right March 20, 2022

There is no discrimination in the volunteering activities, whether they are a highly educated or junior high school graduates. Immediately after the disaster occurs, we rush to the affected site. We don't get started with a project, an agenda, or a meeting to plan. Therefore, even if you don't have any skills such as office management, calculations, or planning and presentation, you will be given

⁴ 2022. Quarterly journal "Shien". No.39. May 1. 4.

important positions as staff members of Kobe International Sustaining Organization. On a regular basis, at out office, people are energetically involved in leaflet letter dispatching work on Wednesday, warehouse management, preparation of volunteer activities of agriculture, forestry, and fishery. At least, three schizophrenic members are always working. It is not an organization that requires special abilities, so each person can share what they can do. If schizophrenic members can't handle it, ex-social recluse, physical handicaps and the elderly make up for it. It is no exaggeration to say that Kobe International Sustaining Organization is consisted by the people who are socially marginalized, excluded, and ignored. What they have in common is a good smile, no lies, and the perseverance to do things through to the end. Compared to them, healthy people are more uneven in their work due to entertainment, hobbies, and social associations. On the other hand, people with schizophrenia at Kobe International Sustaining Organization are organically connected like a family, with their limbs, hands, feet, and fingers. It is a new community model that there is no person to criticize even if a person makes a mistake. We call each other brother ○○ and sister ○○ regardless of whether the person has a religious mind or not. "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-35) We empathize with people who have pain, suffering, anger, and frustration regardless of whether they are Buddhist, Shinto, or Christian.

(2) Cooperation with bag people

The 17 participants of the 36th Tohoku Volunteer (February 16-22, 2014) were; Mr. Honda Yotaro who is a pharmacist and the leader of our organization, a banker Mr. Ueda Kazumi, 4 students from Kyoto University, a student from Department of Pharmacy of Kobe Gakuin University, a student from Kansai Gakuin University, a student from Kansai University, a student from Osaka University Graduate School, an elementary school teacher, an officer of Kobe City Hall, and a worker at meal Hotto Motto (Obento shop).

On February 18, we divided our team into 3 groups for agriculture, forestry and fishery, and 2 groups for listening volunteers in Ishinomaki City Miyagi Prefecture, where had an unusual heavy snowfall.

Just in front of seven-eleven convenience store in Watanoha, where all team members got together, there was a shabby-looking man. He was a homeless man. He was born in Konoike Osaka, and he was used to live in Kohama, Takarazuka City. After he lived at Tamachi station for 6 years, he walked for 4 days and reached Watanoha. His name is Mr. Taguchi Masao [March 7, 1941 (73 years old at that time)].

He was in Watanoha before the earthquake, but he was at the Sendai at the time of 3.11. Participants from Kobe could not help but looking at the lonely figure of Mr. Taguchi in the snow. Despite the extreme cold weather, he has no home to live in, and cannot sleep in warm bedding. How he lives? Young people can hardly imagine his situation.

There was no one who looked down on Mr. Taguchi among the members who had gathered after completing their respective tasks.

He fell out the slide society. It is possible to imagine from his poor outfit that he was rejected from receiving a benefit of the system. Just like musical chairs, those who try hard but fall down will never get another chance. He did not become a wanderer because he wished it. He has no choice but to survive in an isolated society because he was cut off from the society and no one to rely on.

A resident of Watanoha complained when I was doing door-to-door listening volunteer. The person told me that just like Yubari City, which as famous for its Yubari melons, declared its bankruptcy in 2007, if the consumption tax goes up next time, this place will dry up like Yubari. The darkness of anxiety is approaching to the people whether their place will become a ghost town due to the

recession hit then even though already the place is a marginal village. It is unlikely that Ishinomaki City, once the city of fisheries, will return to its former vibrancy. Unemployment, bankruptcy, and delays in payments after the earthquake are becoming more common. Above all this condition, why did Mr. Taguchi continue to live in the cold, distant place like Ishinomaki City? Perhaps it is because even without the high buildings of the city, entertainment facilities, and gorgeous illuminations, the people of Tohoku still have a sense of humanity. Even without asking for food, people kind enough to say “please eat this” to him.

We volunteers think that we might not be able to see each other again, so we took out pocket warmers we had brought with us to whoever in need. As we say, “Please use this”. Everyone stared at Mr. Taguchi with praying that he would not freeze to death, and he smiled at our bus and was constantly waving his hand to us until he became small in our sights. I think that we, the group, were rather given more by smiling of Mr. Taguchi



The 82nd Volunteer, From the right, Mr. Masao Taguchi, the author, and the chief priest of Hosenji Temple, Hideki Fujimaru. January 23, 2018. Photographed by Hirotaka Murakami.

I received an information from the members of the 36th Tohoku Volunteer group that there are people who have been unable to eat food since the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake at Higashi Yuenchi Park, which is located next to the City Hall in Sannomiya Kobe City. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, Arikawa Yoshio, the representative of Shinikutagawa Kyoseikai, who worked closely with our organization to serve the weak, passed away in July, 2013. Food distribution had been stopped. Because there was no successor to prepare meals. Among the members who met

homeless people, Nakano Shota (Kwansei Gakuin University) and Sakamoto Keiko (Kobe University) expressed their desire to conduct food distribution after returning to Kobe. We returned to Kobe and gathered at the office. We started to think how to approach from zero, such as who has a qualification of cooking, how to gather food materials, and where and who should cook. On March 29, 2014, Director of our organization, Honda Tetsuro (*Kamagasaki Furusato no Ie*) gave advice to the volunteers who gather for the second time. As a priest of Christ's path, he gave the encouragement that "Christ is not on the side of people to prepare food, but on the side of the people who must be served".

Starting from Zero Funds.

Under the condition of I, Iwamura Yoshio take responsibility for procuring rice and other ingredients, as well as the location of cooking, Ms. Kusumoto Rumiko accepted to cook since she has an experience of cooking meal box at Hotto Motto. As starting our project, for the organization without enough funds to purchase cooking materials and ingredients, things are prepared in a mysterious way by members of "Hanshin Religious Association", Saifukuji Temple, Gyokuryuji Temple, and Buddhist monk Kawanami Tsuyoshi from Kamagasaki (*Shien no machi Network*).

On April 5, 2014, the week after the meeting, I was able to receive food ingredients from Buddhist monk Kawanami Tsuyoshi in Kamagasaki.

I was looking for a place to cook so that we can prepare warm food to the homeless people in Higashi Yuenchi Park (next to Kobe City Hall). We were able to complete a contract to use the second floor of Kobe Philadelphia Church (Cooperating Pastor Oshima Yoshinao. Pastor 金起賢牧師&李永蘭). They also don't ask for charging money for the room. Everything was smooth starting.

The generous supply of rice from Buddhist monk Ioi Masahiro (Gyokuryuji Temple), Fujimaru Shujo (Housenji Temple), Yokoyama Hoyhu (Musho kongoni), Toyohara Masanao (Saifukuji Temple), Goto Yumiko (Komyoji Temple. The 20th volunteer participant), and cooperation of Food Bank Kansai are strong support to us. Mr. Kishimoto Yutaka supplies fresh, pesticide-free, organic vegetables to the organization's "*Koushien* (耕支縁: Cultivation-support-relationship)" at Tomokiyo Nishiku Kobe City.

Starting food distribution.

On April 17, 2014, for the first time, we carried warm soup in the large pot and meal boxes by the Toyota HiAce to the Higashi Yuenchi Park. We started to meet with Mr. Takeda and Mr. Horii Kouichi every week. Yutani Shigeki, a reporter of Mainichi Shimbun, was also with us on the first day.

With confusion and a lot of anxiety, every Thursday's food distribution began.

Mr. A is always seeming to be crunched for time. Mr. Takahashi, looks sideways of a flower road, the main road in Kobe, lays down on a cot bed, hanging a heat indicator on bed rail, burns mosquito-repellent incense for himself and his beloved two cats, is well-educated and favor in reading. He earns his living as a "connoisseur" of junk waste materials on the street.

Mr. Ota, who is an astonishing debater and very polite gentleman. Mr. Otsuki, who always wait with us. And Mr. Ishikawa, who is originally from Okinawa, and he told us information about the heavy typhoon and tropical fruits.

In the beginning, 12 people lined up at our food distribution at Higashi Yuenchi Park in Kobe City. Nowadays, it became 4 people. Our organization targets homeless people who do not receive public welfare from Kobe City. Mr. Otsuki eats a properly cooked meal only once a week. Therefore, he looks forward to our meal, and as soon as he receives it, he eats it. Even now, he lives alone and

lives on the street. In Kobe, about 120 people receive public welfare payment (120,000 yen a month). Five churches take turns offering meals three times a week on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Also, at the end of the year, big food distribution has become a tradition in Kobe at Higashi Yuenchi Park. Therefore, members receiving the organization's food distribution do not line up in large lines three times a week.

Mr. Hori, who was used to live on the street, has been the leader of the food distribution team for the past three years. He lived in an underground parking lot in Kobe City. He is so skilled in cooking that it is hard to believe he is an amateur. He also began to participate in the Tohoku Volunteer ad Kumagawa River (Kumamoto heavy rain) volunteers 4 years ago. Since August 2022, he has been living in a residence in Tarumi area Kobe City and receiving public welfare money. He is also a key member for the activities of the Kobe International Sustaining Organization.

The footsteps of the food distribution at Higashi Yuenchi Park let to activities in the affected areas to support the victims who were evacuated to gymnasiums and other places. On July 7, 2018, at the same time as the flood damage in Kurashiki City Okayama Prefecture, Kobe International Sustaining Organization headed to Kurashiki Municipal Daini Fukuda Elementary School. From the second day, I departed to the 7th Nepal Volunteer with Hirasawa Hisanori. It can only be said that the results accumulated at experience though Higashi Yuenchi Park.

We also have meetings with people who feel the hardships of life, not only through agriculture, forestry, and fisheries volunteer of "Resurrection of Rice Field, Mountain, and Bay", but also by door-to-door visit.



Ukrainian Lola and Viktor, who returned from Europe together to Kobe, Japan, help out with the soup kitchen in Kobe. July 7, 2022.

(3) *Kyoshin* (共振: Sympathized resonance) to handicapped people

Kobe International Sustaining Organization considers that Haki Masue Asakura City Fukuoka Prefecture as the origin of disasters in Japan. By the heavy rain on July 5 2017, 41 dead and 1 missing.

We started to serve for food distribution at Haki Junior High School Gymnasium and we were able to establish a relationship with the victims in Masue, which has been abandoned. While agricultural reconstruction as not permitted, we also cooperated in buckwheat producing for restoration. In between times, we conducted door-to-door visit at restoration housings Sasaki Miwa (Representative of “Kayoko Fund”) met with Ms. Iwamoto Matsuko (68 years old) in 2021. She has a son (48 years old) and a daughter (45 years old) and they are mentally handicapped. Her husband Hisayoshi is in a wheelchair.



30th Kuma River (Kumamoto Heavy Rain) Volunteer Hisakichi Iwamoto, September 5, 2022. Photographed by Miwa Sasaki.

30th Kuma River (Kumamoto Heavy Rain) Volunteer Hisakichi Iwamoto September 5, 2022.

Photographed by Miwa Sasaki. From September 18 to 22, We harvested rice with kindergarten students as part of the 134th Tohoku Volunteer. It was featured in local newspapers. However, the consistent work of Kobe International Sustaining Organization is not only volunteers of agriculture, forestry, and fishery. Of course, the restoration of natural ecology is also important. But the most important thing is to share human weaknesses, connection with each other, and develop a relationship of mutual support. For that, we knock on the door one by one. ego out into the “place” of those who groan, suffer from loneliness, are drowning in a sea of distress. The “those who made to be small” are the “gods made to be small”. Once we build a relationship each other, even in a society where life fluctuates, the relationship is no longer in a deserted island called “*Ku-kai-jyo-do* (苦海浄土: suffering-sea-pure-land)”, but a “space” where hands touch each other will be there. They are not socially isolated. Because we are able to visit and provide spiritual health care at least once a month. Friendships are developed. People’s face become to smile. There is a value that is more than nay wealth, material goods, or profits. Discrimination against people with disabilities as

“harm” will be “*Un-san-mu-sho* (雲散霧消:vanish in smoke). It have forgotten ho hard it is to live with “gai (碍 handicap, stumbling block)” of “*shogai* (障碍 disability)”. Nobody feels the coercion brough by *exousia* (power, authority) from above.

Mr. Noda Kenji (72 years old) of our office, has a bad leg and uses a stick when he goes for door-to-door in clothes that are still dirty from farm work. Even elderly people who live alone and are closed their heart like a shellfish, once they saw Mr. Noda, their face became relax at the entrance. This is a gift that no other members of Kobe International Sustaining Organization have. He takes 10 minutes to walk a distance that healthy people would take 1 minute. It is a snail-like movement. His slow pace is a relief for those who cant’s keep up with productivity, efficiency, and convenience. I don’t say that “cure to care”, “social capital”, and “welfare something” are not worthless. However, at some point, those became subordinate organizations for propagating “publicness” by politicians, bureaucrats, and business world.

In welfare settings in Japan, the social ruler-ruled structure has already been established, and the processes in charge are specialized. They are merely mechanically interacting with clients. Labors like hard, dirty and unsophisticated operates in an economic system for law wages. Warm communication between people, intimate dialogs, smiles that make people dance have all disappeared. The work on ground is entrusted to trainees from Southeast Asia, and managerial careers play golf.

Religions that practice an ethic of “care” that can be said to be anti-intellectual have been excluded from public “places”.

Japan, where the most fundamental thins are ignored, must take the opportunity of the new coronavirus to return to “welfare”, “charity”, and “volunteer”, which value “a person”.

Being on side, “*Kyosei* (共生: Live together)”, “*Kyoku* (共苦: Share sufferings)”, “*Ku-en* (苦縁: Relationship to share sufferings)” are required. If you have a heart to be with people with drooling, bad breath, and obnoxious attitude, anyone can do it. Experts, underservant slaves, or handy tools are not wanted. The “victim”, “sick”, and “poor” are the “soul”. Who is suitable of such work?

We should not confuse to gain credibility by having many social establishments (vested interests), such as a superior education, supreme court judges, university professors, ad doctors. Please don’t misunderstand. Also, we should not be proud having members in your group with high social status, reputations, or income. It is the vessel that God uses to newly “restore” the suffocating, impoverished earth, and the earth with the terminal phenomenon of the nation and the self-priority, and it is consistently “those who are equal to nothing”. *“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are.”* (1 Corinthians 1:26-28)

There is no explicit reference to “restoration” in Japanese law. There is no definition. Those who hold the key to pouring new water into old leather bags are those who have been oppressed, discriminated, and prejudiced, such as “homeless people”, “people with integration disorder syndrome, schizophrenic, depression”, and “handicapped people”. It is shown in their way of life. No one from our organization has ever received a single certificate of commendation. Also, we have never received a single yen from the government.

Our activities are supported by the sustention membership fee of 200 yen per month from all over Japan. To the victims of the disaster, we are not speaking, but acting to show the testimony of “for I am the Lord, who heals you”.