

Disaster Relief Hinokishin Corps Mobilized in Kumamoto Prefecture

Between July 3 and 4, the rainy season front associated with a low-pressure system brought persistent heavy rainfall to the southern part of Kumamoto Prefecture and triggered massive mudslides and flooding. A total of more than 8,000 buildings in the prefecture were inundated, and some of them were partially or completely destroyed.

Tenrikyo Disaster Relief Hinokishin Corps' local unit in Kumamoto diocese first went into action to provide disaster relief support in the immediate aftermath, focusing on regional churches, mission stations, and followers' houses between July 7 and 10. On the 11th, Tenrikyo Disaster Relief Hinokishin Corps Headquarters Director Isafumi Tanaka visited Kumamoto to assess the damage and identify the types of relief efforts that would be required.

Meanwhile, in keeping with the measures taken by wider society to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, Kumamoto Prefecture's social welfare council gave careful consideration to their recruitment of general volunteers and, eventually, decided to accept only those living in the prefecture.

Unlike general volunteers gathering from the same prefecture, however, the Disaster Relief Hinokishin Corps Headquarters was asked by the local authorities to assist in relief efforts and, on the 13th, Church Headquarters' Disaster Counteraction Committee (chaired by Yoshiyuki Nakano) decided to dispatch the headquarters corps to Kumamoto Prefecture. To help prevent the spread of the virus, arrangements were made to keep the corps members away from the local residents as much as possible



Corps members at work in a flood-affected school (July 22)

and focus their operations on public facilities.

The first unit sent to Kumamoto Prefecture—consisting of members not only from the headquarters corps but also from Kumamoto, Nagasaki, and Miyazaki diocese corps—carried out its operations in Kuma and Sagara villages between July 17 and 19. Both villages, located along the Kuma River, were hit hard by the flooding. The river overflowed its banks at 12 points after torrential rain struck the region on July 4, causing widespread flooding.

On July 17, the corps members were divided into three groups and embarked on full-scale recovery operations in several designated areas in the villages as well as at Tenrikyo Kumagawa Branch Church, which, located in Hitoyoshi City, had been severely damaged.

In Kuma Village, one of the groups worked at Watari Elementary School where the muddy water reached the ceiling of the first floor. The corps members removed flood-damaged equipment and scooped away sludge that had accumulated in the school buildings and playground, as well as surrounding roads, using shovels and heavy machinery. These efforts were continued by later units, who also loaded large amounts of mud and debris onto trucks and transported them to dumping grounds before thoroughly cleaning the buildings inside and out by washing away sludge with high-pressure pumps and squeegees.

Mr. Yoshihiro Mori, chairman of the local education board, who had served as the principal of the school until March, said: "We completed the refurbishment of the school facilities last autumn. Then the torrential rains afflicted our region. The massive flood inundated the buildings and drove us and local residents to despair. But the Disaster Relief Hinokishin Corps rushed to our school and worked to restore the damaged facilities, bringing a ray of hope!"

The first unit of the Disaster Relief Hinokishin Corps was followed by the second (July 20–22), third (July 23–25), and fourth (July 26–28) units. A total of 947 corps members from seven dioceses and the headquarters took part in the disaster relief activities during the 12 days. The corps removed 890 tons of mud and 655 tons of debris, clearing away areas measuring 10,076 square meters.

Church Headquarters' Rice-Planting Ceremony Held



The Shinbashira at the rice-planting ceremony (June 22)

On June 22, Tenrikyo Church Headquarters held its annual rice-planting ceremony at Somanouchi Farm, which was attended by the Shinbashira and his wife, Mrs. Harue Nakayama, as well as Successor-Designate Daisuke Nakayama and his wife, Nobue. As the Shinbashira and Nobue—who had brought her daughter, Masae—looked on, Mrs. Harue Nakayama and Daisuke planted rice seedlings one by one together with some resident officials of Church Headquarters, some staff members of Tenri High School, and students who belong to the school's Agriculture Department.

Announcement

Tenrikyo Newsletter to Switch to Digital Format by May 2021

In keeping with the general trend in society, the *Tenrikyo* newsletter will be published in electronic form from May 2021 to facilitate quick access to information. The newsletter will not be available in printed form from May next year, but if your organization has been archiving back issues for an extended period and needs to continue to receive a printed copy for archival purposes, please contact us at en1@tenrikyo.jp at your earliest convenience.

More details regarding how to sign up for and have access to the electronic version will be available in the next issue of the newsletter.

Report on Shuyoka 2020: A Close Look at the Students

As reported in the previous issue of this newsletter, the 46th English Class of Shuyoka (the three-month Spiritual Development Course) began in the Home of the Parent on April 1 as part of the 948th session of Shuyoka. This year, there were four students from three countries: Tetsuyuki Kawai and Jason Toru Miyauchi from the United States; Ritchie Venice Chavez Rafols from the Philippines; and Benjamin Jørgensen from Norway. The 948th session of Shuyoka came to a close on June 27 as the students of the English class completed the three-month program with joy in their hearts with the support of their homeroom instructor, Rev. Robert Susumu Yuge, and their assistant instructor, Rev. Fusao Yamazaki.

This year's English class of Shuyoka was conducted amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which made it impossible for a number of prospec-

tive students to return to Jiba to attend the course. The pandemic has also had an impact on the way the program was run. "The 948th session of Shuyoka was held with many adjustments due to COVID-19," says Jason. He explained that one of those adjustments, which were made to curb the spread of the coronavirus, was holding the morning assembly separately in each homeroom class from early April to mid-June rather than having all students gather in front of the East Left Wing 4 of the Oyasato-yakata building-complex. Another student shared his view of how the pandemic defined many of his experiences at Shuyoka. "I would like to highlight everything that happened with COVID-19," says Tetsuyuki. "From the beginning, so many things happened due to the pandemic. I sincerely care and hope for those affected by COVID-19, but I am also grateful for

everyone and everything that occurred."

Drawn from Different Walks of Life

The English class of Shuyoka brings together people from various countries and regions across the world. This year's students embarked on the three-month-long spiritual journey for various reasons. For Benjamin, who attended Shuyoka at the recommendation of his Japanese fiancée and her father, the decision to attend the course was also born out of his personal quest. "I also wanted to take this opportunity to learn about Tenrikyo as deeply as possible, especially because I had previously written a thesis on Tenrikyo at my university in Norway," says Benjamin. The desire to learn more about the teachings was also what brought Ritchie Venice to

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Special Interview with Director-in-Chief of Religious Affairs Yoichiro Miyamori (Conducted on May 5, 2020)

Pondering over the Great Knot of the Novel Coronavirus



Director-in-Chief of Religious Affairs Yoichiro Miyamori

—Would you tell us about the measures taken by Tenrikyo Church Headquarters in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic?

First of all, I would like to express my deepest sympathies for those who lost their lives due to COVID-19 and, as a follower of the path, I pray to God the Parent and Oyasama for the quick recovery of those who are suffering from the infection.

Many people are suffering from the pandemic. Experts in various fields are working hard to tackle the situation. Under the current circumstances, Church Headquarters has implemented a series of measures to help prevent the spread of the infection.

On March 3, a prayer service was held at the Main Sanctuary. We conducted it with the wooden clappers and the counter in the hope of serving as a model for those who might wish to perform a prayer service at their churches, fellowships, and homes.

As the number of coronavirus infections increased toward the end of March, it became difficult to welcome a large number of people from all over the country into the Sanctuaries. Due to fears of infection, only head ministers of directly supervised churches and diocese superintendents were allowed to attend the March Monthly Service and Spring Memorial Service representing all other followers, who were asked to worship at their respective places.

The Oyasama Birth Celebration Service and the April Monthly Service were to be performed in the same manner. However, the state of emergency initially announced on April 7 was expanded on the 16th to include the entire nation, urging people to refrain from crossing prefectural borders. Therefore, the Oyasama Birth Celebration Service was attended only by the Service performers and directly supervised church and diocese heads who had already been in Jiba by the 17th, and the April Monthly Service only by the Service performers.

Also, we decided to not accept new Shuyoka students for the session that was to start in May, to postpone courses and lectures, and to cancel the Children's Pilgrimage to Jiba. These decisions were based on the guidance given by the authorities and advice from experts in various fields regarding large gatherings of people.

I would like all followers to understand that these decisions reflect the expectation that those who are in Jiba are firmly resolved to fulfill their roles in Jiba and the hope that those based in regional churches and fellowships and other followers will serve as Yoboku in their respective roles and positions.

Now that the infection has spread so extensively, people's reactions to COVID-19 seem to fall into two main categories. For instance, we are encouraged to put on a mask, but the reason people wear a mask seems to be different from person to person. Some people put on a mask because they worry about get-

ting infected while others wear a mask out of concern that they might spread the infection. These behaviors appear outwardly the same, but the motives behind the actions are quite different. If your motivation is to not infect others, that means you care about and are considerate of others. This sense of caring and consideration can develop into the mind that desires to help save others. In contrast, if you worry about yourself, you try to protect yourself. Once your attention focuses on your own safety, you become nervous about other people's behavior. That mindset will cause you to complain about and criticize others' shortcomings.

Under the current circumstances, people are not able to freely go inside the Main Sanctuary even if they make a pilgrimage to Jiba. However, I hope that people will not be caught up in the idea that they cannot go inside the Main Sanctuary. Rather, I hope that people will focus on the fact that they can offer their prayers from wherever they are. Personally, I believe that loving-kindness in praying for others is a vital key to overcoming the great knot of the coronavirus. The important thing now is to cultivate this loving-kindness for others.

—What is your understanding of infectious diseases like COVID-19 in terms of the teachings?

The Ofudesaki refers to several infectious diseases, the first of which is smallpox. This term appears seven times in the Ofudesaki between Part VI and Part XIII, which were written by Oyasama between 1874 and 1877. It is worth noting that in Part VII, which was written in 1875, this disease is mentioned three times. In that year, Oyasama identified Jiba and taught the songs and hand movements for the verse containing the phrase "*Ichiretsu sumasu Kanrodai* (the Kanrodai which purifies all humankind equally)." Oyasama thereby completed teaching the Service in its initial form.

In Part VII of the Ofudesaki, we read:

What do you think this Service is? It is from My single intent to save you in childbirth and from smallpox.

What do you think this salvation is about? I shall teach the Service to free you from smallpox.

By this Service which teaches the path quickly, all minds in the world will be purified.

How are you hearing this talk? It is solely about the preparations for the salvation of the world.

Ofudesaki VII:97–100

These verses assure us that, if we perform the Service, we will be protected from smallpox, and our minds will be purified. I feel that God the Parent's loving-kindness, which is at the root of the Service, is expressed through these verses.

The Service of the Kanrodai is performed at Jiba. Receiving that truth, we are allowed to perform the service at local churches, fellowships, and homes in the same spirit that the Service of the Kanrodai is performed. If we are able to develop loving-kindness as much as possible while performing the service, it becomes a genuine prayer for the salvation of the world. I believe it is vital to emphasize this point now.

Next, let us take a look at the following Ofudesaki verse from Part XII, which was written in 1876:

What do you think this salvation is? It is My assurance of your freedom from smallpox.

Ofudesaki XII:95

Prior to this verse, we read:

From now, Tsukihi requests you, everyone in the world, to replace your mind firmly.

To explain what kind of mind it is to be: it is none other than to save the world singleheartedly.

Hereafter, if all of you throughout the world save one another in every matter,

Know that Tsukihi will accept that mind and will provide any salvation whatever.

Ofudesaki XII:91–94

We are assured of every kind of salvation when we lean on God the Parent and perform the Service. However, through these verses, it seems that we are further instructed to unite ourselves and to nurture the mind of mutual help and consideration. That is to say, we are encouraged to replace our minds with a mind of loving-kindness.

Moreover, we are taught:

If a true resolve comes to your mind, and you do not turn away from the words of God,

Then Tsukihi will firmly accept this mind and directly hasten your salvation.

Do not think of this salvation as being trivial. It is the principal matter of the Divine Record of *Nihon*.

Ofudesaki XII:99–101

These verses indicate that, if we do not turn away from "the words of God" so that we can pray together for one another and replace our minds with the mind of kindness and mutual help, God will surely accept our minds and provide us with blessings and workings, which will become "the principal matter of the Divine Record of *Nihon*." This appears to be what we should convey. That is to say, what we need to realize now is the parental love of God the Parent, who desires us to replace our minds with a mind of loving-kindness through the knot of infectious disease.

Regarding cholera—another infectious disease—the Ofudesaki says,

The world is saying that it is cholera, but it is Tsukihi informing you of the regret.

Ofudesaki XIV:22

This verse is in Part XIV, which was written in 1879 when there was a terrible cholera epidemic in Japan. With regard to the change of the names referring to God the Parent in the Ofudesaki—"God," "Tsukihi" (Moon-Sun), and "the Parent"—Part XIV is the part in which God changes the name from "Tsukihi" to "the Parent." In this verse, we are taught that cholera represents a message informing us of the regret of Tsukihi.

Earlier in Part XIV, we read:

The mind of Tsukihi hastens day after day, but the minds of you close to Me are only depressed.

Why are you depressed? It is because those in high places know nothing.

Unaware of this, the whole world follows them in all matters and is depressed.

Ofudesaki XIV:2–4

As suggested in these verses, God's "regret" seems

to be over the “depressed” mind of human beings. After talking about cholera, the Ofudesaki goes on to say,

Whatever may happen, there will be nothing to fear, depending on your mind of sincerity.

Ofudesaki XIV:49

By saying, “[T]here will be nothing to fear, depending on your mind of sincerity,” God the Parent assures us that, as long as we can transform our depressed mind into a spirited one, we need not worry about anything.

Further, we read:

When the regret of the true Parent comes out, perhaps no one knows the way to settle it.

But if you are truly sincere, I shall teach you everything whatever.

Ofudesaki XIV:79–80

Then, we are taught:

I earnestly request you to take this path. The Parent assures you, so there is no need for worry.

Do not wonder what this is about. I need musical instruments for the Service quickly.

Now today, whatever you may do, you need not worry, for the Parent assures you.

Ofudesaki XIV:84–86

An important point to note here is that these verses express God the Parent’s deep heart.

In the fifty-sixth in a series of lectures on the teachings held in the East Center Wing of the Oyasato-yakata building-complex, the second Shinbashira gave a talk on the Ofudesaki, in which he mentioned that the Ofudesaki changes the term referring to God the Parent from “Tsukihi” to “the Parent” in Part XIV and said:

What God the Parent is working to hasten out of parental love is single-hearted salvation, which is to say, the completion of the Service. In order to help achieve that goal, what we need to do is put all other concerns aside and take actions exactly as instructed by the Parent because the time has already come for that. This is what it means to follow the faith. The Ofudesaki is saying, “The Parent will take care of all other concerns, so commence the Service!”

Here, God the Parent hastens us to perform the Service. Yet, rather than resorting to the authority of God or Tsukihi by forcefully commanding us to perform the Service, God the Parent expresses loving-kindness through using the term “the Parent” in the Scripture while encouraging us to perform the Service. This is one of the features of Part XIV. When we read this part, therefore, we must ponder deeply over this point. In other words, this part explains how we human beings can absolutely trust in and rely on the Parent and what state of the mind can connect us to the Parent.

The second Shinbashira says that Part XIV describes the mind of children who implore the Parent for salvation and teaches the loving-kindness of the Parent and the way to connect our minds to God the Parent. Although cholera—a frightening infectious disease—is mentioned to encourage us to replace our minds, we are assured that there is no need to worry, for the Parent is undertaking salvation.

I feel that the loving-kindness of the Parent is something that far surpasses human love. These Ofudesaki

verses assure us that we are saved so long as we rely on the loving-kindness of the Parent and become spirited.

—Given the loving-kindness of the Parent, what should we followers keep in mind?

In the Divine Directions, the term “kindness” is used often. We read, for instance,

Kindness is the basis that enables you to nurture people’s minds.

Osashizu, May 16, 1900

This Divine Direction says, in effect, that the basis for world salvation can be established through kindness. In the Divine Model of Oyasama, we find that She always welcomed those who came to Jiba with kind and gentle words, saying, “Welcome home” and “Thank you for your efforts.” Pilgrims then felt that Oyasama is the true Parent. Instead of explaining the doctrine or giving guidance, She at first held their hands and rubbed their back while speaking kind words. This kindness is the basis for world salvation.

Also, we are taught as follows:

To save others requires the mind of sincerity. Even one word of kindness can express the mind of sincerity.

Osashizu, 1888 [exact date not recorded],
supp. vol.

The mind of sincerity can be put into practice with one word of kindness. Thus, we are encouraged to always use kind words. Conversely, as we make efforts to use words of kindness, we can transform our minds into the mind of kindness. In other words, if we consciously try to use kind words, we can nurture the mind of sincerity that is accepted by God.

Currently, we are not able to see people face-to-face, but we can still use words of kindness by talking to people on the phone, the Internet, and social media. It is important to make every effort we can.

Regarding the state of the mind, there is the mind of kindness and the mind of fear.

Osashizu, January 13, 1892

Even if we see and experience the same thing, it is up to individuals whether to use the mind of kindness or the mind of something else. That means that the current situation can be regarded as an opportunity for us to ponder what state of mind we want to nurture and use.

A knot is a juncture where changes occur and where we make changes as well. There may be followers whose conviction of faith will falter and waver under the circumstances that prevent them from attending monthly services for two to three months. That is all the more reason for us to ponder over what kind of words we speak to them. If we nurture the mind of kindness, we would say: “Don’t worry. It will be okay. Let’s work together to overcome this knot. I’m looking forward to seeing you soon.” If we fall short, we might end up speaking stern words, saying: “What are you doing? Pull yourself together!” What manner we choose will make a difference to the way things will be after this knot comes to an end. God the Parent surely accepts our sincere efforts if we try to transform our minds into the mind of kindness.

—How should we understand the current difficulties that people are facing throughout the world?

All of us human beings are at risk of novel coronavirus infection. Nobody can tell who will be infected and who will not. Under the circumstances, socioeconomic status and other such factors do not matter at all. As we all share the same danger, we can think of the situation as an opportunity for all human beings to realize that we are brothers and sisters and that our bodies are things we are equally borrowing from God the Parent.

We human beings tend to blame and accuse others when something bad happens. As a follower of the path, what we should do is nurture the mind that allows

us to see the situation as guidance from God the Parent and cultivate the mind that can help save people who are suffering. That will become the basis for receiving the blessings that bring a settling to this great knot.

Let us now shift the focus to what is going on in the household. Due to the authorities’ request for everyone to refrain from going out, children are not able to go to school as freely as before. Parents may have blindly believed that, just by sending their children to school, they can ensure that the children are provided with education, but they now know the matter is not that simple. Likewise, we might have assumed that simply sending our children to the events and activities of the Boys and Girls Association and the Students Association was sufficient to ensure that they received nurturing and guidance. We need to change the way we think about nurturing children. As a matter of course, it is still vital to invite as many children as possible to the events and activities in an effort to bring them joy, and school education continues to play an essential role. However, perhaps we should not be complacent about those things. Behind what is happening now, there probably is parental love that desires to encourage us to reflect on the way we think about nurturing and guidance.

Also, there might have been a tendency for husband and wife and for parent and child to confine themselves to a narrow role and to assume that they are fulfilling their responsibilities by merely playing their limited role. We must use the current situation as an opportunity to correct this tendency. Let us cultivate a sense of loving-kindness and consideration among family members and proactively help one another. I feel that more and more people are beginning to notice the importance of family and mutual help. Now is a chance to develop a capacity to pay attention to the things that we never used to notice. I hope that we will thereby be able to cultivate a sense of loving-kindness.

—Lastly, would you give a message to the followers of the path?

At local churches and homes, it is now easier for parents to teach children why we perform the service and why we have faith in this path. Exerting layer upon layer of this effort will lead to nurturing the successors of the path. Without getting caught up in formality, we should convey whatever is necessary to our children in a casual manner in the course of our daily lives.

The same thing can be said of maintaining a relationship within a church community. If you are a head minister, you should call your followers and ask how they are doing. Even just one word will do. Even if you are not able to call all the followers of your church, that is fine. We can rest assured that, so long as we make efforts to cultivate the mind of kindness and to exert it, God the Parent will help us by taking care of the rest. Instead of being discouraged due to the lack of choices currently available, we should pay attention to what we can do now and appreciate it with an open heart. I believe that that is the way of thinking that is appropriate for us who follow the path.

So far, I have talked about the mind of kindness and the importance of change. Under the current circumstances, however, it seems difficult to make external changes. What we can seek instead is internal changes. What enables us to change internally is performing the service. Even if the *kanzane* (the symbol of worship) is not enshrined in our house, we can still perform the service, facing toward Jiba. We are currently unable to engage in door-to-door missionary work or gather together to do *hinokishin*, but that is fine. There are other things we can do. For example, we can read books that explain the Scriptures and the teachings if we want. We may find a new perspective for understanding the teachings and become spirited. Since the spirited mind is the mind that accords with the intention of God the Parent, we can achieve spiritual growth by continuing to make such efforts.

There is no need to worry even in the face of this great knot so long as we rely totally on God as we do whatever we can to nurture the mind of kindness and to develop the spirited mind.

Report on Shuyoka

(Continued from page 1)

Jiba. She decided to attend the English class after learning about Oyasama through an English book. “My church head minister explained Tenrikyo to me, but because I could not understand Japanese, he gave me a copy of *Tale of Oyasama*, which is an English translation of the manga rendition of *The Life of Oyasama*,” she says, adding: “Reading the book gave me a feeling of joy, and I was especially touched by the story of Oyasama’s hardships and miracles. I felt that I wanted to learn more about Tenrikyo, so that is why I came to attend Shuyoka this time.”

Compared to Benjamin and Ritchie Venice, who are relatively new to the faith of Tenrikyo, Tetsuyuki and Jason came to attend Shuyoka to explore the faith that they had already been familiar with. “On a personal level, I was motivated to go to Shuyoka to learn more about the religion that I grew up with and see where it actually fits in my life,” says Tetsuyuki, adding that he wanted to see for himself what the faith his parents had encouraged him to follow would mean to him. For Jason, who had graduated from Tenri Junior Seminary and subsequently worked at Church Headquarters’ Overseas Department, his personal causality is what brought him to attend this year’s English class of Shuyoka. Noting that the two instructors had a close connection with his mother at the Oyasato Seminar, a training program intended for followers of high school age from overseas, he expressed his feelings of how the instructors and students of this year’s English class were brought together through the parental love and guidance of God the Parent and Oyasama.

Learning and Implementing the Teachings

During the three months of Shuyoka, the students of the English class learned the teachings through lessons on *The Doctrine of Tenrikyo*, *The Life of Oyasama*, and the Mikagura-uta, *The Songs for the Service*, as well as service dance practices. In addition, they practiced the musical instruments for the service as well as engaged in *hinokishin* activities. “Shuyoka is a wonderful place, which has provided us with important knowledge about the path,” notes Benjamin. “During *hinokishin*, we shared many things with one another and freely asked the instructors any question we wanted to ask. Being in a small class of four, I was able to ask questions more easily.” The unique learning environment that the relatively small size of the class provided was also highlighted by Jason: “Through Shuyoka, I think we all learned many things about the teachings. Since there were only four students, I be-



2020 English Class of Shuyoka (June 9)

lieve the teachers were able to teach us more than they initially expected to.” Apart from what they learned in classroom settings, some of the students shared their experiences regarding the service and the Sazuke. Jason talked about how his way of performing the seated service changed after attending a lecture that explained a sincere and proper way of performing the seated service. Concerning the Sazuke, Ritchie Venice noted how she was moved when a Shuyoka student who had lost feeling in her legs became able to walk again one or two weeks after other Shuyoka students administered the Sazuke to the student.

As for life after Shuyoka, the students expressed their hopes of how they would like to continue to follow the path as they moved on to the next chapter of their spiritual journey. Benjamin, who was to do *hinokishin* at his grand church after completing Shuyoka, mentioned his plan to keep learning the teachings. “I’m determined to read the *Osashizu* and the *Anecdotes of Oyasama* step by step in order to seek the exemplary way of living in my daily life,” he said, adding that he would like to attend the Lay Minister Preparatory Course in the future. Tetsuyuki said he hoped to stay connected with the path through a daily routine such as cleaning his neighborhood as well as continuing to attend the monthly service of his church in the United States. Ritchie Venice, who is determined to do what her church head minister would like her to do in following the path, expressed her hope of performing the service dance and playing women’s instruments at the monthly service of her church. For Jason, the next milestone toward which he intends to work hard is the 130th anniversary of his grand church to be commemorated in 2022.

TLI Students Share Their Thoughts about Studying in Jiba

Due to the spread of the novel coronavirus, the Japanese government has restricted the entry of foreign nationals, making it impossible for many international students to enter Japan. On the other hand, some young people from overseas, who had left their home countries before the restrictions came into place, are currently studying Japanese and the teachings and engaging in *hinokishin* at the Home of the Parent as students of Tenrikyo Language Institute. What is on their minds as they endeavor to acquire the language and learn about the path under the current circumstances? Four students from the Oyasato Fusekomi Department—Thanapat Vimokittirak (Thailand), Gyugyeong Kim (South Korea), Megan Sae Omoto (the United States), and Yoshinobu Alex Imai (Brazil)—recently shared their thoughts.

—How is your country affected by the spread of the novel coronavirus? What changes did you go through in your life?

Megan: I went back home to Seattle after graduating from the Japanese Department of TLI in early March. Most public facilities and stores were closed, and the government was restricting non-essential outings. At that time, I happened to learn that I might not be able to reenter Japan, so I purchased a flight ticket right away and managed to come back on March 31. In addition to the spread of the virus, there are protests against racial discrimination going on. I’m worried about the situation in the United States.

Thanapat: The same goes for me. When I went back home, the number of infections was rapidly increasing in Thailand. I could not even meet with my friends. My parents and my sister were the only three people I met during my stay. During the two months between my reentry to Japan and TLI’s reopening, I performed a prayer service by dancing to the twelve songs every morning at my grand church. I hope that this pandemic will be over as soon as possible.

Yoshinobu: In Brazil, many people were going out without wearing a mask even after restrictions on

non-essential outings were imposed. Although confirmed cases have exceeded two million, there are many people who still don’t take this pandemic seriously. The situation is complicated by political issues.

Gyugyeong: In my case, I was planning to return home with my Korean friend for a short period of time, but I was advised to stay in Jiba by my family and my head minister, who were worried about the situation. I stayed in Japan and spent three months at my upper church and followers dormitory until TLI’s reopening. During the period, I went to the morning service of Church Headquarters every day and, while doing *hinokishin*, I was praying for this situation to be settled as soon as possible. Looking back, I feel that God the Parent guided me to stay in Japan.

—What are your thoughts about studying in this situation? What is it that you want to achieve in the future?

Thanapat: My parents are Buddhists, but they are not opposed to my studying at the Home of the Parent. They said to me: “You should live life according to your own choices. Just try your best.” I have volunteer experience in teaching math to children from poor families in Thailand. One of my goals is to study Japanese and the teachings of this path so that I can teach them to such children.

Megan: I’m so glad we had an opportunity to do rice-planting *hinokishin* the other day. I have always enjoyed experiencing various types of *hinokishin* ever since I was a Japanese Department student at TLI. Although we are currently in a difficult situation, I’m grateful for my good health. While studying at TLI, I want to do my best to put into practice missionary work and *hinokishin*

so that I can maintain the attitude of *hinokishin* even after going back to the United States. I will try to help keep my town as clean as possible by picking up trash. I hope that this effort will give people an idea of what Tenrikyo is about.

Yoshinobu: I’m planning to delve deeper into the teachings at Tenri Graduate Seminary after graduating from TLI. After that, I will serve as a live-in missionary trainee at the Mission Headquarters in Brazil. At this point, there are many things I need to learn about the teachings of this path. My family in Brazil is going through a lot of difficulties, but what I ought to do right now is to work hard to do whatever is in front of me. I want to do the best I can to learn the teachings so that my family may have peace of mind.

Gyugyeong: I feel that the number of young followers of the path is decreasing these days. By making full use of my learning experiences in Jiba, I hope to explore a new form of missionary work—that is, I’m thinking of holding the kind of event young people may be interested in such as a cooking event with an opportunity to get to know the teachings. What I think is important now is to perform the service while being conscious of our daily use of the mind. On behalf of all newly enrolled students who were unable to come to study at the Home of the Parent this time, I would like to pray in Jiba for the wellness and happiness of their families and all people in the world.



Gyugyeong, Thanapat, Megan, and Yoshinobu sharing their thoughts (June 25)