

FUKUSHIMA DESK NEWS

Sendai Diocesan Support Center
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Baton Passing of Life with Friends of Fukushima

On the eleventh day of every month, Fukushima Prefectural Police set about the all-over search of the east coast. Each of the policemen, with a shovel in his hand, digs every nook and corner, searching for the least clue of anyone of the missing since March 11, 2011. They say, “We’ll never give up, for the sake of the family members waiting all these days.” As their words were reported on TV and newspaper, many people join them in heart and prayers.

Indeed the eleventh of each month has become a day of prayer for people to stop and pray.

For these four years and nine months, so many people have visited Fukushima, and they each brought a thoughtful prayer, joys and sufferings, to be with us. In this issue we would like to introduce one of the visitors, Mr. Nozomu Ito, a volunteer from Hiroshima, whose piercing eyes saw many profound things in detail.



NB. The Christmas tree in the picture on the left is as tall as 7 meters, and is decorated with 10,000 LED bulbs of red and white. The tree was erected in commemoration with the cherry trees in Tomioka, which used to be known as “the Winter cherry blossoms in Tomioka,” using the special LED bulbs symbolizing the cherry blossoms, just completed three months prior to the Earthquake. Now the town of Tomioka is empty as the citizens were forced to move out because of the atomic pollution. The bulbs were brought in to the town of Tomioka, to decorate a tall tree which symbolizes the hope of the former residents to return there one day. The tree was named “Lights of Hope.”

Iitate and Minami Soma I Saw Today

By Nozomu Ito, Fukuyama Parish, Hiroshima Diocese

Toward the end of last October, I visited the city of Minami Soma. Here I would like to share with you what I saw with my eyes as well as with my heart.



Getting off at Fukushima Station, JR, and taking the bus to Minami Soma, you pass the village of Iitate on the way. When I took this route last August, there was not even a shadow of a man in sight. What a difference now! Men are busily working on disinfection, power shovel cars are moving around everywhere, large trucks are running all over the place, roads are being dug, and dozens and dozens of

black plastic bags containing infected objects are being carried... At any rate, it was a completely different sight.

Odaka area, Minami Soma, was very similar. There the inhabitants are planning to return next April, and the preparatory work has started. The JR station of Odaka is covered with a huge blue vinyl seat while the station building is being repaired. As I walked toward it, I suddenly smelled strong wet paint. The blocked area of Joban Line, JR, was also being prepared to be opened in five years. The replacement alone of the ballast underneath the rails must be a huge amount of work. In the midst of such heavy work, I saw someone planting pretty pansies by the station. We can see a valuable message in such a gentle gesture. Indeed flowers soften the hearts of people. Blessed are the people who plan and realize such a delicate project.



I found a new sign near Odaka Station, marked “Purattohome”, which is a pun for “platform”, but meaning “Come and stop off like your home.” I was deeply moved to witness the thoughtfulness of the towns’ people, desirous to regain the former friendliness. Hoping to be a part of this movement, I gave

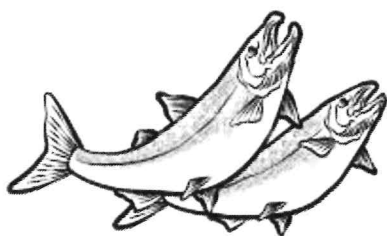
a helping hand for the planting of tulip bulbs. The same work of planting tulips was also seen in the temporary house area of Kashima. Planting flowers makes people's hearts thoughtful. I was already able to see the smile of cooperation on the faces of those who were working at the planters.

While preparing to receive the people back from evacuation, one can foresee many serious problems such as where they can go shopping, where they can find hospitals, how they can repair badly damaged houses, how they can re-establish mutual friendship, how they will find helping hands to look after the huge farming land, etc. etc. However, in spite of the difficult situation, or rather, because of the difficult situation, we are very much in need of hope, strength, cooperation and determination for success.

News

1) Salmons Laying Eggs in Ota River, Minami Soma

The salmon which were born in the year of the Earthquake grew to adulthood, and returned to their native river for the baton pass of their life. Ota River in Minami Soma was felt too narrow for the dozens and dozens of salmon crowded together upon their return from the ocean. They laid eggs generously in the hollows at the bottom of the river. Many of the salmon looked tired, their bodies turning white here and there. We were all touched by those fish who give their own life to the end for the next generation. For us who came from the western part of Japan, this was a new and very valuable experience. We watched them in awe.



2) Visit of the Fathers of Hiroshima Children

Seven members of the parents' association of Ake no Hoshi, a Catholic elementary school in Hiroshima, visited Minami Soma, Fukushima, and had their first-hand experience of seeing the Tsunami damage. For example, they were frightened by the actual view of what is generally called Ton Bags, which are officially called "Flexible Containers", with their huge size and black ugly coloring,. They each said, "I am so glad I came. We read about the place and see the photos, but we have to come and see the reality."

By Nozomu Ito, Fukuyama Parish, Hiroshima Diocese