

March 2011

Dear friends in Christ,

Thank you very much for your prayers, concerns and encouragement. As you already know, my country suffered an earthquake of 9.0 magnitude at 14:46 JST on March 11. This is the greatest earthquake in our history. But since most of our buildings meet stringent requirements of the Building Standards Act, the earthquake itself was not the worst part of the disaster. It was the enormous tsunami right after the earthquake that swept away countless homes and took thousands of lives in a moment. In some places, entire towns were swallowed up by the tsunami, and no one knows how many people are alive or missing. In fact, as I write this to you ten days after the earthquake, we don't know how many lives have been lost. At least 8,450 are dead, more than 12,000 are still missing, and more than 350,000 evacuees are living in more than 1,000 shelters and enduring cold weather.

When the earthquake occurred, Ms. Kaori Shimada and I were at office on the fifth floor of the building in Tokyo, which is about 200 miles from the epicenter. The quake started with a small shake and gradually became bigger. At that time we optimistically thought it would stop soon, since earthquakes are not uncommon in Japan. But just in case we left the room and went into the hallway. The shaking continued for more than two minutes and then it seemed to stop. But right after that, the strongest tremors hit and we were able to do nothing but sit down on the floor. The quake seemed to continue forever to me and I really thought I might die here. The shaking continued for five minutes in total. After the quake stopped, we evacuated the building and stayed in a safer place for a while in case there would be large aftershocks.



Thank God our family is safe, and all our staff and their families are also safe. We don't see any structural damage in our office. Although the reduced schedule of the trains due to the short supply of electricity prevents us from going to the office on time, we again began doing much of our regular work on March 15 and resumed recording programs on March 18.

Damage is more striking in northeast Japan, where our radio program *Morning Word* is broadcast from three commercial stations. As far as the Reformed Church of Japan is concerned, the safety of all the pastors and their families is confirmed, and the church

*Japanese Ministry*

buildings are usable except for Ishinomaki Reformed Church, which is located not far from the coast. The whole area where the Ishinomaki Reformed Church is located was destroyed by the tsunami. The pastor of the church (who is one of the speakers of *Morning Word*) and his wife have been staying in a shelter since the day of the earthquake. In a recent newsletter, he stated that for the first several days they had nothing to eat except some candy and chocolate. Finally on March 18 they finally got a very small amount of cooked rice. The picture to the right shows the damage to the house of a member of Higashisendai Reformed Church.



We are planning to change the contents of *Morning Word* temporarily for the next several months in order to provide comfort and encouragement to the people of the disaster-stricken area. Usually the pastors of the area help in production of the program, but since most of them are themselves suffering from the earthquake and are busy caring for their members, Ms. Namiko Kummada, the announcer, and I will produce the program.

You have also heard about the radiation from the nuclear plants in Fukushima prefecture. We continue to watch this as well. At present, Tokyo is safe and there is no risk to human health. Please check the website of the Prime Minister of Japan at <http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/incident/index.html>. You can also read articles written by the nuclear scientists of MIT at <http://mitnse.com/2011/03/>.

Please continue to pray for us and pray for Japan.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Masao Yamashita'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Masao Yamashita