



# JCFN Japan & North America

## Directors Letter July 2021

### ✿JCFN Japan Ministry Report✿ (Chihiro Okada, Japan Director)

In North America, the graduation season is over and summer vacation is beginning. For JCFN, July is also the beginning of a fiscal year. While the effects of the still linger, we pray for blessings on each step of transitions.

In June, the closing month of the 2020 fiscal year, the **WIT Leadership Camp** was held on two Saturdays online in the US. Pray that the connections made among the WIT leaders will remain as encouraging relationships after the WIT, and that the encouragement will continue as they are sent to Japan and other places in the future.

Also in June, **the JCFN annual board meeting** was held to discuss the foundation of the organization's progress, personnel, and finances. Please pray for the board members who carry important roles of JCFN ministry. In this issue, I would like to share with you the testimonies of the participants of EC20 Beyond held last December.

In this letter, we want to share with you a powerful testimony by one of the EC20 Beyond participants.

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### **From Despair to Hope** **Ryoko Kawaguchi (JCFN Member in Miyagi Prefecture)**

I was in despair. I was really in despair. I was so busy working, going to bed, waking up, working, going to bed again.... There was no hope for me. I was desperate to finish the day. Before going to bed at night, I even wished that tomorrow morning would never come. Even now, as I write this, I am crying from the pain of living a life without hope or joy.

I studied in California for six years starting in 2000. I had a hard time studying, but I also made many Christian friends and had a blessed time. After returning to Japan, although I had some ups and downs in my faith, I was working at a Christian workplace and participating in Christian gatherings for returnees, so I didn't fall away from the church, and I was having a good time both at church and at work.



It was after I got married that I started to change (no, it wasn't because of my husband, just so you know). After the Great East Japan Earthquake, my husband, who is a Christian, and I began to live in the Tohoku area for long-term support. We came to the area with great enthusiasm, feeling like a hero, to share the gospel with the people living in the disaster area, but I was immediately beaten down. First of all, I had no friends. The church was too quiet (of course, that was not a bad thing, but I was confused by how different it was from the churches I had been to). When I looked to my right and left, I saw mostly elderly people. Even so, I took it as a positive sign and said, "This is the kind of environment God dared to give us." I continued to attend church diligently, but my faith quickly weakened. My new job became busier and busier, and although I was supposed to be going to church to receive blessings, I came home only feeling tired. I didn't know what the point of going to church was. I didn't know what "Christianity" was in the first place, and my old energetic self had gone away.

I suddenly realized that I had no motivation to evangelize people in the disaster area, and instead, I was being evangelized by the people in the disaster area (laughs). But I didn't have the courage or faith to overcome, so I just nodded my head. I think I was more afraid of what people would think if I said, "I'm a Christian. So I decided to go on a wandering trip to find another church (with my husband and children, of course). As a family, we went to a different church every week. However, since I went to church with the feeling that "the church will take care of it," there was no one church that completely satisfied my heart, and we continued to go to some church every week for a long time (this is an ongoing process). Of course, with such an uptight attitude, it was impossible for the message to penetrate my heart, and I never made any Christian friends. In any case, I wanted to minimize the time I spent on church-related matters and use the time to get home early to work and do homework for my children.

The time was December 2020. It was the busiest time of the year at work, and my heart was finally dying. I was at my limit. That day, after coming home from church exhausted, I took a nap without knowing it, and when I woke up, it was evening and my bedroom was completely dark. I was staring at my phone in the dark, afraid to come back to reality. Then I saw the EC information. And this year, it was online. There was no way I could go to California to participate, not without leaving my husband and children behind in Japan, and not having the money to pay for it in the first place. I wanted to change, I wanted to be changed, I wanted to praise God from my heart like I used to.

The morning of the EC day. I was feeling pretty guilty. "What if there are really hot Christians there?" "What if I feel completely away?" "What if I meet someone who knows me from the past? However, my fears were wiped away in no time, and I was in tears immediately after the first message by Pastor Kuroda. I can only explain that God touched me, but anyway, I cried all day long. Above all, being able to share with Christian friends in small groups softened my heart, which had been sharp as a knife.

Up until now, I had experienced the so-called worldly life of an ordinary person, away from God. I worked very hard and received a good salary. However, I had children and if I spent money, it would be gone in an instant (of course). When I thought about what I could have left behind after working so hard, I couldn't leave anything behind. Really nothing. After working so hard and ignoring God, the only thing I had left was fatigue and despair. When I went before God, instead of praising me and saying, "You've worked hard and saved up all this money," God said, "Faithful servant, you've done well. You've done well. I experienced firsthand that there is no other way but to leave behind "faith, hope and love" in order for God to praise me.

As a side note, when I was working for a Christian organization, I had a chance to talk with an orphan boy from Africa. He told me something like this. He said to me, "If you know God, it's like you have everything. But if you don't know God, it's like you don't have anything. I laughed it off in my mind, thinking, "That's so exaggerated!" But now I know that what he said was true. After 15 years of being told by a 10 year old, I finally realized the truth.

After joining EC, I realized how important it is to connect with Christian friends and encourage each other. In the past, I had thought, "I'm such a person of faith, I'll be fine on my own! I want to kick my past self out! I want to continue to connect with my Christian friends (even if I have to force myself to do so), encourage each other in our faith, and continue to cling to God's love.

I wanted to write my testimony because I wanted to thank the EC committee members and all the people who made the EC possible. It was my first time to participate in an online EC, and I am so grateful to you for making it happen. If it wasn't for online, I would never have been able to attend! Thank you so much!

"This is why the things that last forever are faith, hope, and love." (I Corinthians 13:13)

## **[Announcement]**

(1) JCFN's fiscal year change will be the time for renewal of supporting members. We are currently adjusting the system for renewing the membership online. We will inform you again in July. Please support JCFN!

(2) Here is a video introducing JCFN candidate, Daisuke Tsuchida and his family. They are currently raising support. Please watch the videos, remember the Tsuchida family, pray for them, and support them. Please pray that they will be able to come to the US in God's best timing. (They are currently waiting for the visa.



Video 1: [https://youtu.be/qEOwU\\_-RdKA](https://youtu.be/qEOwU_-RdKA)

Video 2: <https://youtu.be/RawVsPH3X0g>

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