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On the 3rd Great East Japan Earthquake International Theological Symposium

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We held the 3rd Great East Japan Earthquake International Theological Symposium with Fuller Theological Seminary on the 15th and 17th of February, 2014 at Ochanomizu Christian Center in Tokyo. This is a report from the symposium. We were pleased that an extension of the symposium took place in Kobe on the 13th of February, 2014 at Aotani Evangelical Lutheran Church supported by three seminaries (Kobe Lutheran Theological Seminary, Kansai Bible College and Evangelical Biblical Seminary). Kobe suffered a major earthquake in 1995. We were also delighted to have two professors from Wheaton College joining the symposium as speakers.

The theme of the 1st symposium was “How Can We Start Again? Centurial Vision for Post-disaster Japan.” This became the overarching theme for the three yearly symposiums. The 2nd symposium’s theme was “The Church: Embracing the Sufferers, Moving Forward.” One of the strengths of the symposiums was our network with the local working groups, through which we were able to see the reality on the ground. With this perspective, we could discuss and prepare symposium themes useful for the church in Japanese society. We chose “Raising Leaders through Sufferings beyond Walls” as the theme of the 3rd symposium. When you look ahead to the future, to 100 years from today, raising and training young Christian leaders is an urgent and essential challenge. We contacted KGK (*Kirisutosha Gakusei Kai*, the Japanese affiliate of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students) and SCF (Student Christian Fellowship) of the United Church of Christ in Japan, along with seminaries and Christian universities. We hoped that young Christians and seekers could have opportunities to meet together in various ways through, before and after the symposium. Unlike the 1st and 2nd symposiums where we met just for one day, we added a 2nd day especially for young people at the 3rd symposium.

We started the Great East Japan Earthquake International Theological Symposium with two purposes. One was to encourage theological discussion in plain language regarding the disaster for the church and ordinary believers. Everyone was seeking some kind of answer and a space for theological dialogue after the massive disaster. The other was to develop personal relationships amongst Christian leaders beyond denominational and other unnecessary walls. We intentionally provided several opportunities every year for them to have face-to-face dialogue to prepare for the next symposium. We were pleased to have participants not only from mainline denominations and evangelical churches, but for the last two years from the Roman Catholic Church as well. Over the past three years we were able to create such an “open space” for people to come and meet. And we plan to continue this into the future.