

May every blessing of peace and happiness be yours at Christmas and the New Year!



We started the Year of the Sheep with the hope to become more faithful to Our Shepherd every day. This is the first New Year's Day since Fukushima Desk moved in to Fukushima City, while it is the fourth year since the day of the Earthquake. Those of you who are spending the fourth New Year's Day in your temporary residence, and those who spend the New Year in a completely new environment... may all of you be blessed though your New Year's Day may not be rosy at present. We sincerely hope that you will see brighter days this year.

Overcoming Damage Caused by Rumors

We still hear that there are some who hesitate to buy food produced in Fukushima, regardless of what type of food it is. Of course it is up to each person to decide what to buy and what not to buy, but it is hoped their judgment is based on correct information. There are newspaper articles on some high school students of Fukushima who work hard to eradicate the misunderstandings of consumers, by informing the latter with updated knowledge. These students' actions prove how much they love their native place, Fukushima, by spreading the truth.

In the year 2015, from April till June, Fukushima Destination Campaign will be held. Those involved in its organization are extremely eager to profit from this opportunity to eradicate the unjust rumors about the "safety" of Fukushima. To the questions like "How safe is Fukushima in regards to radioactivity?" In reply we must

give the present situation as we know it and let them judge for themselves. Mr. Kato, President of Iwase Farm which prides itself with the long story of 130 years, is a good example of making his work worthy of our attention.

We also hope that consumers will try to choose the right attitude.

"Related Deaths" Still Increasing

Three years and ten months have passed since the East Japan Great Earthquake and the accident that happened at Fukushima First Atomic Power Plant. In spite of this long period of time, there are still innumerable people waiting to go back to their own safe homes. In the midst of all these situations, our House of Representatives was dismissed, and the General Election was announced, making the issue on the Atomic Plant ambiguous.

The Earthquake victims find it difficult to maintain good physical condition, and a prolonged unsettled life starts ruining their health. The number of "deaths related to the Great Earthquake" is slowly increasing. The total number of such deaths in the "three disaster prefectures" is over 3,000. In Fukushima Prefecture alone, the deaths related to the Earthquake counted 1817 as of December 12, 2014, which surpasses the number of the direct victims of the Earthquake which was 1603. The limit of the evacuees' life is evident. Would one be exaggerating to feel that even the air feels different once he gets out of Fukushima Prefecture?

Removal of "Debris"

The work of the removal of debris in Namie seems to be advancing well. The removal of the disaster debris in Tomioka Machi and Futaba Machi which seemed to be eternally neglected since the accident of Fukushima Daiichi Atomic Plant finally started in

December. That reminded me of some men taking pictures around Tomioka in November when I was there. At that time I vaguely imagined that it could be the preparation for the debris removal. On December 6, we were informed of the completion of the Joban auto-route between Namie and Minami Soma, as well as between Soma and Yamamoto. This meant that now one can drive directly from Soma-Futaba to Sendai, which gives us the hope to see the accelerated reconstruction of the coast area. As for the Joban auto-route, the blocked area from Tomioka to Namie IC (14.3km) will be opened on March 1, 2015; and the route joining Sango (Saitama Prefecture) and Watari IC in Miyagi Prefecture (300km) will all be opened, too. The work has started in haste. We hope there will be sufficient safety in spite of the speed. Any way, once the Joban route is opened, the access to Kanto will be extremely convenient.

Elementary School Children's Dream

The children who go to Futaba Kita and Futaba Minami Elementary Schools come from the area of evacuation. The children of these two schools attend their classes together since the Earthquake. The children of these two schools recently put on a play of their own story. The "two" schools consist of the total of five students: two first graders, one fifth grader and two six graders. These children went around the area and heard as many stories as possible from the adults, and with the help of their teachers they made the whole narrative into a play. The children below 15 years old have not been allowed to return to their own town even for a short visit, which means that these children have not seen their own homes for nearly four years. So, in their imagination in the play, they visit the present Futaba Machi by riding a time tunnel. In the play they visit their past town, and then the same town ten years from now in their imagination. At the conclusion of the play, the children say, "It is good see our old town with no change." The adults who went to see the play wept, as they know the real state of the town today, where wild grass grows, and wild animals walk around freely.

Study Session for Bishops

A study session for Catholic bishops was held in Fukushima from December 16 to 18, 2014. It was a part of the annual project organized by the Catholic Bishops' Social Issues Committee, and this year's program was to study what is going on in Fukushima. The total number of participants was 22, including 11 bishops and several priests, religious and lay Catholics, who gathered in Fukushima to be exposed to the reality of the life of the people for the three years and nine months since the accident at the First Fukushima Atomic Power Plant. To welcome so many people to Fukushima is first of all very encouraging for the residents of Fukushima, and it becomes still more meaningful when the visitors listen to their stories sincerely, since the fact that they have taken so much time to come all the way in the midst of their busy life. The experience of the visitors and that of the residents of Fukushima are both valuable, and hopefully life-giving for the entire Church in Japan.

Thank You!

Friendly and consoling E-mail messages arrived from U.S.A. and Canada. Our Newsletter is humble, but it gives us much courage to know that there are people on the other side of the globe, too, who read it and think of us.

Thank you very much for walking with us.

Sister Yukie Nogami, A.C.I.