Meru District in Kenya in 1984 had no electricity, no running water, and no other modern conveniences. Moreover, the district had suffered from a long drought that threatened the lives of both humans and animals. Reverend Misheck Kanake, who was based in Meru, was responsible for twenty-six churches. He and his wife owned nine hectares of land in the district. Although their land was no different from that of others, the Kanakes were able not only to feed themselves but to help many others do the same.

How? By showing the people how to use the land wisely, building up the soil through organic farming and putting in many hours of hard work. Every day, hungry people came to the Kanake farm with their hoes and sickles and worked to get food. Mrs. Kanake promoted a "culinary revolution" by cooking and serving meals that included new and healthier kinds of food. After a few days, the people returned home to try the new methods of farming that they had learned from the Kanakes on their own dried-up land. These new methods consisted primarily of organic farming practices and other useful information, skills, attitudes, and approaches to community life that the Kanakes—committed "to witness to the Hope of the World, to Love as experienced and expressed in Jesus Christ"—had learned at the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in Japan, founded by a fellow Christian named Toshihiro Takami. The Kanakes were among hundreds of individuals in Asia and Africa for whom Reverend Takami’s course at ARI marked a turning point in their lives as rural leaders.

Takami founded the Institute in 1973 in Nishinasuno, Tochigi Prefecture, a rural area outside of Tokyo. His life leading up to this event is a remarkable saga. Toshiro Takami’s parents were from Kyushu Island in southern Japan. Driven by poverty, Takami’s father and mother, Taisuke and Toshi, migrated to Manchuria along with many other Japanese in the early twentieth century.

Japan then was a very poor country. Many people in the rural areas could not make a living, particularly third or fourth sons, or daughters. To survive, thousands of them migrated westward to China and Korea, eastward to Hawaii and the West Coast of the United States, or southward to the Philippines and Indonesia. Some even went to Brazil and Argentina.

In Manchuria, the Takamis settled in a town called Bujun, now known as Fushun. There, Toshihiro Takami was born on September 30, 1926, the fifth of the Takami couple’s six children. In the town was one of the world’s largest open-pit coal mines, owned by the Southern Manchurian Railway Company of Japan. Though not well-educated, Takami’s father could read and write. For a time he ran a boarding house for Japanese mine workers, but eventually he found a job with the company itself, as an accountant.

Takami’s mother was a housewife who never finished school. Sometimes, Takami recalls, she had difficulty reading the newspapers. But in those days, girls in Japan did not have to go to school. Compulsory education came only later. As a result, says Takami, "most of the girls like my mother never finished primary school. This was why she was so anxious to send us children to study higher and higher."

Takami says his family did not become rich in Manchuria. Among the Japanese there, their income was only average. But he remembers that they lived much better than the Chinese or
Manchurians, or the Japanese at home in Japan. "When I gained some way to go to school, ordinarily I was wearing Western-style clothes. And I used to love to go, and to wear [leather] shoes. In Japan, I wore shoes only made of straw—sandals."

In Manchuria, the Takami children were isolated and never played with Chinese children. All the stores in town were owned by Japanese. The Chinese lived outside of town, in shantytowns. Takami's main world, therefore, consisted of his brothers and sisters. They were taught that there was a "wall" around their little community. "Don't go over there," they were told, "stay within the compound."

"Actually, there were not any high walls," Takami says, only a "boundary."

"It was so dangerous for us to be outside that boundary."

Takami has no memory of having servants in the family house in Manchuria, but he remembers that many Chinese people came to do menial jobs when his father ran the boarding house.

When Takami was ten years old and in the fourth grade, his parents decided to move back to Japan. Although they were living a relatively good life in Manchuria, they "could not make ends meet," says Takami. They had debts to settle and were not advancing economically. They might have returned home even earlier but were held back by a social expectation: people who leave their villages in Japan and later return are expected to come back as successes. "When you come back as a failure, or you don't have money or better clothes, it's a shame for the whole family," Takami says. So, when the Takamis did return to Japan, they did not go back to Kyushu but instead went to a poor fishing village outside Kyoto called Maizuru.

In Maizuru, Takami saw that he and his family had been better off in Manchuria. Children looked at him and thought his family had come back richer and as a success. "Actually, we had made less, and we had bigger debts, than these fishing people," he says. "We were really penniless. I remember my mother taking our clothes to the pawnshop after dark to get money to buy food for the next day." Takami's father became downhearted and thought himself a complete failure. He suffered a stroke that paralyzed half his body. No longer able to move about on his own, he relied on Takami to help him walk.

To earn money for the family, Takami's mother sold kimono cloth from door to door. She also took boarders into their small house: five or six young men who worked in the local shipyard. When Takami finished grade school in Maizuru, he saw no hope of being able to go on to high school. "And, of course, my parents never thought they could send me," Takami says. Indeed, one of Takami's elder brothers had already quit high school to work in the shipyard.

But luck was with Takami. One of his teachers, Mr. Senga, and the schoolmaster nominated him for a scholarship provided by a rich benefactor for students in Kyoto Prefecture. They told him that if he took the qualifying examination and passed, he could use the scholarship to attend one of the elite public high schools in Kyoto City.

The scholarship, however, had one condition. If Takami won it, he would have to leave home, sever his relationship with his family, enter a Zen monastery, and live as a student monk. "Because education meant so much to us all, we accepted those terms," Takami says. He did qualify and, although it was difficult for him, Takami now left his parents and his brothers and sister and made the four-hour train trip to his new home in Kyoto. It was 1938 and Takami was twelve years old. It was like "going to a foreign country," he remembers.
Takami received a good education at the Third High School in Kyoto, a government-run secular school. At the same time he experienced monastic life at Senbothu Temple, where monks followed the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism. His stay at the temple taught him strict discipline in life, patience, and an appreciation for the beauty of nature. He meditated daily and performed a variety of chores. "We would get up, say, at 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning," he recalls, "and some of us would start cleaning the whole temple. We would say group prayers aloud and some would cook meals—vegetarian food. We would be wearing robes but changed to the school uniform before we went to school. After school, we returned to the temple, changed our clothes, and did more chores: cleaning the beddings or gardening. Most Japanese temples have beautiful landscaped gardens and cemeteries, all those—we kept them clean. That was in the afternoon. In the evening, we studied by ourselves. No one taught us. The Master never speaks to the students."

There was strict discipline in the monastery, but it was enforced mainly "by voice only." Erring boys, particularly freshmen, were switched once in a while, "on the shoulder or back," especially during meditation. Takami says "this is only to help you to concentrate in the meditation."

In high school, Takami took the same subjects as everyone else. He also received basic military training, learning how to fight, fence, handle a rifle, and march in formation. Although students were not made to wear cadet uniforms, their school uniforms were changed to khaki, so that even ordinary students looked like soldiers. Some of the teachers in the school were against military training and military education, but they did not speak openly about this in school; they only hinted at it.

Patriotic values were also inculcated among the students in school because, at the time, Japan's armies were ranging widely in Asia and building an ever-larger empire. Students sang songs and held assemblies where the principal message was "We must do everything to respect and support the emperor." In history class, they were taught that the emperor was the head of heaven, head of the whole nation, and has been doing "good things for the Japanese for centuries."

While in school and in the monastery, Takami read newspaper accounts of Japanese conquests in Southeast Asia and the Pacific and came across many words, ideas, and stories about Asian countries such as the Philippines and Thailand for the first time. These accounts said that Japanese imperial troops were always victorious and that Japan was waging the war for peace and justice for the people of Asia. But when Japan was defeated, all of this suddenly changed. "The spiritual vacuum was a most serious one," Takami recalls.

Toward the end of the war, tremendous pressure was put on young Japanese boys to go into the armed forces. "I'm not a very brave man in that way, so I tried to stay away from the armed services for as long as possible," Takami confesses. "But finally the draft paper came, and I thought that rather than being drafted I should enlist." So Takami enlisted in the navy. Since he had already graduated from high school at the time and his mathematical ability "was not too bad," he qualified to become a special student to study the critical new war technology of radar. Takami was ordered back to school to study electronics and radar operations at the Japanese Naval Radar Center in Atsugi. He was still there when the war ended. "Many of my friends who were drafted and sent to the front didn't come back. I was saved."

Takami, now nineteen, went back to his family in Maizuru. He had lost his father toward the end of the war. Subsequently, one of his younger brothers suffered appendicitis and, because he
could not get medical attention and enough food, experienced a lingering death over the course of a year.

Takami relates that high government officials had told the Japanese public how terrible the Americans, the British, the Dutch, and other Allied Forces were. The same officials warned that the occupying US Army would kill everyone. "So we just stayed inside the house and remained quiet," Takami says. "My younger brother died from sickness and also from fear. I found myself, despite all the Zen discipline, becoming a very wicked person. When we were hungry, I often went to the faraway mountains to pick young leaves and young grass for eating. We were very hungry, and I was quite selfish. I only wanted to get food for myself, not for my family or even for my brother who was suffering tremendously. When I think of how wicked I could be in a hungry situation, I realize even today that I cannot be a good and righteous man without help from God and from my fellow persons."

When the Americans did come, contrary to the official warnings, Takami did not witness any conflict between them and the Japanese. But the times were difficult. Takami continues: "Few jobs were available in those days, so I did all sorts of jobs—black marketeering and carrying fish, potatoes, or rice from the village to the cities to sell. In exchange we would get something else. I did some coal carrying, but mostly I worked as offshore labor. It was a hard job, but at least I got money and food; hard laborers received extra rations from the government ration office. Experiencing the war and hard offshore labor made my body tough."

Sometimes, when Takami could not find a job, he would cross two mountains on foot to the seashore to dive for clams. "No one taught me how to swim; necessity taught me. I sometimes carried two big sacks of clams on my shoulders over the two mountains back to my town and exchanged them for salt or rice. I did this kind of thing to support my family."

To find work or to earn extra money, Takami says he willfully cheated and lied. An instance of this occurred in 1951 when he was in Kobe: "One day I found from the classified ads of the Mainichi English newspaper that a missionary at Kobe College was looking for a cook. I thought that this would be the right kind of job and that I would try it. Opportunities come to us unexpectedly, and we have the freedom to seize them by stepping forward." So Takami had an interview with Professor Albert Faurot, an American missionary from Kansas who taught music and art at the Christian-run Kobe College. Faurot had just arrived from China, where missionaries were being evacuated in the wake of the communist takeover in 1949. He was unmarried and lived by himself.

"I learned some English in high school before the war," Takami says, "so I could handle some conversation. And I said [to Faurot] that I could cook. He was desperate. He was a single man and even today I think he doesn't know how to make coffee."

"Okay," Faurot said, "come back tomorrow and you will start."

"That is the time I told a lie," Takami says, "that I was a cook. He believed me." But Takami adds that he did have some experience cooking in the Zen temple. "The monks took turns cooking but mostly they just watched the rice cook," he said. Then, after the war, Takami worked for six months for an American military family. He learned to bake biscuits and fry eggs and bacon. "But I never actually saw a cookbook," he says, and he certainly did not know how to plan a menu.

On his way home from the interview with Faurot, Takami went to a big bookstore in Osaka and
bought himself a copy of *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook*. Every night, with the help of a dictionary, he translated new recipes into Japanese. "For some time I never served (Faurot) the same kind of breakfast or dinner," Takami says. "I think that, to this day, he believes that I’m a professional cook."

Working for Faurot, Takami’s life began to change: "I saw that he trusted me. When I said I was a cook, he said, ‘Okay.’ He fixed a salary and hired me. When I went with all my dirty clothes and one pair of torn rubber boots to wear, he said, ‘Okay, you will start living with me in the same house.’" Faurot fixed up a room for Takami next to his own and bought him a new desk, chairs, curtains, and bedding. "This was the first time in my life that I had a private room." Next, Takami says, "he gave me a large amount of money and a small notebook to keep accounts. He said my responsibility was to keep the house, plan meals, write menus, do the shopping, keep all records in the book, pay the bills, and report only once a month to him. I never met this kind of person before. I was ready to cheat and I knew how. But when I experienced such trust, this really began to change my own life. I couldn’t cheat this person. I began to trust this person, and I also began to trust myself."

Faurot never asked Takami to come to church with him. But Takami did see Faurot reading the Bible in English and going to church every Sunday. One day Takami asked Faurot to take him to church—to the Japanese church. Takami was so impressed by the sermons preached by Dr. Hiroshi Hatanaka, the president of Kobe College, that he began to attend regularly. "I was so used to leading a very poor life that I thought the [Japanese] Bible was something I really shouldn’t spend money on." So he got himself a free copy of the Bible from a missionary, a small, pocket-sized New Testament that he read with the help of a dictionary. He began to attend Bible study. "When I came to the Gospel of John," he says, "this particular book spoke to me directly. Many times I had a very strong spiritual experience." And when he came to the story of Paul, he says "all the life that I had thus far experienced became meaningful." After that, Takami asked the pastor to let him join the church and to be baptized.

Eight months later, Faurot moved from Japan to Silliman University in Dumaguete City in the Philippines. Before leaving Japan, he arranged work for Takami with another missionary and also asked friends in Nebraska to help raise funds to further Takami’s education in the United States. The Nebraska Congregational Church youth group, the Pilgrim Fellowship, had established a college "scholarship of reconciliation" for someone from Japan. The group became interested in helping Takami. By mounting a "workday for ‘Tommy’ Takami," it raised enough money to enable him to go to the United States. He entered Doane College, a small Congregational school in Crete, Nebraska, where in 1956 he finished a bachelor’s degree in the history of civilization.

After graduating from Doane, Takami returned home and spent a year working as an editorial staff member of the English *Mainichi* newspaper in Osaka. Heeding a call for the ministry, he returned to the United States to study at the Yale Divinity School in Connecticut, graduating in 1960 with a Bachelor of Divinity, majoring in theology of mission. In the same year, he was ordained into the ministry of the United Church of Christ and returned to Japan. For ten years, he taught practical theology and directed the Christian Rural Leaders course at the Tsurukawa Rural Evangelical Seminary in the outskirts of Tokyo. Then, in 1969, he went back to the United States to earn a master’s degree in cultural anthropology from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

The idea for the Christian Rural Leaders course that Takami directed in Tokyo had its roots in 1959, when delegates to the inaugural assembly of the East Asia Christian Conference in Kuala
Lumpur asked the Japanese churches to start a leadership training program for churches in Southeast Asia. These delegates, representing the younger churches of the region, based their request on three premises: (1) that the church should play a role in the development of Southeast Asia's newly independent countries; (2) that Japan's remarkable industrial progress was based, initially, on agriculture and agribusiness; and, therefore, (3) that Southeast Asian churches must help to organize rural people for agricultural development. This called for trained leaders to train farmers.

The Japanese churches responded quickly to the request. In 1960, they initiated the Southeast Asian Christian Rural Leaders Training Course (SEAC) at the Tsurukawa Rural Evangelical Seminary of the United Church of Christ. In 1962, they named Takami the first full-time director of the course, a post he held until March 1973.

Ironically, the training course was launched at a time when Japan's own farm families and communities were experiencing great difficulty.

In 1947, two years after the end of World War II, the Allied Occupation forces in Japan led by General Douglas MacArthur forced Japan to adopt land reform. This firmly established the principle of ownership of farmland by cultivators. Almost overnight, all tenant farmers became landowners.

Because Japan was hungry, the government encouraged farmers to produce food by granting them tax privileges and heavy subsidies. These incentives did boost agricultural production. But because urbanization and industrialization were the driving forces of Japan's fast economic recovery and reconstruction following World War II, the government made the development of heavy industrial exports and chemicals its top priority. This paid off. Japan's heavy industries brought in huge, unexpected economic gains from the Korean and Vietnam Wars. (Japan did not export weapons, however.)

But the rapid growth of Japan's urban/industrial sector created economic disparities between urban and rural people. Because industries needed a bigger workforce, they drew masses of strong and healthy men and women, and even children, from the rural areas to the new urban centers. The Tokyo Olympics in 1964 drew thousands of rural workers for the construction of elevated expressways and underground train lines that went in all directions from Tokyo. Industries also began moving into suburban and rural areas to take advantage of reliable cheap labor, giving rise to thousands of new factories and the creation of new cities in once-rural areas. As a result, many farmers began working for money instead of for food, youths lost interest in farming, and rural communities began to deteriorate quickly.

Japan's Agricultural Basic Law of 1961 made matters worse, according to Takami. Aiming to boost agricultural production and incomes, the law encouraged the use of large machinery and chemicals, larger farm sizes, and specialization (in fruit production, for example, or swine raising or dairy farming). It also provided extension workers to help the country's farmers adapt to new technologies and modes of farming. Instead of improving the lives of farmers, however, the law drove many of them into debt and caused many others to suffer the effects of chemical poisoning caused by the overuse of pesticides and herbicides.

Observing these trends, Takami came to feel that his own training program—the SEAC—was not adequately addressing the needs of the time. What was needed, he believed, was a different kind of training program, one that nurtured dedicated leaders at the grassroots level. This conviction was strengthened when Takami was temporarily assigned to newly independent
Bangladesh in 1972, as a Christian pastor of a disaster relief project. The South Asian country had recently experienced devastating floods; hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis were struggling to survive. What shocked Takami in the midst of this catastrophe was the dearth of capable and committed local leaders.

Takami was in Bangladesh with a group of volunteers who were assisting with emergency rice production. They came not only from Japan but also from North America. Many of them had no apparent religious affiliation but Takami noted that they were all "deeply spiritual." They adjusted quickly not only to the local topography but also to Bengali culture "and worked beautifully with Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, and animists in Bangladesh." The joyful dedication and hard work of these young volunteers, and the enthusiastic response from villagers, so impressed Takami that he began to conceive a vision for a new rural leaders’ training program for Asia.

Upon returning to Japan, Takami shared his thoughts with other church people. He says, "I wanted to dedicate all the rest of my life as a Christian person to this task, God willing, as an act of repentance for sinful acts committed by the Japanese nation during World War II." His idea met with mixed reactions. Several people responded with great enthusiasm, especially those from outside Japan. Many more regarded the idea with suspicion. Even friends took a wait-and-see attitude.

Nevertheless, by late 1972, several people had agreed to join Takami’s envisaged training institute as staff members or board members. "These were men and women of varied ages and professions, each one having an independent mind and a strong character," Takami says. "We shared a common goal." With this support, Takami founded the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) as a Christian leadership training center.

To establish the Institute, Takami and his friends borrowed 11 million yen to buy six hectares of land and to build their first building. The complex is located in the town of Nishinasuno, about eighty-five miles north of Tokyo. Although near the capital city, it is still regarded as a rural community, "not too far from Tokyo, but appropriately detached from the big city," he says. A local minister who talked to friends (who, in turn, talked to bankers) helped them get the loan. "The whole thing was approved on the basis of trust," Takami says.

Registered as a non-stock, nonprofit, tax-exempt educational institution, ARI’s mission is stated as follows: "In God’s love and grace, to provide an opportunity and facility for international mutual learning among rural leaders so that all can grow together, respect human dignity and improve the life of all people and societies."

The Institute was formally inaugurated in March 1973. Takami recalls the modest ceremony: "Only four overseas participants from Asian countries and one Japanese participant sat in the front row, and a total of six members of the staff sat beside them. There were about thirty well-wishers present." The countries represented in the inaugural class were Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, and Korea. From the beginning, English was used as the primary language of training.

In the years that followed, young men and women from virtually every country in Asia, and eventually from many in Africa, the Pacific, and Latin America, joined Takami’s course. Many of them, he notes, have common characteristics; they are strong-minded, power-conscious, quick to action, and rather domineering. They also possess above-average ability and high self-esteem. All of them have had experience in rural development work through the churches,
nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, schools, or farming communities that nominated them to the Institute. Most of them are rural grassroots leaders familiar with the struggles of poor farm families as well as those of minority groups, women, and children.

Recommended by rural leaders or heads of similar institutes, they are trained at ARI "to become better servants; to be peace-makers instead of peace-talkers." Sponsoring organizations range from the Catholic Missionary Society of Saint Francis Xavier, the Karen Baptist Convention of Myanmar, and the African Independent Pentecostal Church, to the Muslim Council of Tanzania, the Risho Kosei Kai (a Japanese Buddhist sect), and others.

To support its training program, ARI depends on donations from groups and individuals in Japan as well as from abroad; it also takes on bank loans. Both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in Japan give financial support. Overseas churches (mostly in North America and Western Europe) as well as the Christian Conference of Asia offer scholarships and other funds. For several years, 70 percent of ARI’s funding came from outside sources, mostly from the United States. But, by 1988, 60 percent of the Institute’s expenses were being borne by Japanese sources. In fact, donations from Japan could cover virtually all of the Institute’s expenses, Takami says. But he wants to maintain 20 percent of the funding from outside of Japan to retain ARI’s international character. ARI is, however, under constant financial pressure. "We live on a hand-to-mouth basis," Takami says. A number of people have formed the ARI Support Group, which coordinates fund-raising activities for the Institute.

Most of the participants in ARI’s training course are on scholarship. "It’s a shame if young people can’t study because of lack of money," Takami says.

Takami himself describes ARI as a "multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, interfaith community." Of the last, he explains, "We welcome men and women of other faiths to our training program, for we believe the love of God is for all—Jesus Christ was born, suffered, died, and has risen for all people. Through the years our participants have included not only a wide range of Protestants (from Anglicans to Quakers) and Roman Catholic priests and lay sisters, but also Buddhists. We have the joyful challenge of daily encounter with men and women of other faiths, finding unity in the common motivation to serve the poor and hungry."

By 1996, the Institute had about eight hundred graduates from forty-five countries around the world. In that year, ARI took in thirty-five students, only five of them Japanese. Takami limited the number of participants in the course to make "fuller participation possible for each person." He cast his net so widely that the Institute’s graduates are spread across the entire developing world. ARI also strives for an equal balance of male and female participants in its program.

There is no age limit for people admitted to ARI, but the minimum acceptable age is twenty and applicants this young must show definite leadership qualities. Above all, it seeks dedicated people who pledge to return to their villages after completing the course. Takami takes great pride in the fact that eight out of every ten of the Institute’s graduates have returned to their countries after their training to help in village development as rural extension workers, teachers, pastors, and church and social workers. Only a handful have been unable to apply their training in their own communities, especially those in war-torn countries of Asia and Africa where some ARI graduates have had to abandon their communities because of security concerns.

Takami says the program at ARI was initially conceived to be mainly for Southeast and South Asians and for Africans, although there were always a few participants from Japan as well. As
Japanese interest in the program grew, he began including more Japanese participants on a regular basis. Takami says many Japanese who travel abroad are initially unaware that they make up only a small part of the world. Through ARI, they are learning about other cultures. ARI’s faculty is also multinational, though more than half are Japanese. Apart from the participants, the ARI community is made up of about fifteen staff members and ten part-time workers, several volunteers, and also various family members. Takami’s wife, Shinko Furuya Takami, who is a teacher and housewife, helps in the Institute by giving Japanese language lessons. The couple has three children: Shinn studied environmental ethics; Masato is an organic farmer; and Kaori, their only daughter, studied arts and crafts in the United States.

ARI describes itself as an institution "for nurturing and training rural leaders." Its stated purpose is "to nurture and train in the love of Jesus Christ rural community leaders, both men and women, to facilitate the self-development of Third World people at the grassroots level in order to achieve the building of a just and peaceful society in which each can live to the fullest potential, free to work together, sharing resources and abilities with neighbors for their common good."

The Institute’s training program takes place once a year for nine months, from April to December. It does not resemble training in a traditional school setting but, instead, occurs "in the setting of a Community of people, living, working and learning together. The program is WORK-oriented toward food production, the ultimate goal being leadership development." People interested only in a high degree of technical training in a certain area are advised against coming to ARI because, as the Institute’s literature declares, its "training is much broader and more generalized." The Institute does not confer a degree, but it awards those who successfully complete the course a Certificate in Rural Leadership Training.

The teaching of agriculture is also not ARI’s main goal, especially since the soil and climate of Japan are very different from those of the tropical homelands of most participants. Rather, its deeper purpose is to give the students an experience in communal living that can shape their vision and leadership skills. Instead of presuming that there are correct approaches to each problem, ARI emphasizes principles of consensus building and leadership through service, ideals that can be transplanted anywhere. Students learn to foster group decisions through a process that elicits full participation and emphasizes the art of listening. In doing so, they develop creative and flexible work attitudes and learn from one another. The content of the course changes yearly in response to the needs and experience of the current class; the staff and the participants plan it together.

Activities at ARI remain low-tech, relying mainly on ordinary human skills and strength. Takami has done this on purpose: by simulating as much as possible the simplicity or even the dearth of equipment and facilities in its course participants’ villages, ARI makes it easy for its participants to slip back into the lives they left behind, enriched by the skills they have learned instead of being alienated by the need for modern tools.

ARI’s program focuses on community leadership because Takami believes communities need well-trained and dedicated leaders who can help them improve the quality of their lives. He also believes that outside influences have made Asians and Africans more individualistic, so there is need to revive their sense of community. ARI graduates are expected to pass on to their communities what they learned at ARI, particularly leadership skills and appropriate technologies.

If there is a "great equalizer" at ARI, that would be farmwork, says Takami. He explains:
"Though we do have classes and library work, most of the time is spent in the fields. They [the course participants] never expected to get their hands dirty."

Sr. Alicia Gibanga, an Augustinian nun from the Philippines who was a course participant at the Institute, was surprised by the three to five hours of chores at ARI each day. But she adjusted. "I always choose the heavy chores," she says, "because I want to know what the poor people of my country have to undergo. If I know their hardships, I can speak to the people from experience."

ARI is food-centered and strives to be self-supporting in basic foodstuffs. It aims for a simple lifestyle where everyone shares the essentials of life and strives to prevent wastage. It is labor intensive, emphasizing "learning by doing." And it is community-oriented, blending all aspects of life and work, theory and practice, in a full schedule of "hard work, long days and simple living." Everyone contributes according to one’s abilities, initiative, flexibility, receptivity, sense of responsibility and self-discipline.

Takami says that, at ARI, participants each day go through the difficult process of making collective decisions—through consensus, not compromise. "Each person—man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, strong or weak—has an equal right and responsibility to participate," he declares. "We know ‘people’s participation in human development’ is an indispensable key to realizing justice and peace. But this is easy to say and difficult to practice. Each of us must learn to be a good listener—especially to the poor and weak, the voiceless. At the same time, each person needs to become an articulate but not necessarily an eloquent speaker. Eventually each learns to be a trustworthy spokesperson of his or her own community, in word and deed."

Takami adds that one of the most critical, painful, and difficult experiences each person goes through at ARI is image change. With such a variety of cultural backgrounds and values, the self-images of participants differ greatly, along with their images of what constitutes a desirable community. "These images are important," Takami says, because "they set the limits of what each participant is going to be. They determine what kind of world he or she will try to build."

He explains: "Many come to ARI with their own images of a training institute. They expect it to be a conventional ‘academic institution’ rather than a community of learning through a process of personal encounter. These participants suppose that a set of normally accepted subjects in agriculture and social sciences will be taught by experts to students. Instead, what happens is that people have to go through the pain of creating for themselves a community of learning. In the process, each person has to find a new image—quite different from the one they came with."

Takami goes on: "Pastors, priests, school principals and others find it very difficult to engage in physical labour—soiling or ‘dirtying’ their hands and knees. They think it is below their dignity to take a shovel or a broom to scrape up chicken or pig dung. Leaders are not supposed to do that; manual labor is below their self-image. Every year we hear some participants murmur: 'We did not come to ARI to work in the mud. We came to Japan to study!' People become indignant when their expectations are not met. We need to listen to these indignant murmurs. In this painful process of having our own conventional images shattered, we find ourselves emerging with new images—of ourselves, of leadership, life and culture. All this happens as we work together to produce and share food and other resources."

Takami himself suggested the ARI motto: "That We May Live Together," which also serves as the guideline and goal of the Institute. The phrase is found in several places in Saint Paul's

Takami explains, "It shows us the goal towards which we should move as a community and as individuals, as long as we live; at the same time, it gives us practical guidelines for our daily life. Living together means sharing life together. Not only sharing our daily life with our friends and neighbors of the present generation but also with people of future generations. Not only human beings but also the entire creation now and in the future. Sharing life together in a holistic way requires a simple life and simple style of life. Sharing life means to have less. It means to live a non-competitive, non-possessive life. One has to decide whether, (as Erich Fromm puts it), ‘to have or to be.’" This, Takami says, is a major decision for each person and community, a difficult one for today’s urban culture.

On ARI’s tenth year, Takami decided to amplify the motto to make it easier to practice in daily life. It now reads: "Let us participate in creating the world in which Life and Food, which sustains Life, have central value: That We May Live Together."

Again he explains: "We decided, with growing sensibility, to be a community of people sharing life, participating in the holistic working of nature. We would, daily, practice organic ways of food producing in order to sustain and be responsible for all forms of life. . . . As the urbanizing force infiltrates the rural communities surrounding ARI, their lifestyle becomes urbanized. Each farm household specializes in the food item they produce for money. Rice farmers cultivate only rice. One village grows only lettuce. Chicken farmers raise only chickens. No farm household meets its own food needs by its own farm, so farm wives go to supermarkets in the town for their daily food. No farm household is now sufficient in food. Sometimes one whole island raises sugarcane only. No one can live on sugar alone. . . . More and more nations are becoming less self-sufficient in food. Even food-exporting countries are importing increasing amounts of food from outside."

When Takami traveled abroad, it troubled him to see so much land being used to grow tea, coffee, and tobacco for export, rather than to grow food to feed the people who are hungry. "I witnessed first-hand what damage international capital can cause by encouraging non-essential food items to be grown for cash income. The result is tremendous damage to the life of the people, as well as to the land and its surroundings."

ARI takes exactly the opposite approach: it maintains a high degree of self-sufficiency in food. Around 85 percent of the food that its participants and staff eat is produced on the Institute’s own farm. It shares small amounts of surplus farm products with its neighbors to supplement its income, but it does not produce and sell in large quantities so as to become an economic threat to its neighbors. "We have just enough materials for composting," Takami says. "Not even a spoonful of garbage goes out of our campus, and our soil condition keeps improving." At ARI, waste from pigs and other livestock are recycled as compost. When ARI participants and staff make charcoal, they extract acid from the smoke and then use this as a pesticide and fertilizer.

With all this in mind, Takami and his ARI colleagues put together a curriculum or training agenda that has three interrelated parts. In the beginning, these parts consisted of the following: (1) the production and sharing of food and other necessities; (2) the enrichment of life; and (3) the role of the Church in human development.

Every year, this agenda was critiqued by all members of the ARI community to ensure its relevance and its responsiveness to the concrete needs of participants. By 1994, ARI described its three main foci this way: (1) producing and sharing food and other resources—emphasizing
organic farming, self-sufficiency, and need-based distribution; (2) community formation and sustainable development—emphasizing skills for consensus-based planning, income generation, and sustainable resource use, and for the critical analysis of differing political, social, cultural, and political situations; and (3) challenging personal growth—emphasizing identity formation, goal setting, public speaking, religious tolerance and empathy, and an appreciation for physical labor.

Except for half a day on Saturdays and Sundays, every day at ARI is a work-and-study day. The day officially starts at 6:30 a.m. with exercise, followed by morning chores. These chores include farming, caring for livestock, maintaining the grounds and buildings, cleaning and repairing tools and equipment, and preparing meals.

Breakfast follows from 7:45 to 8:45, after which there is the morning gathering that lasts for half an hour. At this gathering, every member of the community takes a turn as chairperson. He or she may use music, scripture, or an appropriate prayer, or share a personal belief or experience to open the meeting. Visitors, newcomers, and work campers also introduce themselves at this time, and time is given for reports and brief announcements.

Much of the learning at ARI takes place in shared community life, but participants also learn in the classroom from resident staff members and special lecturers. The topics include leadership in rural communities, food production for self-reliance, contemporary issues, spirituality of rural life, development and social change, basic computer skills, environmental issues, and "survival" Japanese.

Routine classroom hours at ARI are from 9:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Lunch and a break follow from 12:20 to 1:30 p.m., after which afternoon activities take place until 4:25 p.m. Depending on the day of the week, these may consist of committee meetings, participant seminars, special lectures, farmwork, community work, or independent study. During participant seminars, attendees are invited to talk about their backgrounds, their work in their home countries, the issues and circumstances faced by their communities, and their plans. This not only enables them to share their personal experience and knowledge, it also helps them learn to make effective presentations.

From 4:45 to 5:45 p.m., there are chores again and then free time before dinner at 6:30. Thereafter, participants have time for self-study or committee work. Takami says participant committees practically run ARI's daily life. There are five of them: the curriculum committee, the food-life committee, the dorm-life committee, the credit union and co-op committee, and the all-important community life committee.

Every other week, a general session is held for reflection and planning; here the participants share their concerns about classes, food production, and other aspects of ARI's community life. The meeting is led by participants themselves and involves the entire community. Once or twice a month, all participants and staff members do voluntary community work, including reforestation, rice transplanting and harvesting, corn harvesting, and campus beautification. This exercise is meant to symbolize the oneness of the human race despite differences in age, sex, race, and culture.

ARI also arranges visits to local farms, homes, schools, craft centers, churches, international friendship groups, cooperatives, service clubs, agricultural industries, farmers' associations, and farm museums. Through these exposures, the participants observe the Japanese community system and leadership patterns and meet Japanese people directly. They also visit historical
and cultural sites and see places of natural beauty.

At ARI, participants also learn about the function and operations of credit unions and cooperatives by managing the ARI credit union and the ARI co-op, together with ARI staff. Begun in 1975, the co-op belongs to the people it serves and caters to community needs by selling everything from postage stamps and postcards to gloves, rubber boots, and sickles.

An important part of the ARI experience is the individual project. In consultation with a staff adviser, each participant is required to design and execute such a project for activation in their home community. Projects may be undertaken either on campus or in the wider community. Past projects have dealt with organic farming, reforestation, bee-keeping, fruit growing, dairy craft, food processing, social welfare, water purification, Bible school, well-making, handicrafts, marketing cooperatives, and machinery repair.

ARI’s campus extends into an adjacent rural area where many successful farmers share their skills with the Institute’s participants. Using both simple and advanced techniques, these farmers grow rice, vegetables, flowers, and trees, and breed cows, pigs, chickens, honeybees, silkworms, and fish. Their farms are small and tilled by family units whose patterns of life and work are similar to those of rural people in the third world.

Where food is concerned, ARI strives to be self-sufficient because, as Takami points out, self-sufficiency in food production is a prerequisite for national independence and self-determination in developing countries. The Institute cultivates one hectare of its own land and supplements this with two hectares of rented farmland. ARI participants grow rice and other grains, soybeans, forage crops, and vegetables. They also raise chickens, cows, pigs, ducks and geese, goats, sheep, and rabbits.

At ARI, the preparation and sharing of food takes central place. "How meals are prepared and shared is indicative of the quality of life," an ARI brochure states. "Meals at ARI are understood as an act of meeting our physical needs and as an act of celebration as members of the human family and the Household of God." This celebration is enacted daily in the Koinonia House, or Fellowship Hall, which houses the cafeteria, chapel, and auditorium. As Takami himself would say, "By sharing food we share life. The function of food is to connect nature and man, and man with man."

At ARI, pesticides, chemicals, and inorganic fertilizers are banned because they are harmful and costly. So, too, are synthetic sweeteners, artificial coloring, and preservatives in food processing. ARI’s processed food products include dried mushrooms, milk butter, soybean sprouts, tomato puree and tomato catsup, wheat flour, pickled cucumbers, strawberry jam, bread, tofu, ham, and bacon. Fresh produce includes mushrooms, scallions, beets, carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, and rhubarb.

Takami believes women play an especially important role not only in food production and preparation but also in its preservation and fair distribution as well as in waste prevention. The latter is of special concern to Takami. ARI estimates that Asians waste as much as 30 percent of their harvest or available foodstuff because of inadequate knowledge, skills, and facilities.

After their nine months of residence "on campus," ARI participants move outside Japan for a monthlong exposure to tropical farming in either the Philippines or Thailand. In Bacolod, Philippines, the Institute operates its own farm laboratory; in Thailand, it collaborates with the United Church of Christ. The idea for such a kind of exposure came up after many participants
and staff members observed that there was a wide gap between the agricultural training at ARI's campus in Japan and the application of that training in the tropical countries of most of the participants. The Philippine farm was set up in 1995 when the Augustinian Sisters of Our Lady of Consolation offered the Institute use of their land in Bacolod. (Eight members of this religious order are graduates of ARI and one of them is on ARI's staff.)

Apart from its annual training course, ARI has a program that enables its graduates to return to Japan for a refresher course. This gives new participants the opportunity to learn how past participants have used their training. Graduates' ties with ARI are also kept fresh through graduate study tours and newsletters.

Takami retired as director of ARI in 1994, but he continues to serve as its director emeritus, spending much of his time raising funds. He remains its moving spirit and he still lectures on leadership styles (invoking the "servant leader" model of Jesus) and on contemporary issues such as the environment, human rights, government, children’s rights, child abuse, and food security. He also lectures at the Japan Lutheran College and serves as a member of the executive committee of the Global Environmental Commission of Japan's health, labor, and welfare ministry.

Takami is held in high esteem by people who have worked with him. Sister Aida, a nun from La Consolacion College in the Philippines and who is on the ARI staff, regards Takami as a true servant-leader. "He leads others through example and hard work," she says. Kubo Yusuke, a Japanese veterinarian who has been teaching on and off at ARI for twelve years, describes Takami as a very humble man who is very pleasant to work with. Most people who come to ARI do not expect to see the institute director doing manual work. Once, a new ARI participant who had been at the Institute for several weeks complained that he had never met the director. He was astonished to learn that the man who had helped him clean manure from the chicken house that very morning was Takami himself.

In recognition of Takami’s outstanding work, Doane College conferred on him an honorary degree in 1974. Ten years later, Japan's Ministry of Education gave him the Award for Outstanding Contribution to Social Education. Takami does not claim credit for the Institute’s success, however, and says: "I never started ARI; it is God’s ministry."

Takami would like to see ARI replicated in other countries and, in fact, similar training programs have been launched in the Philippines, India, and in Africa.

Aside from ARI, Takami has been active in promoting the efforts of Japan’s other NGOs. As chairperson of the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC), he has worked to raise the effectiveness and status of NGOs in Japan through the exchange of information and know-how. Twenty-two NGOs in the Tokyo area are affiliated with JANIC. Altogether, there are around two hundred NGOs in Japan involved in some form of overseas assistance. But these NGOs, which began their activities abroad toward the late 1950s, lack both experience and funds. Takami believes the reason the NGO movement in Japan is so much less developed than in other parts of Asia is that Japan has always been government-centered. One reason the NGO movement has begun to attract more attention is that Japan’s formal Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has come under criticism; despite being meticulously designed and executed, he says, "our ODA was not directly (and immediately) helping the people most in need of help," particularly in cases where such assistance is from government to government.

Takami believes that NGOs, in contrast, "are in a position to meet the real needs of the people,
however inconsequential they may appear from some perspectives.” He says, "We can get
good results in stamping out malaria and making improvements in such areas as maternal
health and education." The best technologies are those that fit local conditions. "We pretty much
leave the high-tech things to ODA," he says.

Now in retirement, Takami remains an optimist, this despite the many serious problems that the
world and its people face. "We are facing crisis after crisis in our time, most of which are due to
our own doing," he says. "A definition of crisis, one of a few dictionary definitions I like, means a
turning point for better or worse. We are standing at a turning point. Our common task is to turn
ourselves, our fate, for the better by simply cherishing life and food in our daily living and
keeping close touch with the rhythm of nature."

Vicente G. Tirol

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