Center for Minority Issues and Mission Sets Sail

On April 8th, the Center for Minority Issues and Mission in Japan (CMIM) celebrated its inauguration with an inaugural worship service, held on the 6th floor of the Japan Christian Center at Nishi-Waseda, Tokyo. The service was attended by approximately 50 people, mostly representing churches, denominations and Christian organizations that have supported the Center’s long preparation process.

The seed that gave birth to CMIM was sown in 2014, at a time when hate speech was targeting minority communities across Japan. The Korean Christian Church in Japan (KCCJ), with much encouragement and support from the World Council of Churches, as well as from churches and Christian organizations within Japan and abroad, began preparations for the 3rd International Conference on Minority Issues and Mission. The conference, which took place at the Tokyo Korean YMCA in November 2015, gathered 120 participants (plus another 40 youth!) from across Japan and from several countries including Canada, China, Germany, India, Korea, South Africa, Taiwan and the USA, as well as representatives of WCC, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia. Affirming the need for renewed Christian collaboration in the fight against racism, the seed was nurtured for another one and half years by the hands and prayers of a dedicated, ecumenical group of supporters to produce this fruit.

The inauguration service featured a litany of prayers by people who are belittled and ignored in Croatia, Vietnam, Argentina, India, Australia and other places around the world, read by several youths. This was followed by a message based on Mark 4:35-41, “Let us cross to the opposite shore,” from Rev. KIM Sungjae, Chair of the CMIM Preparation Committee. Rap artist and KCCJ Kawasaki Church member KWAK Jeonghoon, who led a creative workshop at the 2015 conference youth program, responded to Rev. Kim’s message with a collage of images and heart-felt lyrics. Rev. DÔKE Norikazu, Acting General Secretary of the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ), concluded with words of encouragement upon CMIM’s embarkation. The service was followed by a time of relaxed fellowship over a delicious meal, which was lovingly prepared by members the KCCJ Tokyo Chuo Church.

The afternoon also marked the first meeting of the CMIM Board of Counselors, which is comprised of representatives appointed by various Japanese churches and organizations. The Board elected the following officers: Chair - Rev. KIM Sungjae (KCCJ); Vice-Chair - Rev. YOSHITAKA Kano (Japan Baptist Convention); Financial Officer - Rev. DÔKE Norikazu (UCCJ); Secretary - Rev. AMINAKA Shôko (NCCJ). From here forward, KIM Shinya, a minister of the KCCJ, and David McIntosh of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, will develop and carry out CMIM’s daily activities together, as its co-directors.

Amid old and new challenges facing minority communities, the Center for Minority Issues and Mission takes its first steps toward that place where the Lord awaits, led by our Lord, like a branch that sprouts from the stump of Jesse. We ask for your prayers and support as we stand against the violence of antiforeignism and seek to become a place of comfort, encounter, cooperation and hope for people of every minority community. Please help us to spread the tent of inclusion!
The following is an abridged text of the sermon message shared at the inaugural worship service for the Center for Minority Issues and Mission in Japan, April 8, 2017.

“Let us cross over to the opposite shore”  
Mark 4:35-41

Rev. Dr. KIM Sungjae  
Moderator, Korean Christian Church in Japan  
Chair, CMIM Board of Directors

If we are to choose a few words to describe the currents flowing through our present world, these might include Terror, Conflict, War, or Refugee explosion, or perhaps BREXIT, or Trump phenomenon. The last two, especially, reflect a great wave of reaction against growing economic disparities and contradictions made plain by the unrelenting advance of globalization. Much of this can be described as an eruption of a populism that seeks for itself the energy of heightened, exclusionist nationalism, as well as the indignation of masses who fear growing economic disparity. Here in Japan, after the public release in 1992 of documents detailing the former Japanese Army’s involvement in the military “public women” system, as well as the Kōno Statement of 1993 and the Murayama Statement of 1995, we have witnessed the rise of a new kind of ultra-nationalism, qualitatively different from the conservatism and nationalism seen in the past. The hate groups against Koreans emerged from here.

Against a background of fears about loss of vested interests, anger at fading hope for a future in which one can live like a person and an unnatural and deliberate regression toward “traditional” culture and morals, the Zaitokukai 1 was born toward the end of 2006, the same year in which the 1st Abe administration was born. And in 2012, the year in which the Abe returned to power with his 2nd administration, and in which then Minister of Education and Science Shimomura announced the exclusion of Chōsen Gakkō4 from the national tuition support program for high school students, this hate group started to openly perform street demonstrations in major cities across Japan.

I believe, at this tempestuous time in history, the Lord called together the churches of Japan and the world at the 3rd International Conference on Minority Issues and Mission. And now, after 1 year and 3 months of preparatory meetings, the Lord beckons us from the port of this worship service, “Let us cross over to the opposite shore.” Of all the times and places, why do we set sail now, in such stormy conditions? We hear other voices, too. “Shouldn’t we take shelter, wait for the storm to pass?” But we cannot close our ears to the Lord’s call, “Let us cross over to the opposite shore.”

Why? First, the “Church” (Greek “ecclesia” = “ec”[out] + “kaleo”[call] = those who are called out) is not just called to gather, but is called out by the Lord and sent into the world so we may be used for God’s purpose. At a time when animosity, self-righteousness and exclusionism are spreading in the hearts of people, we are sent by God into the world so we may be the salt of the earth and light of the world.

Second, we know that xenophobia, racism and exclusionism, which are so destructive toward inclusive society where different people can live in harmony, are rooted in insecurity and fear. As Christians we are confident that the only power that can overcome deep insecurity and fear is the Gospel of reconciliation and peace, given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ of the Cross and the Resurrection, not the voice and force of “anti-” this or that, or another nationalism.

Third, as indicated in “The Kingdom of heaven is like...” passage of Matthew Ch.25, without our knowing the Lord is already at the side of those who hunger and thirst, those who are imprisoned, travelers who seek shelter, and those who are threatened and hurt by hate and discrimination. Obscured in such places, God watches us Christians to see what our faith is made of, and reveals God-self to us with the words, “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” When “that day” comes, the returned Christ will recall the decision we took today, with whom, and for whom. (Portion omitted)

“Let us cross over to the opposite shore.” These words are the Lord’s challenge to us, to shake us from our temptation to say, “Let’s turn back,” or “Please don’t bother with us.”

“Let us cross over to the opposite shore.” This is the Gospel words that awaken in us the faith that says, “Lord, I am exhausted, at my limit, out of strength and weak, but I will follow you.”

“Let us cross over to the opposite shore.” This call to us contains not only the promise that the Lord will walk with those who follow and will continue to point the way forward. It also holds the power to awaken in Christians the heart of a church that lives in community with neighbors who are made small.

What is the storm that we face today? Is it financial concerns? Is it indifference? But the Lord who encourages and invites us, “Do not be afraid. Stay awake, and have faith,” is boarding our mission boat with us. Let us listen attentively to the Lord’s voice. Let us hear and obey the Lord’s calling, “Let us cross over to the opposite shore,” and set sail together, trusting in the plan of God who guided us to today’s opening of this Center.

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1 Refers to the statement made by Chief Cabinet Secretary KÔNO YÔhei, on August 4th, 1993, acknowledging that a government study found that the Japanese Imperial Army had forced women, known as “comfort women,” to work in military-run brothels during World War II.

2 Refers to the statement released by Prime Minister MURAYAMA Tomiichi, on August 15th, 1995, apologizing for the damage and suffering caused by Japan to its Asian neighbors during World War II. Official title of the statement is: On the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the War’s End.

3 Abbreviated Japanese name for the leading hate group, Citizens Group That Will Not Forgive Special Privileges for Koreans in Japan.

4 Ethnic Korean schools established after WWII by Korean’s own hands, whose ties with N.Korea deepened after the division of Korea.
Co-directors’ Message

As a white North American—i.e., “majority” as it gets—raised in the Korean Christian community in Japan—a rather “minority” place—it is with much joy, but also trepidation, that I pick up an oar as this “mission boat” CMIM sets sail into a stiff headwind. The wind and chopping waves will surely make the rowing heavy, and intersecting currents might make a straight bearing tricky, but I’m joined at the oars by a great crew of friends. And, above all else, we have Christ as our pilot! In faith that the Lord places among us, “minority” and “majority,” all that we need to patch, sew and weave together our “tent of inclusion,” I look forward to the challenges and joys ahead, and to the fellowship that God will provide at every step...or heave of the oar!

David McIntosh

In Matthew Chapter 16 Jesus speaks of how people “know” how to read weather by the “sign” of the sky’s color, but “do not know how to read the signs of the times.” We who live in modern society, one might say, “know” the “signs of the times” through a variety of analyses and predictions about politics, economics and society, delivered to us daily like weather forecasts. But the “signs of the times” to which Jesus referred were His death on the cross and resurrection, which no-one knew. In today’s world the “signs of the times” sometimes appear as the violence of intolerance and exclusion against what is different. CMIM sets sail under the motto, “Spread the Tent of Inclusivity,” seeks to walk forward knowing that the true “signs of the times” are the reconciliation and peace to come, prepared by our Lord.

Kim Shinya

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CMIM has been working with a lively group of young people—since several months before CMIM’s opening!—to plan a Minority Youth Forum, to be held in Osaka September 3-6. We hope to gather young people with a variety of backgrounds, who will learn together about the history, hardships and present challenges of minority communities. Participants will share their experiences and ideas through worship, presentations, field study, workshop and plenary discussion, to deepen mutual understanding and consider together what we are called to do, as people of faith, as members of our communities, and as citizens of the world.

During this Forum, we will pay visits to an area known as “Little Okinawa” in Taisho Ward, as well as the “Korea Town” neighborhood of Ikuno Ward, where the main venue Korean Christian Center is located. In Taisho Ward we will learn about the history of migration from Okinawa to Osaka and the community’s challenges of discrimination and identity. In Ikuno we will learn how the community was formed during Japan’s colonialist period and consider together the problem of hate speech. The Forum will also dedicate time to the study of the so-called Jinruikan Incident of 1903, and to try to understand how events of the past are linked to continuing prejudice today.

You can link to the program and pamphlet by accessing through this QR code. We look forward to welcoming participants from across Japan, and youth sent by our overseas partners!

* Jinruikan was a pavilion placed just outside the main entry gate to the Osaka Exposition of 1903, in which living persons representing a variety of ethnic groups were “displayed” for visitors. This caused much offence and controversy, and is referred to as the Jinruikan Incident.

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Youth Forum to take place in Osaka, September 3-6

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CMIM in Action! (April – May)

April 8
CMIM Opening Worship Service
1st meeting of the CMIM Board of Trustees

April 14
Rev. Dr. Dale Woods, Principal of Presbyterian College
(Montreal), and Rev. Dr. Glen Davis of Presbyterian Church
in Canada visit CMIM

April 21
Youth Forum Planning Committee meeting

April 25
McIntosh attends Annual Assembly of KCCJ Seinan District

May 13
Discrimination and the Church Committee

May 19
Kim attends Annual Assembly of KCCJ Kanto District

May 25-31
McIntosh, with Ms. CHOI Kan’ija (community center staff
and anti-hate-speech activist) and Ms. KIKUCHI Junko
(CMIM Steering Committee member, and Chair of the NCCJ
German-speaking Church Relations Committee), attend
Kirchentag in Germany and presents at the 5.27 forum
event (in Berlin), Minorities, Migrants, Comfort Women:
Marching with the marginalized in Korea and Japan, in
collaboration with partner Evangelical Mission in Solidarity

Become a Member and Support Us!

CMIM has four core activities:

a. Struggle Against Racism
b. Engagement in Youth Mission
c. Develop the Spirituality of Reconciliation and Peace
d. Communicate with Domestic and International Partners.

Various denominations and Christian organizations are
supporting us by sending talented people to serve on CMIM’s Board of Counselors, as well as
Steering Committee. We are hoping to make the
activities of this center truly ecumenical, through
broad dialogues and cooperation among Japanese
Christian community.

We have already receiving support not only from
Japan, but also from overseas. We invite and
request you to join us in our mission, by becoming
a member, by participating in our activities and by
helping CMIM to develop into an important hub in
the struggle against intolerance.

Individual membership: ¥3,000 or more
Institutional membership: ¥10,000 or more

Bank account:
Center for Minority Issues and Mission
Mizuho Bank Ltd. (Swift code: MHCBJPI7)
Takatanobaba Branch (Branch #064)
Regular Account #064-2382724

Japan Postal Bank Account: 00160-6-487-170
(Minority Mission)

Spread the tent of Inclusivity!

Youth participants present their original praise rap song at the 3rd International Conference on Minority Issues and Mission, held in 2015.

Surrounded by the words, Center for Minority Issues and Mission, is Jesus’ crown of thorns—symbol of our sins, and of Jesus’ standing and suffering with the shunned. Within the crown is Jesse’s stump, from which a new branch/leaf sprouts. God’s promise of new life, even out of deepest despair.