

**JAPAN MISSION TRIP**  
**September 10-15, 2011 Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture**

*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.  
 (Hosea 6:6)*

Island ECC sent our first short term mission team to Japan following the March 11th earthquake and tsunami that left thousands dead and homeless. We partnered with Grace City Church Tokyo in their efforts focused on Ishinomaki City (石巻市) to serve in a small town called Watanoha Koganehama (渡波黄金浜).

**Where we went**

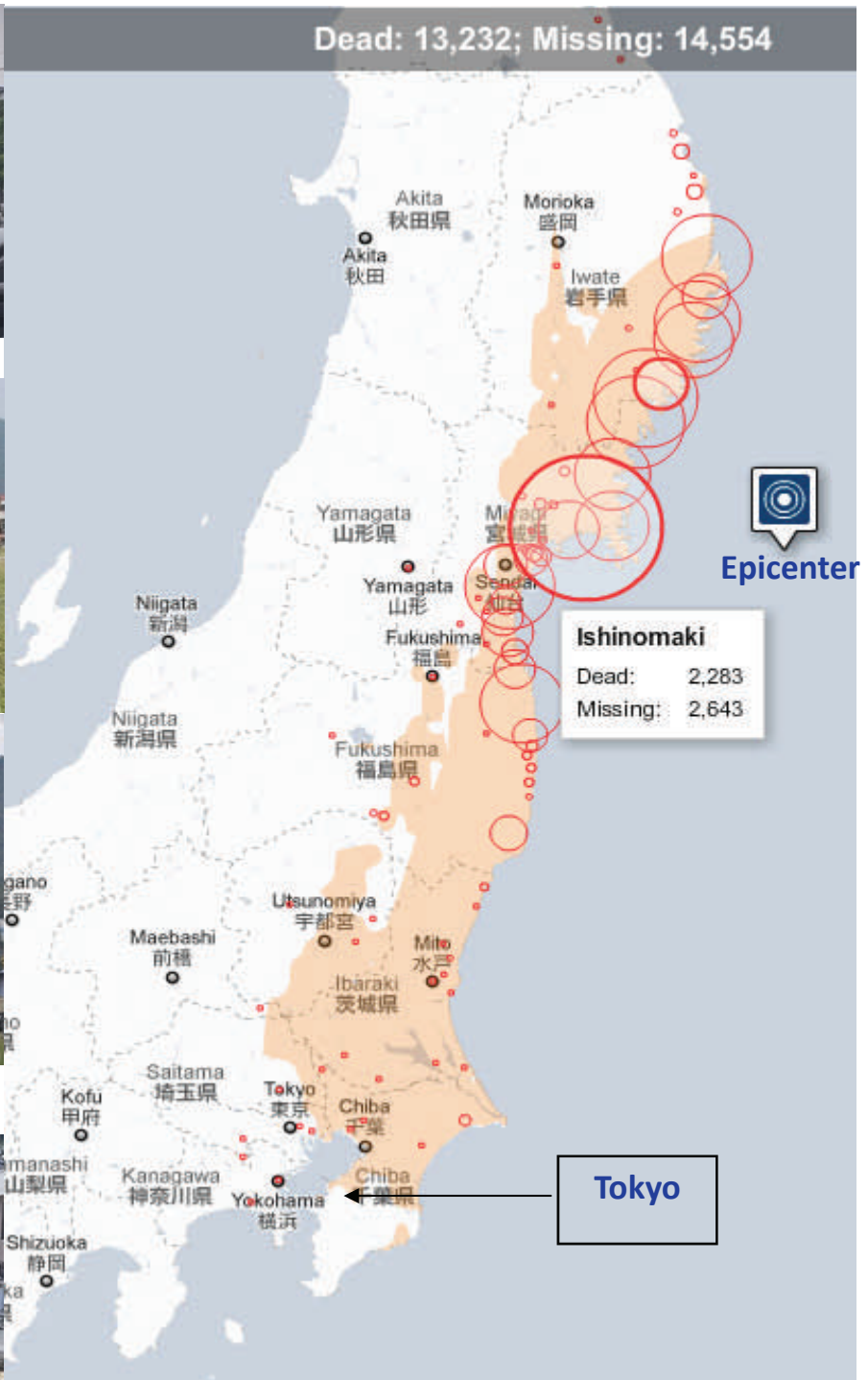
Even though the tsunami hit area is very large, Ishinomaki has been chosen as the base for many Christian organizations and groups. With a population of 160,000, the city was one of the hardest hit with a large death or missing toll of close to 4000 people. Almost 50% of the city was inundated by the tsunami, leaving many buildings and homes damaged or beyond repair. Where the team worked was in a small town where most homes were half wrecked by being flooded up to the first floor and nearly 180 people died in little town alone.



*Ishinomaki City ruins (above, below)*



*Onagawa town, overturned building (above)  
 Only skeletal frames remaining (below)*



*A map showing the area affected by the earthquake and tsunami, a span of more than 500km. Red circles show the magnitude of the number of people dead or missing in that area. Ishinomaki being one of the hardest hit.*

## Our Team

God blessed us with a team of 12 people where 4 were native Japanese speakers, and another 4 were intermediate Japanese speakers, which meant that most of our team were able to communicate with the locals. For most, this was their first mission trip and we were blessed with each other during the journey in serving and learning how God is showing His love in Ishinomaki.

## Trip Schedule

Rimpei & Akemi arrived in Ishinomaki on September 7 ahead of the Island ECC team. The rest of the team arrived on 9/11, the day that marked 6 months after the 3/11 earthquake & tsunami disaster; and one whole decade after the US 9/11 terror. Upon arrival of the team in Ishinomaki on Sunday morning (they left Narita on a bus at 5am!), we visited the Ishinomaki (Brethren) church and worshipped at their afternoon service. The service was very typical old-school style with hymnals, which was very different from the contemporary style that we were used to. It was a blessing to worship with the local believers, some of whom became Christians after the tsunami through relief efforts from the church.

We all checked in at two residential homes (boys & girls separately); we slept on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of homes that we were to work in; no electricity, no water, no working bathrooms. Since we had no bathrooms, we had to go to a local bath-house for our evening showers. We had a taste of what the tsunami survivors experienced for weeks & months. Yet, despite the inconvenience, this was a great improvement from the original plan which was to sleep in tents. We did manual labor during the day, and took part in the open café the local residents could drop in and chat over coffee. On the final day, September 14 we went out on a survey of ground zero areas of Onagawa City and Central Ishinomaki. It was heart breaking to see areas where there was literally nothing left standing.



*Girls' house (Yoshida residence). The girls slept on the floors of the 2 rooms in the upper floor.*

## Our Hosts

Island ECC partnered with Grace City Church Tokyo, a downtown Tokyo church that started a relief arm Grace City Relief since the disaster. On the ground we worked with Grace City Relief (GCR) local team and Help Tohoku, a group made up of various churches in Chiba, and Mission to the World (MTW). GCR and Help Tohoku provided our accommodation and logistics in Ishinomaki. Actual daily work was arranged through Samaritans Purse, a US based Christian relief organization.



*The Help Tohoku base where the weekly open café was held and is a place for meetings as well as team accommodation. 19 people stayed there on the last day, including our team*



*Some of the long term missionaries. We thank each one of them for being a living example of living by faith and using everything they have to witness for Jesus in this hard place.*



### Daily Work

All of us can say that we can add demolition to our resume after this trip. We worked on 3 homes to do preliminary work for house restoration. Tsunami waves entered homes and reached the ceiling of ground floor levels (we worked on homes that the tsunami did not reach 2<sup>nd</sup> floor heights). We knocked out walls, took our floors, pulled out nails and removed mud and debris from under the floor. Only when this is done can the house be handed over to professional carpenters for refurbishment. We are thankful that we were able to work with the home owners (a mum and daughter) on one of the homes. Samaritan's Purse aims to repair 300 homes before the winter.



*Team in action: Candice, Flo and Rimpei (above and below: knocking out walls and insulation), Angela and Koji (below left: cleaning debris and pulling nails)*



### Outreach Programs

As we arrived 6 months after the tsunami, what we learnt from the local staff who have been there since the beginning was that it is only now that people are beginning to start talking about their experience in the tsunami and grieve. Outreach has now started to take on a more emotional aspect and not just the physical aspect of relief work. We pray that as more people are willing to open up and relationships are being built, there will be more and more opportunities to share with them the love and hope of Jesus in this community. Rimpei and Akemi who arrived earlier were able to participate in a cookout outreach. The cookout every Saturday serves lunch to 150 local Koganehama residents. For the rest of the team, we took part in the café outreach. A renovated home operated by Help Tohoku turns into a café every Wednesday afternoon. Neighbors are welcomed into the house for coffee, tea, cookies and casual conversation with Christian volunteer workers. One of the local residents said during the café, "I have not laughed so hard since the tsunami." One of our team member Michelle sang Amazing Grace for them and one of the old ladies held her hand tightly until the time to leave. Koganehama town has never had a church before the tsunami. We pray that this is the beginning of one.



## **Joining Hands**

For many of the team members, Japan is still on our hearts. We have seen with our own eyes the extent of devastation and heard with our own ears the stories of those who have lost their homes and seen friends and family die. What we have seen and heard is only a small drop in the ocean. One of the team goals we had was to let the Japanese there know that they are not alone. What they need is not another person to tell them “Ganbarou” (がんばろう) or to press on. What they need is for others to come alongside them to help them return to normal life. God has graciously orchestrated things for us so that we joined hands with the other Christian organisations on the ground as well as other local and overseas teams and individuals to serve together and demonstrate God’s love. Together as a body of Christ we hope to show the people in Ishinomaki that there is hope and that there is a God who indeed loves us very much and has not abandoned them in their pain.

日本のために祈る♡



## **Pray for Japan**

As we return to HK, many of us are thinking when we may return again. Though we do not know the answer to that yet, we are praying that the relationships built will continue. We are also praying that through our sharing back to Island ECC, others may also be touched with the burden to pray for Japan and to go. Please continue to pray for this nation that has only 0.5% Christian. Pray for the missionaries (local and overseas) who are laboring day and night so that a light may be shone in that area. For Virginia, Isaac, Satoshi, Daniel, Odate san, Lorna, Spencer and all our hosts. Pray for the

strength to come from God and not from themselves and for opportunities to share as they serve. Pray for the local Japanese residents in Ishinomaki who are still living under fear even to return to their former homes to rebuild lives. Pray for them to find a peace that lasts which only comes from God. Pray especially for those we were able to meet and spend time with - Tomomi and her family, the Abe household, the pastor and members of Ishinomaki Brethren Church and those we met in the open house café and in Koganehama town. Please pray for Rimpei and Akemi as God opens doors for them to return to Japan to join in the church planting effort in Koganehama. Finally pray for our team as we share our experiences with our families, friends, colleagues and the church.

Many thanks to Pastors Makoto Fukuda & Seima Aoyagi, GCR local base team Isaac & Virginia, Help Tohoku hosts Odate san (Ohchan) & Satoshi san for all the ground arrangements, and Samaritan’s Purse for giving us work to do. Finally, we wish to thank you for your prayer and support. This entire trip was made possible by the many Christian groups intertwined for one purpose –the revelation of God’s love in Tohoku Japan.

