



M. Linda Jaramillo
Executive Minister

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703

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Rise Like Tsunamis

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There are many stories about the tragic chain of events occurring daily in Japan. Rather than interpret another's voice, I have received permission from Crystal Uchino to forward this very moving message from her. She wrote in the hopes that it would inspire people to move from a place of helplessness into a place of empowerment for the future.

An open letter addressing grief, hope, and some resources for engaging the healing process.

By Crystal Uchino from her home in the Southern Prefecture of Nagasaki, Japan

A somber dirge continues to play in the hearts of all of us here across Japan in the wake of this earth-shaking, tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis. This trifecta of disasters is truly beyond humbling; it is a living, grotesque and sobering nightmare that will likely haunt the world for much time to come. As the after-effects of both the earthquake and the tsunami continue to be revealed, so grows the depths of the despair and sadness over the magnitude of the situation. Watching events unfold over the news in real time delivers new quakes to test the resilience and endurance of our hearts, faith, the depths of our empathy, grief and determination to act.

The death toll has continued to climb daily as does the number of those, now homeless who are seeking shelter from nuclear fallout. Additionally, the conditions within the shelters are appearing more and more grim as a result of inadequate infrastructures to provide sufficient food, warmth and sanitation. There continue to be new explosions at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, and large after-shock tremors continue to rock this already shaken nation. All around me, the apocalyptic images we see coming off the news conjure memories of the damage reaped by the atomic bombs dropped here over sixty years ago, as the possibility for a new generation of Hibakusha (nuclear explosion-affected) emerges as a frightening reality

Today, it seems that Japan is once again poised as a great and humble teacher. The festering wound of this crisis underscores, once again, just how much the splitting of the atom remains one of the single most volatile global threats at a personal, community, state, and environmental level. Japan, despite past injuries of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and seemingly anti-nuclear principles (non-production, non-possession, and non-introduction of nuclear weapons) has become one of the leaders in nuclear development and production in the world. According to Green Action Japan, before the quake there were 53 nuclear power plants in operation in Japan. Fifty-three nuclear power plants in a small island country notoriously vulnerable to earthquakes and other natural disasters.

My heart and prayers are with the people of Fukushima and the Tohoku area, as it is they who are now shouldering this horrific burden of teaching so that the world may be reminded of just what a painful and costly responsibility we bear when we allow bad stuff to enter our communities.

Around the globe, everyday people are beginning to awaken to the reality of our fragility and vulnerability from the dangers of all forms of nuclear development. A short time has passed since the initial shaking, but as a world we have grown up in ways that we had never hoped to, and with our newly realized maturity we are challenged to look ourselves in the face, to grapple with this saddest of lessons, and answer the question of how we will begin to take responsibility for our part in allowing bad stuff to enter our communities, on both the local and global scale.

Crystal Uchino is a 2008 graduate of Northern Arizona University (Flagstaff, AZ) in Politics and International Affairs with a minor in Ethnic Studies. She was the recipient of the NAU Ethnic Studies' "Make a Difference" award in 2007. Crystal currently resides in Nagasaki, Japan where she is pursuing her Masters degree and teaching in an ESL program.

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