



Provincialate : 4A Chestnut Drive, Singapore 679330.

Tel: 67621910

website: www.chij-sisters.org

Japan — 1872

We wind back the clock to 3 August 1549, when St Francis Xavier, accompanied by an adventurous young Japanese man whom he had known in India, landed in Japan.

Amazingly, in the course of 27 short months he brought the gospel to thousands of Christians whom he called "the joy of his soul". He left Japan in obedience to St Ignatius, who wanted him to go to India. After his departure, the Church continued to grow until 1597 when mistrust and suspicion led to a terrible persecution of Christians and finally the closure of Japan to all foreigners. In 1858 this ban was partially lifted and permission given to inhabit the waterfront towns. Immediately, the ardent French Foreign Missionary priests availed of this openness and settled in Yokohama and Nagasaki. They were still not allowed into the interior, or to speak to the Japanese people. They waited patiently and prayed. In 1860 Father Girard, who was in charge of the mission, called to visit our sisters in Singapore on his way to and from France. He spoke of his great desire to welcome them to Japan when the night of persecution was over. Finally on March 17, 1865, a few Japanese Christians secretly informed one of the missionaries, Fr Petitjean, of the existence of many descendents of the first Christians who had kept their faith, with no church, priest or sacrament to support them. They numbered more than 25,000! Sadly, another wave of persecution broke out, which lasted several years before some religious freedom was finally granted and Fr Petitjean, now Apostolic Vicar to Japan, set about finding women religious who would come to Japan to undertake the work of education.

In Singapore, on the eve of Pentecost 1872, Mother Mathilde and her community were praying to the Holy Spirit. As they were about to go into church a letter arrived in unfamiliar handwriting. It was from Fr Petitjean. He was appealing for sisters to come and teach in Japan. Not only that, he wanted them to set out immediately! He requested a reply by telegram announcing that they were ready to sail on the next naval package boat!

Fortunately, it was also possible by 1872 to send a telegram to the superior general in Paris, and by eight o'clock the following morning to receive the return telegram from Mother de Fautoas giving her permission and her blessing for the departure to Japan! Ten days later five sisters set out on the



Provincialate : 4A Chestnut Drive, Singapore 679330.

Tel: 67621910

website: www.chij-sisters.org

Peiko. They were the four new missionaries to Japan: Sr Gregory Connolly, Sr Gelase Crespin, Sr Ferdinand Constantin and Sr Norbert Levesque, who was in charge of the group. Mother Mathilde Raclot accompanied them on the journey to help them settle in.

The voyage from Singapore to Hong Kong was uneventful, the weather good, and the sea calm, but when they transferred to a smaller boat, Le Volga, and were on the last stage of their journey, the little boat was tossed about in a terrible typhoon. It was advancing slowly towards the coast of China! No doubt the sisters felt that this was to be the end but finally the storm subsided and the boat sailed into Yokohama on June 28, 1872.

As we would expect, the first years in Japan were difficult. The sisters had no idea of the language. To begin with they had neither grammar book nor dictionary, until eventually Mother Mathilde managed to find textbooks in English and Japanese and their initiation into the language began. When the sisters entered Japan in 1872 the country was undergoing profound social changes and turning its eyes to the West. Many influential ladies of high society were happy to avail of the presence of the sisters to learn French or English, or to familiarise themselves with European culture. So began friendships that, in turn, enabled the sisters to study the language, gradually learn about the wonderful culture and customs of Japan, and to build trust.

However, a heavy cross marked the beginning of their mission. Sr Ferdinand Constantin, the youngest member of the community, became seriously ill and died on October 23, 1872, four months after her arrival in Japan. Mother Mathilde had to go to Singapore with Sr Gregory Connolly, who had also become seriously ill. They both returned to Japan in November 1873 accompanied by three more missionaries from France.

In due course, some Europeans and Americans who had settled in Japan got to know the sisters and confided their daughters to their care. It was a start and an international school was opened in Yokohama, followed by an orphanage for Japanese children. The sisters' dream was to have a school that would provide Japanese children with a Japanese education on persecution in Japan were withdrawn. In this new climate young Japanese girls began to come to the sisters for education. Mother Therese Hennecart pioneered this work. She devoted herself tirelessly over the



Provincialate : 4A Chestnut Drive, Singapore 679330.

Tel: 67621910

website: www.chij-sisters.org

years, setting up well-equipped primary and secondary schools with well-chosen Japanese teachers working side by side with the sisters. A novitiate opened in Japan in 1921 and the number of Japanese sisters gradually increased. Many stories of heroism could be told about the lives of our sisters in Japan, including the long night of the Second World War and the tragic disaster of the earthquake in 1923 that claimed the lives of 16 boarders (12 Japanese and four non-Japanese), as well as 10 sisters. Now, we have to leave the wonderful story of our Institute in Japan for a while and return to Singapore, where another big development was taking place. It led to one of the saddest but most heroic chapters of our history: the story of our beginnings in Thailand.

Japan

Journeying with a gentle student

Four years ago a Burmese lady introduced me to a young man. I'll call him B. He was then a 2nd year student of Senior High. He was smiling, and I had the impression that he was gentle and modest. This impression hasn't changed even after four years of knowing him and accompanying him as he copes with the challenges in his life.

According to his story, he was brought up in a Refugee Camp in West Thailand from very early in his childhood. He came to Japan with his parents and two sisters when he was 15. After having studied Japanese for half a year, he started his hard life of work during the day and school at night. During that period, he came to the Convent from Monday to Friday after work in order to study Japanese and English for about one and a half hours.



He likes sports and was Captain of the Volleyball Club at Senior High School. He also enjoys climbing mountains such as Mount Takao with his friends and sisters.

Being very eager to study, he wanted to go on to college but, unfortunately, in 2016 he failed to get in. During that year, he came to the Convent to study Maths and English, and several Sisters offered to help him with essay writing or preparing for an interview for the Entrance Examination.

In 2017, he successfully passed the test of UNHCR and that of Soka University. As it is a boarding school, he was due to be in the International Overseas Student House by the end of March this year. To be thrown into the middle of complete strangers may be a big challenge for him, but at the same time, it may enlarge his view and help him to mature.

He seems to be taking good care of some Burmese children and young people. Perhaps he is an admired big brother to them. He is a modest young man, it is true, but he tends to have a passive attitude to life since his days in the Camp. I'd like him to think for himself and be more assertive.

Beginning with Mr and Mrs Okada, he has many supporters in various fields: journalists, professors, graduate students, etc. By coming into contact with these people who are actually working in society, his future may become clearer. His dream is to work in the United Nations, or to work for refugees and the needy. His life from now on is full of unknown elements, but, I firmly believe the Lord, who has protected B until today, will surely take good care of him from now on.

Sr Laurent Tokushige IJS

Seven years after the Triple Meltdowns the Government and TEPCO are found liable for Fukushima evacuees



The banners of the winning side read:

Left banner: "The Government and TEPCO found liable for evacuees – for the 4th time" (3 cases concluded before this 'Tokyo trial'.)

Centre banner: "We won!"

Right banner: "The Court ruled that the Government and TEPCO are also liable for evacuees from outside designated evacuation zones."

Seven years have passed since the triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s (TEPCO) Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and massive Tsunami. We sadly see the slow progress of the reconstruction work. Recently, however, the evacuees have made considerable headway in the Courts.

Following the Triple Meltdowns and Tsunami of 2011, the Government created what was termed a 'designated evacuation zone' from which residents were *obliged* to move because of the high levels of contamination. These people have been receiving state compensation. However many people who lived outside this 'designated evacuation zone' felt that where they lived was also dangerously contaminated and was, therefore, not a fit place in which to raise their children. They chose to move from their area to safer areas – some to the Tokyo area. However, this decision meant that they were excluded from state compensation.

On 11 March 2013, two years after the disaster, seventy-eight of them – 'the Tokyo group', including school children, 17 households in all, filed a suit against the Government and TEPCO. The plaintiffs' support group tried to fill the gallery each time there was a hearing. This support group included Sisters from different congregations, including Infant Jesus Sisters. As part of this group, I attended the hearings right from the beginning of the trial. As a result, the Tokyo District Court has become a very familiar haunt.

On 16 March 2018, five years after the complaint was first presented, the court ruled that the Government and TEPCO were liable for those who moved from the 'designated evacuation zone' and those who fled from non-designated evacuation zones. When the judgment was read out by the Chief Justice, it was received in silence. I did not understand at first what was being said. It was only when three of the Counsel for the Plaintiffs suddenly appeared with banners raised (*see the photo*) that we realized we had won the suit. I thanked God that he had heard our prayers. The decision was also good news for other victims who have brought similar cases to the court – there are about 30 cases in all.



It is quite possible that both the Government and TEPCO will appeal the District Court decision to the Supreme Court. We will continue to support these evacuees – whatever happens.

Hideko Marumori IJS
hideko-ijjs73@marble.ocn.ne.jp

News in Brief from Japan

Yokohama: the first community in Japan is closed

Yokohama Community was officially closed in March 2017. The Sisters were sent to different communities in Tokyo, one to Galilee, Denenchōfu and two to Nicolas Barré House where they continue their apostolate.

The IJ presence in Japan began when Mother Mathilde and four other Sisters landed in Yokohama in 1872. They were the first Christian missionaries to arrive in Japan after the very long period, over 200 years, of the persecutions of Christians by the Tokugawa Shogunate. Persevering through many difficulties and challenges, they started to take care of orphans and children from poor families. Since then, a total of 139 Sisters from France, Italy, Ireland, England and Spain came to Japan and devoted their lives to bringing the Good News to the Japanese people.



A hundred and forty-five (145) years' IJ presence in Yokohama came to an end on 15 July 2017 with a thanksgiving Mass offered by Mgr Raphael Umemura, Bishop of Yokohama Diocese, at Sueyoshi-cho Church, remembered especially in connection with Mother Mathilde. IJ sisters from neighbouring communities, Yokohama Futaba teachers, graduates, and friends attended the Mass. Deo gratias!

Shizuoka: Sr. Stanislas Ibaragi - Oldest Sister in the Institute

Sr Stanislas Ibaragi, 101 years of age (102 on 4 November 2018), will celebrate her 75th Jubilee this year. When she celebrated her 100th birthday two years ago, she was awarded framed testimonials by the Prime Minister of Japan and the Governor of Shizuoka Prefecture. At first, she declined with thanks but finally acceded to the earnest request by a city official.

She keeps comparatively well for her age, having good eyesight and hearing. A parish priest visits the community to say Mass for the Sisters twice a week. Sr Stanislaus joins in the celebration in her wheelchair. Her smile is so sweet that people feel happy when they see her. Also, she has a sense of humour and tells jokes to her carers and makes them laugh.

She spends most of her time quietly in her room as she lives out her ministry of prayer. Congratulations in advance on your 75th Jubilee, dear Sr Stanislas!



*Her smile is so sweet
that people feel happy
when they see her*