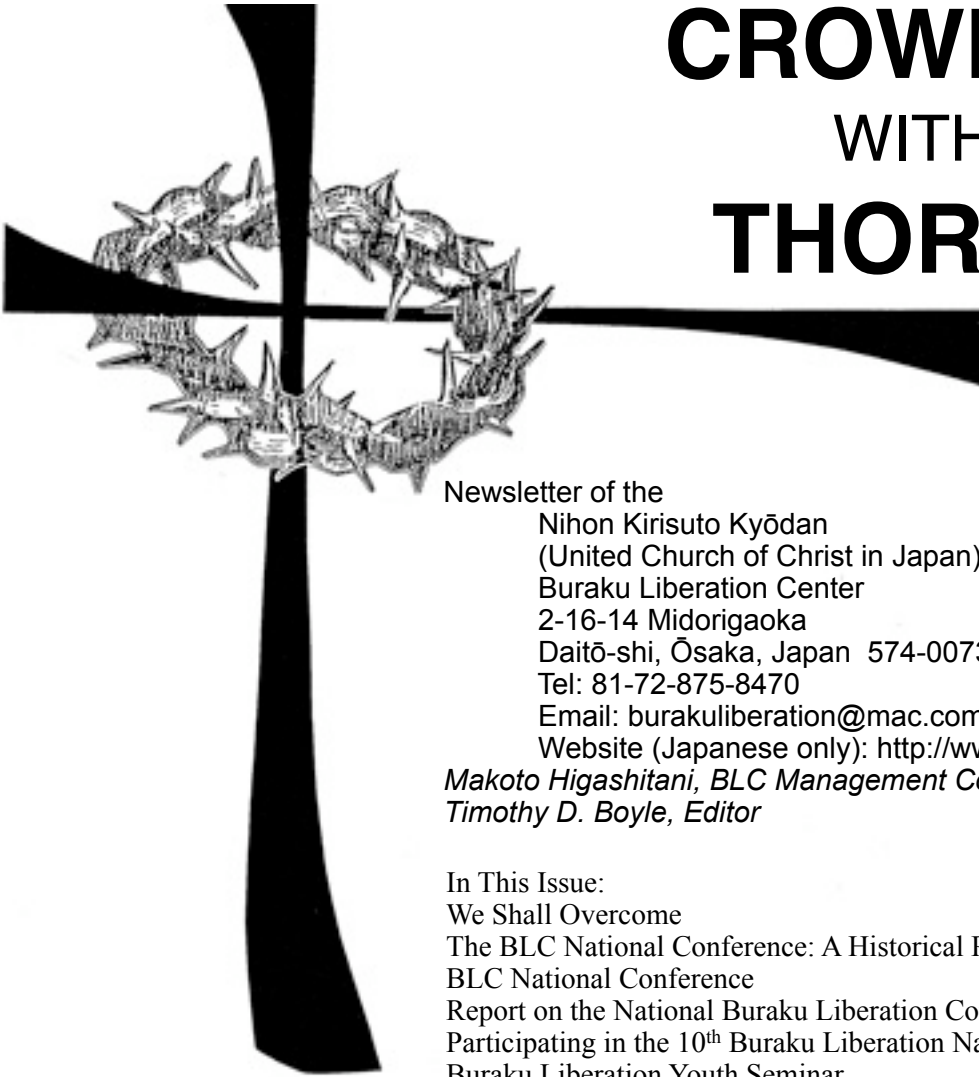




CROWNED WITH THORNS



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We Shall Overcome



In previous issues, we've reported extensively on the "Sayama Incident." While the Japanese court has yet to take action, we're hoping that continued pressure will finally move the court to grant the retrial and full disclosure of all relevant evidence. One thing that would certainly help is more pressure from outside of Japan. People of influence, such as national and even local politicians, writing letters to the Japanese court urging them to respect basic human rights and fairness could very well make the difference. If any of you have such contacts who would be willing to write such a letter, please encourage them to do so. In fact, such letters from anyone overseas would be helpful. The Human Rights Commission of the United Nations has sent advisories to the Japanese government to order the police to make all of the evidence they hold available to the defense lawyers, something they have refused to do so far. There may very well even be genetic material from the real culprit available for DNA testing, which would unequivocally prove Ishikawa's innocence, but even if not, there is plenty of other evidence to show that. Anyway, letters from abroad showing that Japan's reputation is being negatively affected by their not respecting basic human rights in this and other similar cases will likely have a significant impact. The following are the two addresses to which such letters can be sent:

Tokyo Koto Saibansho (Tokyo High Court)
 1-1-4 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan 100-0013

Tokyo Koto Kensatsucho (Tokyo Public Prosecutor's Office)
 1-1-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan 100-8904



The BLC National Conference: A Historical Perspective

By Terumi Igarashi

From its inception in 1987, the BLC National Conference was envisioned as a vehicle for educating people from all over Japan about the Buraku Liberation Movement. From the beginning, the plan was to hold such a conference every two years, and with one exception when it had to be cancelled, we have been successful in doing that. The 2008 conference was the 10th such conference, and so as we look back at the history of this important event, I would like to give an historical perspective.

The Kyōdan first began dealing with the Buraku Discrimination issue on an organizational level in 1975, when it established the Buraku Discrimination Task Force. It was this task force, then, that later developed into the present Buraku Liberation Center in 1981, with the purpose in mind of encouraging the Church at all levels to become engaged in bringing an end to buraku discrimination. This effort has been partially successful, as in the beginning, very few districts had any such involvement, but now 15 of the 17 districts of the Kyōdan have formal organizational structures working on this issue. Likewise, compared to 1975, many more local churches and individual Christians are active in this issue. Nevertheless, most local churches still have little consciousness of the issue, and so as it has been from the inception, changing this reality remains as an unfulfilled goal. How can we bring about a change in this lack of perception concerning the buraku discrimination issue within such churches? Bringing people of like mind together from all over Japan to discuss the problem of how to encourage local churches to take on the issue of buraku discrimination and to learn from each other's experience has been the rationale for holding these national conferences.

The first BLC National Conference in Feb. 1987 was attended by 67 persons, with representatives from districts, subdistricts and local churches sharing their strategies for dealing with buraku discrimination. Attendance at the second conference in Feb. 1989 increased to 102 persons, and as there were participants from Okinawa, it truly became a nation-wide event. We continued the theme of sharing with each other ways each of us involved ourselves in this issue on the local church level, the district and subdistrict level, as well as regionally and in other ways. Also, we added a presentation on the court ruling on the Sayama Incident and its ramifications.

At the third conference in Feb. 1991, we changed the format from 2 days to 3 days. 126 people participated in this event, which included as a new feature, a field trip to a discriminated-against buraku area. The fourth conference wasn't held until 3 years later, in Feb. 1994, when we held it outside of the Kansai area for the first time. The Kyūshū District hosted the conference in Fukuoka, with 140 people in attendance. By working with various districts to host the conference, our goal was

to further make this a national conference in more than name only. Shigeyuki Kumisaka of the Fukuoka branch of the Buraku Liberation League was guest speaker and gave a presentation entitled, "In the Footsteps of Jiichiro Matsumoto." (Ed. Note: Known as the "Father of Liberation," Matsumoto was a leading politician, serving in the parliament for some 30 years. He was one of the founders of the Suiheisha (Leveler's Association) and was the organizing chairperson of the Suiheisha's postwar successor, the Buraku Liberation League.)

While the first 4 conferences focused on bringing the buraku liberation movement into the local churches, the 5th conference in June 1996, held in Kyōto, had the theme of "Buraku Liberation as Christian Mission." Attended by 156 persons, the themes of the two main plenary sessions were on how the Bible informs the Buraku Liberation Movement and reports from the field as to what each locality is doing. As guest speaker, Fujihiko Nishijima, the secretary of the BLL's Kyōto branch, made a presentation on "The Buraku Liberation Movement in Kyōto."

Hiroshima was the site of the 6th conference in June, 1998, with 131 participants. The Nishi Chūgoku District hosted a welcoming party, and the theme of the conference refocused on the original theme of "Bringing the Buraku Liberation Movement into the Local Church." This time, however, the intent was to clarify what that means, with the theme title, "Buraku Liberation: My Liberation and the Church's Liberation."

The 7th conference was held in Nagoya, with 149 participating. The focus of the content this time was sharing by individuals, along with representatives of churches and seminaries, describing their involvement both personally and organizationally. We also had a special time of remembrance for missionary Robert Stieber, who tragically passed away at the age of 53 on Nov. 19, 1999.

Ōmiya Church, in the Kantō District, hosted the 8th conference in July 2002, with 190 in attendance. Kazuo Ishikawa himself was our guest speaker, with the main theme focusing on demands for a retrial of the "Sayama Incident." Being located near the site of the "Sayama Incident," we included a field trip to the site so that people could see for themselves the inconsistencies in his forced confession. In addition to continuing sharing of how participants have been involved in the issue, we also resolved to press for making the "Kyōdan Buraku Liberation Policy" that was initiated in 2000 more concrete. An unfortunate incident occurred, however, when one of the guides to the Sayama site made discriminatory statements against women as well as statements concerning the Sayama Incident that could be misconstrued, thus introducing a new issue into how best to conduct such field trips.

The 9th conference was held in Kanagawa in June 2004, with 138 participants. The theme centered around how to deal with the changed situation in society now



that the special provisions the national government had granted to deal with buraku discrimination were brought to a close in 2002. (These special measures were instituted in 1969 initially for a 10-year period of affirmative action and infrastructure improvement, and then due to slow progress, extended additional years, until being ended after 33 years.) Since the ending of these measures could easily give the general society the impression that buraku discrimination no longer existed, we wanted to focus on how to best continue under these changed circumstances.

The 10th conference wasn't held as originally scheduled, but was delayed until this year. With 204 in

attendance, this was our largest conference so far. A joint planning committee made up of BLC staff and the host district, the Higashi Chūgoku District, put together a program that included another special appearance by Kazuo Ishikawa, field trips to 3 separate locations and 6 focus groups, all under a general theme of "Buraku Discrimination Within Myself: A Link to Liberation."

As we look forward to our next conference in 2 years, our desire is to continue the work of the Buraku Liberation Center towards the goal of the elimination of all discriminatory practices through solidarity with other groups working on related issues.

BLC National Conference

by Tim Boyle

The 2008 National Conference was held at the Okayama Church in the city of Okayama from June 9-11, with 204 people in attendance. In addition to featured speakers, including Kazuo Ishikawa, the man at the center of the "Sayama Incident" whose plight we have reported on several times in *Crowned With Thorns*, the participants divided in to three groups for an all-day "field work" session. Two articles below give



Kazuo Ishikawa speaking to conference

their author's perspectives on the conference as a whole, along with the two field trips they were in. As I participated in the third field trip, I'll briefly describe it plus give historical background information on the other two not found in the translated articles.

Shibuzome Uprising

The "Shibuzome Uprising" took place in 1856, when 53 buraku in the Okayama fiefdom banded together to resist the increased oppression they were facing due to additional demands and restrictions that had been placed on them. The strategy adopted by the local feudal leaders to

strengthen their hand during the turmoil that followed the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853 was to institute various measures to weaken any resistance to their rule. They particularly wanted to keep the farmers' dissatisfaction over increased taxation in check by instilling in them an increased sense of superiority over the burakumin. Thus, burakumin were ordered to wear only plain "shibuzome" or similar "aizome" clothing (tan or indigo dyed cloth) and to never carry an umbrella or wear wooden "geta" sandals. They also were required to take off their footwear and bow down before any farmer they met, thus making the farmers' lot seem less odious by comparison.

The actual uprising began after their petitions for an easing of the restrictions were rejected and they were forced under threat of torture to accept their lot. While one after another of the buraku reluctantly fixed their seal on the order, leaders of the revolt decided to change strategy and gather a force together to force their hand. They gathered an estimated 1500 men to confront the soldiers, and after 3 days of negotiations, their petition was finally accepted and the crowds dispersed. However, the leaders of this uprising were later arrested, with 12 being thrown into prison, where 6 of them died. The survivors were finally released, but their sacrifice had won their people a reprieve from the oppressive measures that had been added, and thus the "Shibuzome Uprising" became an inspiration for the Buraku Liberation Movement.

Mimasaka Riot

The "Mimasaka Riot" took place from May 26 - 29, 1873 in a rural area close to the city of Okayama. As mentioned in Jingo Inagaki's article, the pent-up frustrations of the local farmers were directed mainly at the buraku — particularly at those whose leaders had ignored demands for them to revert to displaying the attitudes that been



a part of their pre-emancipation situation. Some 30,000 people — roughly half of the area's population — were drawn into the riot, and 18 buraku persons were killed, with 314 homes burned or otherwise destroyed.

Hansen's Disease Sanatorium

The third group toured facilities located on the island of Nagashima, 38 km from Okayama, which were built by the Japanese government for the isolation of and care of victims of Hansen's disease, formerly known as leprosy. While in a beautiful setting on an Inland Sea island, the dual facilities of the Oku Kōmyōen and Nagashima Aiseien sanatoriums were built to house victims of this only weakly communicable disease, who, because of fear and misinformation, were permanently ripped away from their families and communities.

What makes the situation in Japan so difficult to fathom is that in spite of effective treatment being available from the 1940's that made such isolation totally unnecessary, it was not until 1996 that the law on which this quarantine was based was finally repealed. But even though these victims were finally technically allowed to leave, for the most part, they had no place to go. As persons disabled by disfigurement, they could not easily fit back into society, and their former communities had long since changed beyond recognition, as far as they were concerned.

The Japanese government website lists a total of 13 such sanatoriums around the country, with the latest figures for the number of residents being



Participants view model of Nagashima facilities

4565 on May 1, 2000, with an average age of 73.6 years. Needless to say, these numbers are rapidly declining as residents die, and so the issue of what to do with these facilities and how to best care for the remaining residents is a difficult problem, one for which no official plan has been announced.

The kind of discrimination these people have faced is really based on the same misperception that is the basis for buraku discrimination — namely that of “defilement” and rejection of persons who are viewed as being “different.” Even if people understand with their rational minds that association with these people won't “defile” them, many still end up rejecting them for one reason or another. Thus, there is a close affinity to buraku and other forms of discrimination.

Report on the National Buraku Liberation Conference

[The following is a translation of the feature article in the July 25, 2008 edition of the Kyōdan Journal “Kaze” (Wind) by Rev. Reiichi Tada.]

<http://www5e.biglobe.ne.jp/~kaze-ed/>

The Tenth National Buraku Liberation Conference was held from June 9 – 11, 2008 at the Okayama Church. It had been 4 years since the previous National Conference, and this time the preparations were done differently than in previous conferences, as BLC staff formed a joint planning committee with representatives of the host district, the Higashi Chūgoku District. The schedule was packed with thought-provoking talks and seminars that will surely stimulate further discussion and action.

The conference began with greetings from the planning committee chairperson, Minoru Uno, the district moderator, Tatsuo Miyazaki, and the BLC management committee chair, Makoto Higashitani. Together with opening greetings, there was also a report on the reasons behind the postponing of this

conference (from its original date in 2006) due to the issues that were raised then concerning how the BLC was relating to other (non-buraku) discrimination issues and the groups working on those issues. As a result of the discussion generated by this inquiry, the BLC launched out in new efforts to strengthen its solidarity with all anti-discrimination efforts.

During the opening worship service and again in one of the topical discussion groups, Rev. Masayuki Niihori, assistant pastor of the Okayama Church, summarized the 130-year history of the Okayama Church, particularly as it relates to discriminated-against buraku. Even prior to the establishment of the Okayama Church, missionaries were doing evangelism in the buraku, and so when the church was organized, 3 of the



founding members were from the buraku. This was just 20 years after the historic Shibuzome Uprising, and these buraku Christians were from that very same buraku village where the uprising began. Borrowing from the words of the theme of the conference, I wonder if these people didn't see in the gospel message preached by the missionaries "A Link to Freedom."

Unfortunately, however, soon after that, a problem arose within the church over the communion service. [Ed. Note: Due to the ingrained nature of prejudice against burakumin, some "high caste" Japanese converts refused to take communion together with buraku Christians, thus demeaning the very gospel message they were trusting for their own salvation. The missionaries resolved the dispute at least on the surface, but similar feelings of prejudice have continued in Japanese churches and to a certain extent remain even today.] While this incident is often focused on, the Okayama Church's involvement in the buraku communities continued for many years after that. However, early in the 20th Century, when "mass evangelism" came into vogue, this direct involvement in the buraku began to diminish. Niihori's analysis of the dynamics involved suggests that this loss of contact with the buraku community was due both to the dramatic numerical growth of the church at that time as the focus of evangelism changed, and also to the trend that was apparent then towards an inward-looking faith.

Against this backdrop, I really felt that there was deep meaning in having this National Buraku Liberation Conference at the Okayama Church. Kazuo Ishikawa was the featured guest speaking under a banner declaring the National Buraku Liberation Conference and beside the BLC flag, and so with approximately 200 people in attendance during these 3 days, we were declaring anew our commitment to buraku liberation.

Several lay people gave their testimonies, and they and the presenters put forth their best efforts. I was impressed with all and learned much from this experience. I was inspired to look within my own heart according to the conference theme "Feelings of Buraku Prejudice Found in My Own Heart." Likewise, Shō Fukazawa's well-received Bible Study, reports on the activities (related to buraku liberation) in each district and the various worship times each made a lasting

impression on me.

As I listened to Kazuo Ishikawa's speech, I thought about how after all of these years he still has to appeal for his exoneration, and realized again how paltry my own efforts have been. I wanted to take away with me from that conference a renewed commitment to bring to reality as soon as possible the day of his full exoneration from these obviously trumped-up charges.

Rev. Kazuhiro Tanimoto, who gave the keynote speech, was his usual inspiring self, as he communicated his heart-felt desire to overcome discrimination and eliminate it from society. His enthusiasm and dedication was a great encouragement to us all.

During the field trip I went on, the explanation of the Shibuzome Uprising given by Yūki Kusunoki made a deep impression on me. Last year, I was able to go on a similar field trip to the site of the "Asagi Hansode Uprising" in Oita, and so I really wanted to go on this field trip to compare the two. [Ed. note: "Asagi Hansode" literally means "light yellow, short-sleeved (clothing)" and refers to a similar incident some 50 years earlier where an oppressive dress code was forced on burakumin in that area for the purpose of clearly distinguishing them as outcastes. Their organized resistance won a reprieve from this added insult.]

The conference ended with a plenary session where participants freely shared their thoughts and opinions on how the BLC should move forward and was followed by the closing worship service. The entire program was one that fostered renewed friendships and fellowship. One thing, however, that I was disappointed with is that none of the Kyōdan executive leadership were present. I certainly hope that I can see at least some of them at the next conference.



Plenary Session in Okayama Church



Participating in the 10th Buraku Liberation National Conference: Changing From One Who Discriminates Against to One Who Liberates — The Value of Encounters

[The following is a translation of an article in the October 8, 2008 edition of the BLC publication "Zenkoku Tsūshin" ("National Communication") by Rev. Jingo Inagaki, pastor of Karuizawa Oiwake Church]

The "National Conference" was to be held at the Okayama Church of the Higashi Chūgoku District. As I held the announcement, I felt compelled to participate, since the Higashi Chūgoku District was where I first served in the pastorate, and it was where I first encountered the issue of buraku discrimination. That was just about the same time when the Kyōdan's "Task Force on the Buraku Discrimination Issue" was established in 1975. While that effort was certainly an attempt by the Kyōdan to publicize the issue, it was really my encounter with the Rev. Sanji Higashioka in Kurashiki that began my involvement. It was a really shocking experience for me to hear about his experiences of discrimination, particularly those within the Church.

Even so, however, for more than 10 years after that, I wasn't particularly involved in the issue, probably because my awareness of the issue was merely a shallow, intellectual one. I first felt personally involved with this issue in 1989, when I was the pastor of the Ōtsu Church in the Kyōto District. I was cajoled into being a member of the "Task Force on the Buraku Discrimination Issue," and strangely enough, it was by the same Rev. Higashioka. Within this context of dealing with the issue in the Kyōto District, what really spurred me into action were my encounters with people from areas that were considered "buraku." Among these encounters were those that took place at the Kyōto District annual "Summer Seminar," where I interacted not only with fellow task force members, but also with youth and adults from these discriminated-against buraku areas. It was at this time that I came to realize that more than anything else, if you want to really understand something, you need to have such direct encounters.

At the National Conference, the field trip that I chose to participate in was the one to the site of the "Mimasaka Riot." Even though I had been in the Higashi Chūgoku District for 11 years, I had never even heard of this incident. The "Mimasaka Riot" took place during the period of tremendous societal change surrounding the Meiji Restoration. Farmers in the area were very dissatisfied with their lot and took out their anger against the new Meiji government by fomenting an uprising. However, the brunt of their rioting was directed against those in a weak position, namely the local "buraku." Houses were set fire and people were killed in the mob action. It has only been in recent times, however, that a concerted effort has been

made to document what actually happened and why.

What really left a lasting impression on me, however, was my "encounter" with the people who were leading the field trip. One was a man in his 80's who was from a discriminated-against buraku, while the man who did most of the talking was another man in his 80's who just happened to be a direct descendant of farmers who had participated in the riot. While this event had taken place more than 50 years prior to his birth, what really surprised me was that he said that when he learned of this "history of shame" caused by his own people, he knew that he couldn't just brush it aside as ancient history but that it was something he must address head on. In that, he recognized that he himself was a discriminator, and so he was brave enough to get to know the descendants of those who had been and still were being oppressed and to work together with them to abolish discrimination. This is what I had been lacking, and in this encounter, I saw anew the footsteps of our Lord Jesus that he desires me to follow in.

Another "encounter" I want to uplift is that with Kazuo Ishikawa, the defendant in the discriminatory "Sayama Incident," which dates back to 1963. Mr. Ishikawa was with us for the entire conference and shared with us his compelling story. I first learned of buraku discrimination in 1964, when I was a 3rd-year college student, through being exposed to this "Sayama Incident." Nevertheless, at that time, it was simply an academic exercise in jurisprudence, and it wasn't until 1996, when I personally met Ishikawa san while I was pastoring the Midorigaoka Church in the Kanagawa District, that this changed for me. It became not simply an objective issue of a discriminatory court case, but also a personal issue, as I identified with the "moaning of his soul." I think it must have been his being able to overcome the incredibly harsh storms he was buffeted by during his imprisonment, for in spite of all he's been through, there is a gentle and patient presence about him that exudes peace and gratitude. It even shows in the grace he shows towards those who discriminate against him. Again, it is "encounter" that is the decisive factor. Through all of this, I have come to truly believe that it is only when the "Sayama Trial" is reopened and Ishikawa san is completely exonerated that Japan will truly engage the issue of human rights in its society.



Buraku Liberation Youth Seminar

By Masayuki Niihori, Assistant Pastor of Okayama Church

The 11th annual Buraku Liberation Youth Seminar was held from August 5-8 at the Izumi Church in Ōsaka. A total of 74 persons participated for at least part of the period, with participants ranging from Hokkaidō to Kyūshū, and even including a delegation from the US who spent a day with us.



Skit presented by group visiting from Hollywood Presbyterian Church

This year's theme was "Have you eaten yet? If not, come on over to our place!" (written in the local dialect). As the title suggests, we focused on preparing food and eating together. The plan was thus to create an atmosphere in which we would do more than just listen to a lecture or go on a field trip. We would gather around the dinner table to learn about the history of buraku discrimination and its present reality while focusing on the role food played in these. Likewise, we wanted to connect with the "table of Jesus," who invited the oppressed and discriminated-against people of his day into his fellowship. Jesus often ate together with the outcasts of his society, thus showing us the way.

In line with this theme, we included dishes that people would eat in the discriminated-against local buraku, such as "saiboshi" (dried horse meat), "aburakasu" (dried cow gut that's been deep-fried), and "fuku tempura" (other internal



organs of cows that are deep-fried in batter like tempura). As one of the participants was originally from Brazil, she shared with us a dish called "Feijoada," which was "cooked up" by Brazilian slaves, using black beans, pigs ears, feet and tongue, etc. These were all "soul food" dishes, each born out of a history of poverty, discrimination and oppression and passed on to the descendants of those people. Participants listened to an explanation of the background of each dish and how such food came to be eaten. Thus, we literally "tasted" history, and learned through this experience about the history of discrimination in a way that went beyond book learning. [Ed. note: While I wouldn't want to have a regular menu of these foods, they were actually much more palatable than they might otherwise sound.]

Other parts of the program included an introduction to the issue of buraku discrimination geared towards those new to the issue, an update on the Sayama Incident, and a field trip to a discriminated-against buraku. The highlight of the program, however, was our annual "Liberation Cup," which is a talent show where participants share a wide variety of "liberating" music and skits. In an atmosphere of both seriousness and laughter, the 4 days sped by. Participants brought with them to the Izumi Church several guitars, a



cello, an "ichigo ichie" (a new kind of guitar-like instrument), a "sanshin" (a 3-stringed Okinawan instrument similar to a shamisen) and a ukulele. Thus, together with serious chats late into the night, one could hear a variety of music being shared during break times.

One thing I really appreciate about the Youth Seminar is that it is more than just an exercise of acquiring intellectual "knowledge." It is also a place where we encounter each other as real individuals and through this grow and mature. I am really thankful for having had this opportunity and meeting many wonderful people.



Crowned With Thorns Editorial Committee

As this is the third CWT issue since its revival almost a year ago, we wanted to introduce the editorial committee. BLC staff members Tim Boyle and Akira Kobayashi, together with BLC Management Committee Chairperson Makoto Higashitani, have been introduced in previous issues, along with their pictures. Following are brief introductions to the other 3 members:

Rev. Dr. Tsunehisa Iwahashi is pastor of the Minami Ōsaka Church and has been an active member of the Buraku Liberation Center Activities Committee since 1996. He went by the nickname "Hashi" while studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York.



Rev. Mayumi Homma spend 17 years in the US, where her physicist husband worked, and upon returning to Japan, she entered Kwansei University to get her masters degree in theology. She is presently teaching at Seikyō Gakuen in both the junior and senior high schools, teaching on various aspects of the Bible, including "What is our purpose in life?" She is both a minister and a counselor, focusing on grief counseling.

Rev. Ken Oguri is pastor of the Kōbe Seiai Church and is also an adjunct professor at Kwansei Gakuin University in Nishinomiya. From 2001 to 2006, he served as a Kyōdan missionary in Germany, pastoring churches in Rheinland and Koeln-Bonn ("Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland" and "Japanische Ev. Gemeinde Koeln-Bonn"). He also serves as a member of the Kyōdan Hymnal Committee.



A Note From Germany

CWT was pleased to receive a note from former missionary Andreas Hoffmann-Richter, who is now pastoring a church in Ulm, Germany. Here is part of what he said:

After 8 years in Japan I was send to Germany by the Kyōtō district of the UCCJ to engage in the German churches' solidarity with the Sinti and Roma in Germany. After being back to Germany for the first five years, I got the chance to travel around the country in order to report on the UCCJ's struggle for Buraku Liberation, Dalit and Sinti/Roma issues.

This job was cut off by reason of the shrinking church budget, and so for the last 4 years I have been working at a local church congregation in the city of Ulm. Thus, the time left for the solidarity struggle with the

"German Sinti and Roma League, Baden-Wuerttemberg Section" has decreased.

Now I am looking for ways to reorganize my job in order to get more time again for this important issue. That means I am trying to get the church administration's acknowledgement on my focusing on this subject, for instance to travel around to public schools together with Sinti resource persons (instead of having my own 8 hours per week with the same pupils on all kinds of religious subjects).

In addition to focusing on our main mission of working towards the elimination of buraku discrimination, the Buraku Liberation Center also endeavors to be in solidarity with similar anti-discrimination ministries around the world, including the Sinti/Roma discrimination issues in Europe. We pray that God will open up the way for Andreas to be able to devote more of his time and energy to this important ministry.

We Need Your Support

Like the church in Germany, the church in Japan is facing a similar situation of tightening budgets, and so the BLC is likewise feeling the squeeze. We ask for your prayer support, that God will give us the wisdom to make the best use of the resources we have, as well as increasing those resources. As always, contributions from sources both inside and outside of Japan are appreciated. We now have a means for cashing US dollar checks without incurring banking fees, and so even small contributions are helpful.