

Disaster recovery help still needed in Japan

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By John Hall, Texas Baptist Communications

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DALLAS—Japan received relief in the wake of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, but many residents affected by the disasters still need to recover.



Residents of Japan set up heart lights as a street memorial in honor of people who lost their lives to the 2011 tsunami.

The rubble has been cleared, rebuilding has begun and people have temporary shelter, but they also have other needs, missionary Michael Towery said.

"We came to realize (during the past year) we can't neglect the broken hearts that needed to be mended as well," he said.

said Towery. **First Baptist Church in Arlington** commissioned him and his wife, Yu, to serve in Japan through **Kinexus**, a missions network supported by Texas Baptist churches.

Some people affected by the tsunami and earthquake still live in small temporary housing. They are coping, but it still isn't their home, Towery said. Fishermen have lost their jobs and cannot afford to support their families.

"Many of them are still hurting, depressed," Yu Towery said. "Because of that, they are hurting physically."

The missionaries regularly deliver food to people in need and are building relationships with those who are struggling. Baptist General Convention of Texas disaster recovery has scheduled a June 19-26 trip to help them with those tasks. Through interpreters, Texas Baptists will visit with people, get to know their stories and be able to offer support and encouragement.

"These people want to share what's in their heart—what happened to them, what happened to their jobs," Yu Towery said.

The BGCT is making available \$500 travel grants to help volunteers defray costs for the trip to Japan, said Marla Bearden, disaster recovery specialist with the BGCT Executive Board staff.

"Our presence helps those affected by the disaster to let them know that they are not forgotten," Bearden



Many Japanese people displaced by the earthquake and tsunami last year still live in temporary housing. (PHOTOS/Chris Liebrum/BGCT)



Yu and Michael Towery, accompanied by their son Luke, prepare to distribute fresh fruits and vegetables to people in temporary housing areas in northern Japan earlier this year.

said. "The Japanese are excited to meet new people. They enjoy sitting down with people, spending time, telling their story about former jobs and lives. Many of these people have lost every material possession they had. They lost their jobs and loved ones. They need an ear to listen."

For some of the people trip participants meet, Texas Baptists truly will serve as the presence of Christ for someone who knows nothing about Christianity.

"A lot of the people we have reached out to in the last year didn't know about Christianity," Towery said. "They had no contact with Christians. In some cases, they had no word for 'Christian.' They would ask, 'Are you Christ?'"

For more information about the trip, call (888) 244-9400, email Marla.Bearden@texasbaptists.org or visit www.texasbaptists.org/disaster.



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