Listening to the Heart:
Among the People in the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster Area

Rev. Taio Kaneta (Tsūdai-ji Zen Temple, Chief Priest)

The Time Comes

I have here a photograph, taken from a hotel in Shizugawa, Minamisanriku town, on March 1st, 2011. The sun is setting on the beautiful ocean of the ria coast. It is a fertile sea. The marine products of this bay have supported the lives of the people in Kurihara from ancient times. Everyone believed without a doubt that time would continue to pass quietly and the warm spring would come.

On March 11th, 2011, at 2:46pm, a large earthquake occurs. The great shaking makes waves and continues. Magnitude 9.0. The tsunami alarm begins to sound. One can intuitively feel that the casualties would be in the ten thousands, no, hundred thousands. Shortly after, utilities are cut off. From the radio, there is news that "three hundred bodies have drifted ashore on the Arahama Coast." The intuition became a reality and the body begins to shake.

The Reality at the Crematorium.

The bodies are carried from the coast to the crematorium. With the consent of the city office, volunteers begin chanting sutras. The first body is a fifth grade girl in elementary school. Immediately, another body arrives. It is the body of a fifth grade classmate from the same elementary school. The two small coffins are laid side by side and the sutra chants commence. The chanting voice quavers. The newspaper photographer's hands are shaking and can't press the shutter. "We will properly perform memorial services. Your duty is to let the world know about this reality. Press the shutter." The volunteers at the crematorium continue for about a month. These were days when everyone had to face his or her duty.

The 49th Day Memorial Pilgrimage: Losing Sight of God and Buddha.

The 49th day memorial pilgrimage. It is ten kilometers from Tokura, Minamisanriku town to Shizugawa. The Japanese Self Defense Forces are desperately looking for bodies. Photographs depicting more tranquil days are scattered around on the ground as the eleven pastors and priests walk through the smell of sludge and death. Facing the ocean, they chant sutras and sing hymns. All their creeds, doctrines and religious vocabularies crumble. Where in the destruction and suffering can we find the words of God or Buddha? Looking for the words of God and Buddha, we start walking again. A mountain cherry tree is blooming as if nothing had happened. "The power to cause a tsunami. The power to make a mountain cherry tree bloom." These words begin to circle in my heart. On the next day, the robes are thrown aside and disaster relief begins.

If Doctors treat "Life," Priests treat the "Heart"'

We serve udon noodles at the disaster shelters. It was there that I had a destined encounter. At this shelter, I see a person in charge desperately urging the "Doctors Without Borders" not to leave. The lives that were saved from the tsunami were being entrusted to doctors. If so, what were we religious practitioners supposed to do?

On the night of March 11th, a cold snow fell on the disaster area, as if delivering the final blow. When the snow cleared, the sky was filled with stars. Without lights and car exhaust, the stars were spread across the clear sky beyond anything I had ever experienced. You could say the universe was enveloping me. The universe was enveloping up "life and death, the emotions of joy, anger, pathos, and humor" of the disaster area. I am reminded of the final scene in Kenji Miyazawa's story, "The Bear of Nametoko Mountain." Kenji looks on the conditions of "Life and Death" from the far side of the universe. This is the perspective that lies at the core of our "active listening activities."

Make a space where people can relax in the mist of the rubble! The work of the itinerant active listening café "Café de Monk" began.

The beginning of the itinerant active listening café "Café de Monk"

We placed a message board in the café.

> "Café de Monk" is a café run by priests.
> Monk refers to a priest in English.
> We believe that it will take a long time for the quietness of your daily lives to return.
> Won't you take a moment to relax while sharing a "monku" [文句 complaint]?
> As we priests listen to your "monku" [文句 complaint] we will "monku" [悶苦 suffer in anguish] with you.

There are many types of cakes, coffee and cold drinks. Beautiful flowers, incense. The jazz music of Thelonius Monk plays in the background. The dissonant and loose tempo of Monk's music accurately expresses the disaster victim's hearts. In the midst of the rubble, a "relaxing space" where humor overflows is born. When suffering, humor is important. Active listening is a very delicate activity. Diligently gathering information, we spread our activities like an inchworm. Some days nobody came. But there was meaning in "being there."

Slowly people begin to gather. The relaxing space is filled with "tales of suffering." A young male in his twenties tells of running away from the tsunami in his car. He cannot forget the desperate faces of the drivers seeking help as the tsunami overtook the cars behind him. He lost his job in the disaster. An elderly lady lay crying on the muddy tatami mats with the ashes of her son in front of her. A tale of a fatherless child in the disaster shelter who faces the wall at night and cries. A letter addressed to a father who died while attending an elementary school graduation ceremony. The suffering of a woman who remains holed up in her temporary housing. The regret of a daughter who was unable to help her mother. The painful cries of a young mother whose child was snatched from her arms during the tsunami.

Active Listening Makes You Face Yourself

The strength you expend on others will come back to you with the same strength. Active listening is work that transcends the borders of "self and other." On the scene, you question your beliefs, and your beliefs are deepened. Eventually, the assembly halls in temporary housing settlements becomes your "Zen hall" and "place of prayer." Using all your sensitivities, melting together you spin tales for the future. "Don't think. Feel!! Creation and Act!!"

The Performers of Café de Monk

At Café de Monk, there are performers who will pull out the many thoughts that cling to the recesses of the heart. The Jizo [Kṣitigarbha bodhisattva images] are one of them. We made Jizo images the size of our palms, and quietly line them up next to the assembly hall with the attached message: "We offer these to those who lost somebody dear in the tsunami." People stop by for a while in front of their kind smiles. Eventually, they start telling the sad story of the person they lost. Pressing their palms together, they speak earnestly to the deceased. Their tear streaked faces turn to smiles, and they can now walk forward a little further.

The Spiritual Phenomena that Occur in Disaster Areas

A woman came who was possessed by the spirit of one who died in the tsunami. The suffering of the departed is told through her mouth. It is a conversation with the dead. Taking her religious background into consideration, we conducted religious rituals to send the dead spirit to its proper place. We counted 25 people like this in half a year.

The existence of ghosts or souls is not a problem. The role of religious practitioners who face scenes of suffering is to carefully listen to the meaning these events have for each person, and to provide the appropriate care.

The Endeavors of Rinshō-shūkyōshi [臨床宗教師Interfaith Chaplains]

Café de Monk works closely with the "Kokoro-no Sodan Shitsu, or The Room of Care for the Heart" office based at Tohoku University and pursues activities from an interfaith and intersectarian perspective. The central figure in this was medical doctor Takeshi Okabe. Dr. Okabe was diagnosed with cancer before the earthquake and did not have long to live. Right until the very end he participated in the Café, and inspired by the sight of religious practitioners who were cooperating and desperately trying to support the disaster area, hoped to train religious practitioners to work in the various scenes of suffering found in Japanese society. This hope became a reality in 2012 when the Department of Practical Religious Studies was opened at Tohoku University. In addition to research and teaching students, an "Interfaith Chaplain Training Program" was also established.

Interfaith chaplains are religious practitioners who take into consideration Japan's spiritual climate, religious foundations, and societal structure to work from a position that stands above conversion activities and seeking profit for religious organizations. With consideration for the ethical and public nature of their work, they serve as a societal resource-- entering the public spaces of medicine, welfare facilities, and disaster areas. This work is spreading to universities and medical settings around Japan and is becoming a post disaster societal movement.

Significance of Interfaith Chaplains (Rinsho-shukyo-shi)

Rev. Yozo TANIYAMA, PhD
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"Rinsho-shukyo-shi" refers to a Japanese-style interfaith chaplain. He/she is a religious practitioner who provides spiritual and religious care, with an understanding of Japanese culture, open to different value systems, but not aiming for proselytization. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, the activity of the care of the heart by religious practitioners attracted attention. The late Dr. Takeshi Okabe, who was a pioneer of home hospice, was enthusiastic in supporting this activity and coined this new word.

A model of Rinshu-shukyo-shi is chaplaincy in the West. This began when the army needed to have worship and funeral services in the battlefield. Then it spread to various other fields. In the United States, after the army, hospital chaplaincy comes to mind.

However, it is difficult to import chaplaincy into Japan, because it assumes a specialist with a Christian background. Japanese Christians have attempted to implement it since the 1960s, but it has hardly spread. We must consider Japan's unique cultural and religious environment, and the contemporary society that features "separation of religion and state."

1. Expectation for Religious Practitioners

As Rev. Kaneta has just mentioned, the victims who participated in 'Cafe de Monk' said, "I want them to come more"; "I'm relieved when I talk with a priest"; and "it is interesting that a Buddhist priest and a Christian pastor work together". On the telephone counseling, they said, "I wanted a hint for living"; "I want [to talk with] a religious practitioner so I can hear something good."

Dr. Okabe left his wish, "a doctor can show a guidepost to live, but not to die, so I want a religious practitioner to show it for those who go down to the darkness." Some medical people say, "a religious practitioner has something unique and special"; or "I am relieved when a religious practitioner is in our ward". On the other hand, there is the fear that, "in regard to religion, it is difficult"; "I don't like to work with a person who isn't knowledgeable about medicine"; or "I'm afraid he might force religious ideas onto the patients."

Some investigations show expectations for religious practitioners. 98.8% of palliative care staff say that participation by religious practitioners are necessary (Kikui et al, 2006). And 79.3% say that "religious practitioners should participate in end-of-life care" (Ono et al, 2000).

Regarding the needs of the patient from the nurse's perspective, 94.9% think, "a patient has religious needs at the end of life", and 82.4% answer that when needs arise "a person of religion should provide care". (Ohmori et al, 1998).

In a survey for the bereaved who used a palliative care unit with a religious background, they valued "meeting a religious practitioner" (86%), "participating in worship" (82%), "religious music" (80%), "religious atmosphere" (78%) (multiple answers). (Okamoto et al, 2010),

On the question for general people, "does religion support you when you face death?", 39.8% answered "Yes" in 2008, but it rose to 54.8% in 2011 after the earthquake disaster. (Japan hospice Palliative Care Foundation)

2. Folk Belief

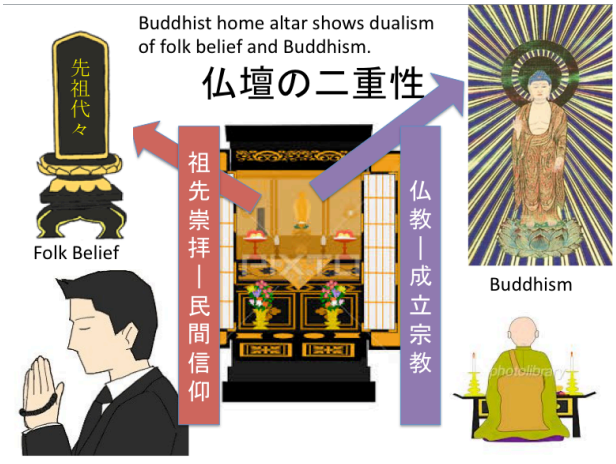
Religious studies covers "established religions" such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Shinto and new religions, as well as "folk belief" that is born by change, distortion and mixture of established religion.

It is Masaharu Anesaki who used the word "folk belief" for the first time in the world. He was the first professor of religious studies at the University of Tokyo. And Ichiro Hori is the father of resurrecting this interest. He was a professor at Tohoku University. The way of the funeral, burial, grave, ritual and prayer varies according to eras and areas. The religious manners for such events are not based on sacred books, even if a priest conducts them.

For example, there is a famous "Splinter Removing Kṣtigarbha Bodhisattva (*Toge-nuki Jizo*)" in a Soto-Zen temple in Sugamo, Tokyo. The formal name is "Life Prolongation Kṣtigarbha Bodhisattva (*En-mei Jizo*) ", based on a sacred book made in Japan. But the name of "Splinter Removing" cannot be found in any book. The following story seems to be the origin of this folk belief in the Jizo. In the Edo era, a woman swallowed a needle by accident and suffered. A priest suggested she swallow a small wood carving modeled after this Jizo. The needle stuck in the carving and came out. Thus, people came to believe in this Jizo's help.

Regarding the next world, there is a famous story. After dying, the soul goes to a flower field, then a riverbank. After crossing the River *Sanzu-no-kawa*, he has to receive a trial of the chief judge

Enma-daiou. If he is liar, the judge picks out his tongue. People also believe that: some dead family members appear by the death bed; ancestors come back to this world on 13th of August every year; the deceased soul protects his living family if he is worshipped well; and he curses them if not.



Recently, the possession rate of the Buddhist home altar (*butsudan*) has decreased, but still about half of houses have the altar (Kotani, 2010). A mortuary tablet (*ihai*) is enshrined on the side of a Buddha statue in the center of the altar. A mortuary tablet is the wooden nameplate which specifies the Buddhist name of the deceased. The altar can be considered as the symbol of Buddhism, but I don't always think so, from my experience as a priest. When a priest prays before the altar, naturally he looks up to the Buddha statue, but how about people of the house? My impression is that they look towards the mortuary tablet in their mind rather than the Buddha statue. It is similar when visiting a grave. People eagerly pray before the grave, but few of them bow and put hands together to the Buddha statue of main hall that is on the way to the grave.

Thus duality is accepted at the home altar; one is ancestor worship as folk belief, another is Buddhism as established religion. By the way, ancestor worship was seldom seen in the doctrine of Indian Buddhism. Buddhism and ancestor worship were mixed ~~it~~ up in China, and this reached Japan.

The superiority of the folk belief is apparent by Kotani's study in 2006 about the religious actions of Japanese. Only 11.0% answered "I always do worship or propagate my beliefs." But over 70% also answered: "I visit a grave", "I put hands together before a Buddhist home altar and/or a Shinto home shelf", and "I believe the bad luck by own bad behavior in past". Kotani comments, "most of us have "religious" ideas and practices at a level that is different from the teaching of a founded religion (≒ established religion)." Based on this, we should comprehend that the basis of Japanese religion is folk belief.

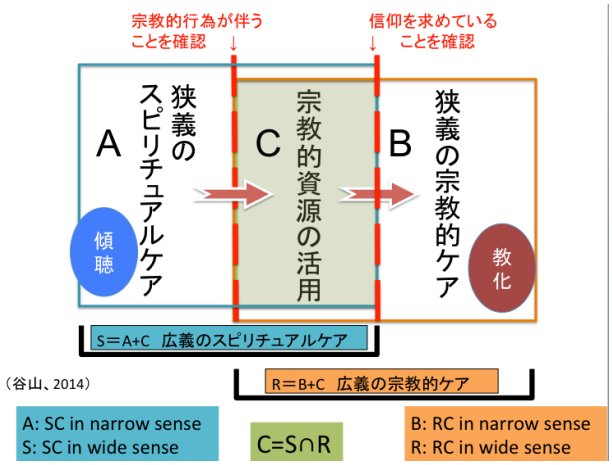
The argument about spiritual care in Japan became active after the 2000s. There have been various studies from the viewpoints of Buddhism, Christianity, and Western and Eastern philosophies. But Japanese folk belief has been overlooked. As most Japanese believe and practice folk belief, a care provider should understand and accept it. Here is the advantage of the interfaith chaplain. The religious practitioner can more easily understand and apply it, with a slight change of his/her perspective.

3.Interfaith Chaplain

In many cases, a religious practitioner who serves a temple or a church may carry a role as a chaplain at a specific time. At this time, it is necessary for him to change his mind set.

When serving a church, he teaches and guides the believer, and engages in proselytization. Therefore it is not necessary to distinguish between spiritual care, religious care, and proselytization. When this same person takes the role of chaplain, he sees people outside of his church. His aim is not proselytization. So he must distinguish between spiritual care, religious care, and proselytization. And he should have a good relationship with other religious practitioners.

Now we will confirm the difference between spiritual and religious care. It has been said that there is a common domain for these types of care, but the contents of the common domain have not been examined well. This figure expresses the domain of S [spiritual care in the wide sense] and R [religious care in the wide sense] and their common domain as C [application of religious resources] ($C = S \cap R$). I assume a domain A [spiritual care in the narrow sense] by excluding C from S; and B [religious care in the narrow sense] by excluding C from R. The contents of A are listening, touching, art and so on. Those of B are mainly religious teaching and rituals. Then what about C?



In fact, the previous presenter Rev. Taio Kaneta showed a good example about C. Frankly speaking, his activity helped me explain this domain C.

This photograph shows "Jizo" and “prayer beads,” both of which the visitor to Café de Monk produce by themselves. As each of them makes Jizo with clay while remembering the late person, he/she can make the figure fatter, add glasses, and so on. The prayer beads are made with commercially available beads and a flexible elastic cord. The design is freely decided.

After it is completed, a chaplain is asked to bless them. This blessing is important. An applicant asked me to bless saying, "this has not yet been blessed. So it is a mere bracelet. Please do it, your reverend. Then it will really become prayer beads.“

What is a person who is demanding Jizo and beads looking for? He/she does not seek to deepen their faith in Buddhism, nor intend to be converted. I guess he/she utilizes a religious thing for the mourning of the deceased person, concrete benefits, or temporary healing. It is truly the application of religious resources.

Similar things are seen when sightseeing at Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines and other churches. Have you been to such religious sites for sightseeing, too? I understand that few people visit for their own faith or religious interest consciously. According to Kotani’s study in 2009, on the aims of visiting Buddhist temple; 33.7% answered “for sightseeing”, and only 14.5% for "the event of the temple" that the priest hopes for proselytizing. Others are for “visiting grave”, “annual mourning function”, and “funeral.”

In another investigation (JTB, 2013), we can consider that only 4% visited
Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines purely for faith. Because it is sightseeing, the main purpose is appreciation of the building, artworks, garden, and the scenery, meals, and souvenirs. Visitors who said it made them "feel better" and "uplifted" add up to 50%. In the words of the figure of ABC, they did not demand B [religious care of the narrow sense], but are healed by C [application of religious resources].

By the way, it is hoped that the existence of a chaplain will help people to express spiritual or religious needs. Care begins here, but of course listening is basic. When listening, if it seems a client is seeking religious engagement, the care shifts to the utilization of religious resources. The chaplain should choose an appropriate religious resource from various things; like prayer, sutra-chanting, beads, Jizo and providing a hint to live for. But it may not be for faith.

Furthermore, when she demands faith (there are few cases), the chaplain will introduce her to a specific religion. If she demands the same religion of the chaplain by chance, he should be particularly careful. When his behavior goes beyond what the manager of the facility for which the chaplain work is willing to accept, he can be subjected to dismissal. Without obtaining the manager’s permission he will invite unnecessary suspicions about his behavior. Chaplains should be conscious and concerned about the standard and who the manager of the place is.

Finally, I will introduce the results of these three years. The training program of interfaith chaplains is approximately 80 hours consisting of lectures, field experience, and group work. We have carried it out six times and produced a total of 95 graduates. Most are Buddhists, but we have also had a Shinto priest, Christian pastors, a Catholic sister and a Japanese Muslim. The male to female ratio is approximately 3:1. We had anticipated mostly participants from the Tohoku district before beginning the training, but they came from the whole country.

Most of the graduates make use of this training in the activities at their everyday temple and church. About 50% are work with the victim support activities of the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster including people who were evacuated from Fukushima to other prefectures. About 30% work while on paid vacation or as a volunteer in the field of medical and social welfare. Among others, there are people who raise public awareness of the significance of chaplaincy to those involved, who desire to deepen talks between the religions, and who are going to spread similar training.

As a result, five local societies of interfaith chaplains have been established in Sendai, Tokyo, Gifu, Osaka, and Kumamoto; to continue studying with each other. The "Chaplain and Vihara Association" is organized and is going to enlarge the scope of these activities. The groups sponsoring similar training are increasing and those that began in 2014 are Ryukoku University (Shin Buddhism) and Tsurumi University (Soto Zen) and more are going to begin in Koyasan University (Esoteric Buddhism) and Shuchi’in University (Esoteric

Buddhism) from the autumn of 2015. Sophia University (Catholic) cooperates to organize the network of such universities and associations.

The Department of Practical Religious Studies is financially maintained by private donations and will be extended for two years from this April. We will continue the training program and want to expand it both in quality and quantity from now on. I would like to invite high expectations for the future.

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Panel Discussion: On the Role of Religious Practitioners in Public Sphere

Presentation abstract

Disaster Relief Activities of Caritas Ishinomaki Base

Sr. Tomoko HOSOYA(Charity of Ottawa)

Caritas Ishinomaki base is a volunteer base run by the Roman Catholic Church. It serves as a relay point taking in volunteers and dispatching them to the places that need them. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster there was a lot of physical labor involved in the debris removal activities. At present, however, we are maintaining links with people we have met at tea party and open-space events at temporary housing facilities, and lending a sympathetic ear. I will discuss the activities of this volunteer base where the religious and sectarian affiliations of others are respected and matters of a religious nature are kept away from the forefront, and share some of my actual experiences.

The open-space area on the first floor of the volunteer base is used by people from the neighborhood and residents of the temporary housing facilities, most of whom have no links with Christianity. It is important to accept the values of the people one is dealing with before stating one's own religious values, and to know the values of other religions and the customs of the area in which one works. By listening quietly to the things someone is saying to you, a trust relationship is formed. Once a relationship has deepened, a person may tell you the things that lie at the depths of their hearts. We must continue an ongoing dialogue in conversation openly and honestly even where a clear answer cannot be given. Sometimes the person one is engaged with is not looking for a plain answer, but someone who will struggle with these questions along with them.

I have heard of cases of those affected by the disaster feeling that religion or things religious had been foisted upon them in activities carried out by religious groups. In their enthusiasm, religious groups may act without due regard to the wishes of those they are working with. This is the cause of their being at odds with the feelings of those they were seeking to help. Religious persons must be careful in this regard. Evangelization and preaching are not done with words alone. If we respect the religion of those we are working with, and have love in our hearts, the message of peace in our various religions will be communicated without us mentioning the names of "Buddha" or "God".

The relationship between those affected by the disaster and those working to support them is not one of those that have giving to those that have not. Humility, and a heart that understands that aid recipient and aid giver support one another are necessary for this work.

Presentation abstract

On the Activities of Team Vihara

Rev. Genshū TŌYAMA(Nichiren-shu)

We are sometimes told that funerals are unnecessary. Are they actually unnecessary? Why do people say they are unnecessary…? What is a funeral in the first place? I have been involved in the funerals of a wide range of different people. On many occasions those who organized and attended the funerals were kind enough to say that they were glad they had done so. Why, then, do we so often hear people in general saying that funerals are unnecessary? I have considered the meaning, the purpose and the role of funerals, and the role of those of a religious vocation.

Considering the role of people of a religious vocation, I thought that what is necessary is to go out of the temple…

As with MIYAZAWA Kenji's "strong in the rain" (the opening line of his poem about a simple, quiet, caring and stalwart person)… As with Shakyamuni, who while still a prince went out from each of the four gates of his city and met with an old person, a sick person, a dead person and a renunciate (and thus decided to go forth from home to homeless mendicancy in search of emancipation)…

In this presentation I will discuss the role of persons of religious vocations though a consideration of the activities of groups and activities with which I am involved. These activities and groups include the activity

of caring for people in their last days, which brings us closer to those approaching death, grief support, which brings us closer to the hearts of those who have lost someone important to them. They also include *shūkatsu* (preparation for and contemplation of death), which brings us closer to the question of the significance of approaching the end of our lives, and "Team Vihara" (multi-occupational cooperative association); which brings together many specialists (working in medicine, welfare, memorial services, the professions and insurance) in cooperation to understand one another's areas of expertise (the principles thereof and the actual work involved).

Presentation abstract

Working as an Interfaith Chaplain in Numaguchi Clinic

Rev. Shidō TANAKA (Jodo Shin-shu Honganjiha)

In the field of medical practice, the role required of me as a *Rinshō-shūkyō-shi* (Interfaith chaplain) is to provide spiritual care. At the Numaguchi Clinic we are particularly involved in at-home treatment. I visit patients in the terminal stages of their illness or those who suffer with chronic illnesses. In interactions with the patients, many have come to me with spiritual experiences or feelings that they could not tell a clinician. Patients who approach me with this type of issue generally avoid talking about it to their friends and family. The reason they avoid talking about it is that they have a deep-seated fear that if they did so, they would be treated as abnormal. When a trusting relationship has been formed with a patient, there are many things that patients may confide in a *Rinshō-shūkyō-shi* (Interfaith chaplain).

There is something that I have noticed in my activities as a member of the at-home treatment team. That is, that while those of religious vocations in the churches and temples in the various regions of Japan have thus far had the role of advisors on all matters to all people, this function is gradually being lost due to the spread of the nuclear family and the weakening (in terms of number and influence) of local temples and churches throughout Japan. As a part of our activities, we *Rinshō-shūkyō-shi* (Interfaith chaplains) must take on the role of forging or re-forging connections with local churches and temples where these are being lost, or have already been lost. In some cases, if we are to take on this role as bridge-builders, we might be called upon to ascertain what views on life and death are held by a person facing death and the leaving of this life. This is because the patient and also their family may fear death, turn their backs to death. Thus the patient and their family they may not feel able to ask these questions. In situations such as this we may also find ourselves called upon to act as bridge-builders and go-betweens, working within a family.

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