



Voluntary Service brings Hope Again

by Fr Daniel Masaharu Torigoe, sdb

The strong earthquake and subsequent tsunami which struck the Japanese archipelago on 11 March were the most devastating events to have hit the country since the end of the Second World War.

In the difficult situation after the tsunami there is a glimmer of light and hope in the solidarity and readiness of young people to help. "In this tragedy, one of the most moving things has been the generous response of the young Japanese" Fr Yasutaka Muramatsu, Provincial Secretary and Delegate for Salesian Voluntary Service told the Fides Agency at the time.

"Young people, Christians and non-Christians, are getting together and they want to go to the stricken areas at once to offer their services, their energy and their enthusiasm to help the victims, giving some hope through their smiles. It is very moving to see how much love they have for their neighbours. It is a lesson for all of us educators".

Some young students from Salesio-

Gakuin High School in Yokohama have undertaken to help as far as they possibly can in the rebuilding of the areas hit by the earthquake and the tsunami back in March 2011. This is something which gives fresh hope to the local people and makes the young people involved reflect and grow in maturity.

Fr Daniel Masaharu Torigoe is the Principal of the school in Yokohama. Like all the members of the Japanese Salesian community not directly affected by the disaster, right from the beginning he tried to make himself useful in helping and comforting people from the most northerly regions hit hardest by the earthquake, the tsunami, and then the nuclear danger.

"However, in the early months the consequences of the devastation and the fear of radioactive contamination prevented us from taking young people to the area. We had no real idea of what sort of help we could give. On my own I visited the area in May to find out what could be done, but the whole city was destroyed, nothing remained, everything had been swept away.

There was no place for the students or young people who were not professionally qualified", the Salesian said.

As the months passed, the situation improved and the Salesians found a safe place where they could work with the students. In fact in Shiogama city, in the diocese of Sendai, a diocesan Voluntary Service Centre was set up supported by Japan Caritas which was being coordinated by a Salesian, Brother Francesco Fukagawa.

In June Fr Torigoe suggested to the young people that they should become personally involved in the reconstruction of their country and provide moral support for the victims. "Surprisingly", he says, "more students than I expected wanted to take part and I divided them into four groups, with five students and a teacher in each".

On 12 July the first group left for Shiogama City; the second were there between 19 and 21 July, the

