

Looking Back on JELA Growth;

1999 ~ 2007



On March 31st 2007, Dr. Lowell Gretebeck will step down as Director of JELA after more than seven years of service.

“We have accomplished so much in these seven years,” says Dr. Gretebeck. “JELA has become a model of success in both outreach to society and the involvement of people. Japan – No, our world! – needs more organizations, like JELA, that encourage compassion towards the disadvantaged.”

In looking back over his time as Director, Dr. Gretebeck identified six accomplishments as being most significant in JELA’s development.

Growth of Broad-based Participation: In 1999 JELA activities involved only 50 to 60 individuals, with most work focusing on missionary support. Now more than 3,000 people are engaged in various JELA programs, including charity concerts, hospice music ministry, refugee care, and overseas study tours and work camps. This nearly 6,000% increase in participation reflects JELA’s growth from missionary support to greater and more diverse outreach.

More Structured Programs for Global Christian Service: JELA now provides opportunities for mission service around the world. Between 40 to 50 volunteers travel abroad each year to participate in

study tours, work camps and other programs in North and South America and Asia. These service opportunities vary in length from one week to one year and draw participants from all age groups, from youth to elderly.

Answering Needs Beyond Japan:

The new JELA programs have contributed much to the welfare of peoples in various lands. For example, the JELA funded feeding facility for street children in Sao Paulo, Brazil now offers meals and extra-curricular education to 600 children per day. Support from JELA has bought incubators for the hospital of the Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP) in Jamkhed, India, one of that nation's poorest areas. JELA also provides scholarships so that disadvantaged children under CRHP care can go to school. This overall theme of helping children will be further enhanced in 2007 by the JELA-assisted construction of an elementary school in rural Cambodia, an area currently without any education facilities. JELA scholarships have also enabled young adult leaders across Asia to study at the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in Tochigi Prefecture. At ARI, they acquire knowledge and skills helpful in improving conditions in their homelands.



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New Outreach Within Japan:

In 2005 JELA began a music ministry training program for hospice care within Japan's aging society. The program consists of training volunteers in the performance of harp music, as such music has been shown to ease the dependence on quality-of-life reducing medications when the sick and elderly transition to the end of life. The music can also prove soothing to families in times of grief. The first program participants

have completed a one-year instruction period and are now entering an internship phase of their ministry. This training class – with eight members – represents perhaps the first such program in all of Asia.

Strengthened Global Partnerships: Over the past seven years JELA has increased its cooperation with both international and domestic organizations, as well as with Japanese government entities. Working with various offices in the Japanese government and other NGOs, JELA has continued to maintain funding and housing for refugees residing in Japan. JELA also has given funding to the Lutheran Immigration Relief Service (LIRS) in the United States to help LIRS relocate immigrants who lost residences in the September 11th terrorist attack in New York.

JELA funds also aid LIRS in providing intervention counseling to prevent the sex trafficking of Asian youth in California. In other projects, JELA has partnered with Lutheran World Relief, CRHP in India and the Lutheran World Federation, partnerships that continue to flourish.

Increased Cooperation with the JELC:

JELA has cooperated with the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church in promoting youth leadership. JELA funding has allowed JELC youth to take part in both domestic and international leadership training programs. Annually, JELA provides over 15,000,000 yen in such support.



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Dr. Gretebeck says he feels blessed to have served as JELA Director during this time of rapid growth. Yet, he also feels certain that such growth will continue.

“JELA” he says, “Is now a beacon of hope and its future is bright.” That future, he adds, will include the programs described above as well as fresh outreach in other areas, such as the following:

-- New study tours to foster greater awareness of the world, with an emphasis on educating Japanese youth.

-- Inauguration of a public lecture series to promote education on issues of human need within Japan and beyond.

-- Further help with Japanese hospice care.

-- Counseling efforts with troubled children in Japan, through support of the Personal Growth and Counseling Center of the Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary and College.

-- Ever-increasing cooperation with the Japanese government and other NGOs, both domestically and abroad, to foster new programming in various locations, with an emphasis on Cambodia.

-- More advocacy for marginalized people, including the promotion of refugee rights.

-- Increased scholarships for needy students in Asia, with the additional hope of fostering female leadership



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through the sponsorship of young Asian women at ARI.

-- The conducting of more special events, such as charity concerts, to support various programs and the work of other NGOs.

-- Spotlighting care on the needs of disadvantaged children in Japan, Asia and around the world.

“The needs of children,” Dr. Gretebeck says, “Are so profound that JELA will be placing even more stress on poverty alleviation programs dealing with their care.”



In a meeting at the Comprehensive Rural Health Project

After leaving JELA, Dr. Gretebeck will continue to work in development programming in Asia. He will be succeeded by Ms. Fumie Furukawa, currently JELA’s Office Manager.

“Yet JELA will always be in my heart,” says Dr. Gretebeck. “The story of JELA is the story of the Good Samaritan – helping the needy whenever we can. One can’t change the entire world, but we can change the small part of the world in which we live. If, over the last seven years, I have been a difference in some small way, I feel fulfilled. It has been a pleasure to serve.”