As a result of the March 11, 2011 East Japan Earthquake, ARI’s Koinonia House was seriously damaged and had to be demolished. This led to the loss of our beloved chapel, which was located on the lower floor of the building.

Since old Koinonia’s demolition, the ARI community had been observing daily morning gatherings in the classroom next to the new Koinonia House. But we held onto the hope that ARI may once again have a chapel, a dedicated space for the community’s spiritual activities, like daily morning gatherings, occasional religious worship (Christian, as well as other traditions of community members), prayer meetings, or private reflection/meditation. With encouragement from supporters across Japan and abroad, ARI began construction of a new chapel in January.

This work was completed at the end of August, and its dedication service was held on September 15th.

The chapel uses the post and beam frame and other materials recovered from a traditional farmhouse that stood for 110 years at another location in Nasushiobara City.

The name that was chosen for the new chapel, our spiritual gathering place, is “Oikos Chapel.” We chose this name for the fact that the new chapel renews an old Japanese-style house. Oikos is a Greek word, which means house, or home, and is also the root word of ecumenism and ecumenical, the principle or aim of promoting unity among Christian Churches. We also felt that this name nicely complements those of our dining hall, Koinonia House, and our food processing building, Manna House.

When we think of a house or home we think of family. Oikos Chapel will be the spiritual home for the ARI family, a place where we will learn together how we may live into our motto: That We May Live Together.

Whether it’s for a day, or for a year, all who come to ARI will be welcome in this home! (The next issue of TMH will have a more detailed article about Oikos Chapel.)

About this issue

We apologize for the delayed publication of this our “Summer” issue of Take My Hand. The next issue is scheduled for late January, 2015.
JOSÉ ANTONIO SANCHEZ
Republic of Cuba

The Christian Center for Reflection and Dialogue

José is the first ARI participant to be welcomed from Cuba, a country that promotes organic agriculture and is committed to environmental protection.

“When I first learned about ARI I thought, what they do is similar to what I’ve been doing, but the techniques and knowledge of organic agriculture must be more advanced in Japan. I was also attracted by the fact that people come from many different countries, offering opportunities for mutual learning of new ideas.”

José previously worked in the field of forest conservation, managing the production of seedlings and overseeing reforestation. The government of Cuba provides subsidies to individuals and organizations that perform tree planting, so José was also responsible for the audit of reforestation sites.

José left the Forestry Bureau three years ago to become Farm Coordinator at the Christian Center for Reflection and Dialogue’s (CCRD) 33-hectare (81.5-acre) farm, where he works with 25 labourers to produce vegetables, fruits, beans and corn.

“What we produce on the farm is supplied, at low prices, to hospitals, kindergartens, schools and charitable institutions. We also cook some produce each day and distribute meals to about 120 people, mostly elderly who live alone. Our activities serve those who consume the produce, but they also offer employment opportunities for farm workers and cooks.”

“I am confident that what I learn at ARI can be applied in Cuba, even if our local resources and agricultural methods differ. I am particularly interested in aquaculture, and look forward to applying methods I’ve learned at ARI to CCRD’s fish ponds.”

“Because we are pursuing the same, organic, agriculture, there are many things to learn in everyday life.”

mini profile
Ethnic Identity: Cuban
Native Language: Spanish
Religion: none
Work Position: Farm Coordinator

Jose (left) and his classmate from Bangladesh, Rehana (right) harvest bitter gourds in one of ARI’s vegetable fields.
It’s a beautiful day and I have done most of my training runs, but I am nervous. I ran one trail marathon a year ago and it nearly did me in. Most of the other runners look younger and leaner than me. Will I even finish this crazy challenge that goes on for 26 miles and climbs over 5000 feet? Suddenly the horn blows and I’m running along as if in a dream. That is until I hit the first hill, and then it becomes all too real.

For the last 8 years I have been running Marathons for ARI. These have been mostly for raising scholarship funds for ARI participants. At first I just asked a few friends and family to support the effort. Since I really wasn’t much of a runner most of those who contributed probably didn’t even expect me to finish. I found that running for an important cause like ARI has two parts that support one another. The physical part involves the training. The fundraising part involves the communication.

**Funds and Encouragement**

By mile 10 I have somehow passed a few folks, mostly on up hills and at rest stations. I’m feeling pretty good but I already I have tripped a couple of times so badly that I nearly fell, which is not so good. To keep from falling I flailed along wildly for several long seconds, stressing my left leg. I’m scared that this will hurt me after another 10 miles or so, when the going gets really tough. I’m wondering, “Why again am I out here?”

The training for a marathon starts in earnest about 18 weeks before the race and can get pretty tedious. In my case I rarely had a running buddy that would go with me, especially on the long runs, which had to be done every week. But here is where the communication for fundraising really helped. My friends and family were so supportive, sending not only funds for AFARI, but also encouragement. I felt uplifted, not just by doing this for ARI, but by all of those supporting my running.

At mile 19 I hit the killer Quarry Hill which gains 600 feet in a mile. My pace has been faster than I have ever run on my long training runs and I’m starting to feel pretty beat. A young fellow with a crew cut, I think must be military, passes me with an “oo-rah.” I mostly hike the rest of the hill and nearly embrace the fellow working the aid station. That is until he tells me that I still have 6 more miles to go. The first 20 miles has taken me 4 hours but the way I’m feeling, this last 6 miles could take me 3 hours more.

Over the years more folks joined in supporting the marathon run fundraising event while a few dropped out. Fortunately the overall amounts coming in every year increased, until two years ago. That year I suffered an injury in my upper back that led to a loss of feeling in my right hand. I had to lay off the running. I made an appeal to the usual supporters, but, understandably, it was a low year. Through physical therapy I was able to fully recover and last year ran my first trail marathon. I wanted to challenge myself and our supporters to get back into the game and up the ante.

As I come near the end of the race, I feel as if Rod has been carrying me along these most difficult of miles. Although I crossed the finish line behind 18 others, I finished ahead of 15, most of whom were younger, and probably leaner, than me. Adeline, my supportive partner in life as well as in marathons was a most welcome sight for my sore eyes. When I looked up at my time, I was shocked to see that I had finished a full hour and 15 minutes faster than my previous trail marathon time. Drawing from the previous years of experience, my recovery regime was effective and quick. Having now had over 2 weeks of rest, I think its high time I started training for the next one.

**Being guided unto the finish line**

With four more miles to go I start to hit a wall. My left leg is cramping up and the rest of my body feels like lead. Even little hills feel like mountains. I look at my watch. Seeing that it is 1:00 p.m., I am hit with the realization that Rev. Rod Booth’s Memorial Service has just started. Rod was an AFARI board member par excellence, a personal friend and mentor. He had passed away about 2 weeks earlier. Amazingly I begin to feel better and the cramping resides.

The 8 years of marathon running for ARI have changed me. Physically, I’d have go back 30 years to find the time I have been this fit. Personally, the running has been a life line. Through hundreds and hundreds of hours of training I have worked through the depression that came with moving from ARI to the U.S. I have come to find myself here in Seattle and how I can contribute to society. With this last run we have raised over $60,000 for ARI.

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The ARI family remembers with great affection and respect Rod Booth, gifted filmmaker, thoughtful friend, conversationalist and preacher, and outstanding board member of American Friends of ARI, who moved into eternal life this summer. Margret Hofmeister, President of AFARI, wrote, “The news of Rod’s passing was truly a ‘with sighs too deep for words’ moment. Rod’s commitment and passion for ARI and AFARI was a blessing and inspiration to all of us and so many others...how fortunate we were to work alongside him these past years.”

J.B. Hoover “met Rod over 20 years ago when he came to ARI with his crew to make a documentary about the institute. Rod crafted a brilliant video, which included interviews with graduates of ARI in Africa and Asia. Seven years ago Rod joined the board of the American Friends of ARI (AFARI). As I was the Executive Director of AFARI by then, Rod became an inspiring boss and caring mentor as well as a tremendous supporter of ARI. He and his wife Maria returned to ARI to update his award-winning video which is shown at gatherings all over the country. All of those many, many graduates, staff and volunteers at ARI, along with those connected with AFARI, whom Rod touched will greatly miss him, yet continue to be inspired by him. Rod has left an invaluable legacy to ARI and AFARI which we will cherish and share for years to come.

Stephen Cutting recalls Rod’s “Terrific!” embodying his positive, go-getter attitude. “When he and Maria volunteered at ARI, I was so impressed with his inquisitiveness - wanting to learn about everything, and though a powerful leader in his own right, he equally enjoyed listening and learning, or letting others take the reins. I appreciated his willingness to jump in and help wherever he could, especially when it called for his particular talents. He was always willing to give generously of himself even when it meant a major commitment, like producing the new version of the ARI documentary, or putting together a major funding proposal.”

Rod’s gifts to the AFARI Board of Directors were many: clarity of mind and sense of purpose, great encouragement, collegiality, and focus on the work at hand. He was such a supportive board member, and always wise in his reflections on the ideas we shared. He was truly God’s gift to me, personally, in working together on the board; so much of the ease of the process in decision-making was due to his commitment to, and love for, ARI.

Pam Hasegawa
AFARI Board