Faith at ARI

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T here is an idiom from Lao-tzu: “Those
who understand others are clever, but
those who know themselves are truly wise”. However, I also believe that by interacting with
others and understanding differences, we can
see a reflection of our own character. This
self-reflection is an important part of ARI’s
training because if you want to be a leader, you
need to know about yourself; where you are,
what you can do, and how you can combine and
utilize your gifts for your community.

Although ARI is rooted in Christianity, it was
built to respect the diversity of all cultures,
ideas, and religions. This respect comes from
the love of Jesus, who showed compassion to
all people regardless of status. You can get a
glimpse of ARI’s diversity even in our daily life.
In the staff room, there is a fish-shaped
wooden temple drum used in Buddhist prayers.

Being a Japanese participant last year was an
opportunity for me as a non-religious person to
learn about the power of building a relation-
ship with God. However, while I have observed
non-Christians participating in Christian
rituals, I haven’t seen Christians perform
practices from other religions (except when
they put their palms together while saying
“Itadakimasu” before eating). I feel some
participants adopt Christian practices because
they don’t want to feel isolated. This is a shame,
because it is ARI’s responsibility to teach its
participants that they are part of a multi-faith
community that values their beliefs. I felt,
“Wouldn’t it reflect the love of Jesus to create
an environment that empowers the minority?”

However, this question made me consider
my own life. In Japan, I am in the majority as a
non-religious person, and while I have always
wished for minorities to be equal members of
society, I’ve done little to create such an
environment. As a minority in ARI, I have
gained some understanding of how it feels to
live with a majority that does little to reach out
to you.

I am sure that, this year again, I will continu-
ously question others, which will lead to new
reflections about myself.

Chigira Hasumi
2017 Japanese Graduate &
2018 Graduate Intern
Throughout my time at ARI, I have felt tension between several views of ARI’s religious identity: those who believe the institute’s day-to-day activities should be more secular, those who want ARI to be more interfaith, and those who want ARI to be more Christian.

To facilitate an open discussion on this issue, I have sought out the thoughts of ARI’s community members. I chose five people to be part of this article based on the diversity of their beliefs.

The contributors are: Micah Anderson, head of Admissions and Graduate Outreach; Chigira Hasumi, a Graduate Intern; Takashi Otani, Livestock Manager; Yukiko Oyanagi, Associate Director; and myself, Stephen Miller, Long-Term Volunteer.

We Who Abide

ARI is not a multi-faith institution. ARI is an evangelical Christian organization that tolerates and sometimes embraces members of other faiths (and denominations). At times, this inchoate acceptance anticipates ministry, or clumsy attempts at sublimation; at other times it represents a sincere desire to learn from different perspectives, nurture tolerance, and build peace.

The sheer volume of Christian missionaries at ARI should belie any notion that all religions are held equally. I sometimes wonder, “Is there really so great a need in such a small community?” I feel uneasy with the pervasive hymns and prayers, the iconography, and the pressure to attend religious services that lack relevance to the training. Though overwhelmed, I am not alone; this discomfort is apportioned equally among the less devout, and we abide.

Before coming to ARI, I identified as a Christian. Now, I am not so sure. Still, every time I am tempted to shake the dust from my feet, I meet someone at ARI whose generosity, humility, and way of being in the world inspires me and compels me to remain.

I was born and raised in the evangelical tradition. Though I continue to repudiate my cultural heritage, I appreciate the opportunity ARI has provided me to reexamine and reevaluate my relationship to it and to other members of my tribe. I remain hopeful for reconciliation.

The Wisdom of Diversity

As I’m sure most of you are aware, ARI is an institution based in the spirit of Christianity. Though I have worked here for seven years now, I am a Buddhist, just as my family has been for generations. While Buddhism in Japan has various denominations, we generally don’t have the Christian rituals of praying aloud in public or gathering in churches every Sunday. Rather, we Japanese Buddhists believe that it is important to be free from formality and to deal with agony so that we can maintain an attitude that allows us to ascertain our true nature.

The power of prayer and the Christian faith are both certainly very prevalent at ARI. Though I myself am not Christian and don’t actively participate in Christian events, that doesn’t mean I reject its presence here. All faith traditions have important wisdom to offer us even if we don’t personally adhere to them, and it is a great gift to be able to discover this wisdom through the interactions we share with our fellow community members at ARI. I believe that the existence of various religions is desirable, and it is my hope that these religions be accepted as they are, both within this community and around the world.
In my opinion, the quandary of ARI’s religious identity boils down to one simple question: what exactly does it mean to be, in the words of our mission statement, “rooted in the love of Jesus Christ”? Some feel this sentiment (in its invocation of the name of Jesus) implies a devotion to Christianity at the expense of other beliefs, while others hold that ‘love’ is its operative term. My own thoughts on the matter are best illustrated with a brief glimpse into the life of our founder, Toshihiro Takami.

“As a young seminary instructor, Takami Sensei traveled to Bangladesh to serve as a relief worker after a series of catastrophic natural disasters struck the nation, leaving the lives of its most vulnerable populations in shambles. Despite their lack of faith in the Risen Christ, the Muslims Takami lived amongst during this time displayed altruism almost to a fault; what little they had was shared not only without hesitation, but with joy.”

Do the semantics of belief exempt such people from favorable comparisons to Jesus? Is being Christian requisite to the practice of Christ-like love? I don’t think so. After all, Jesus himself wasn’t Christian; he was a liberal rabbi from backwater Nazareth who felt compassion was more important than the prevailing values of his day. For Christians to claim exclusive right to this philosophy of altruism would be ironic, disingenuous, and against the wishes of their religion’s progenitor. The love Jesus showed is a universal value grounded in the common bedrock of humanity, and is therefore an example that all of us can (and should) aspire to, regardless of personal belief.

When do you feel the existence of God? When and on what occasion do you praise God and pray? For me, when I am in the field, I feel the existence of God the most strongly and put my mind towards Him.

When I do weeding, sow the seeds, cultivate the soil, or harvest vegetables, I always work together and talk with participants, volunteers and visitors. I talk with them about society, economics, world issues, leadership, environmental issues, our thoughts and experiences, and of course faith. Working on the farm is a very important time for me to share with various people about various topics. Above all, it is the most important time for me to feel the love of God.

The Bible says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” (I Corinthians 3:6)

We can plant. We can water. But only God can give growth.

Through our harvest, we can see the power of God and feel the love of God. For me, agriculture is a beautiful manifestation of God’s power. Farming is my prayer. Working in the field is deeply based in my faith.

In ARI, many people are living together. Many of us are from different countries, many of us have different religions or faiths, but we always work together. When I work together on the soil with community members, I feel we are sharing common thoughts.

Of course, ARI is not an agriculture school: we train participants to be grass-roots rural leaders, as well as servant leaders. At the same time, however, we are very much a farming community. From farming, they learn about leadership; and for me, farming is my way to give thanks to God.

Love: The Universal Religion

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There is a total of 350 amputees currently enrolled in SLASA programs, as well as numerous non-disabled persons who volunteer their time and expertise. Mambud himself holds the staff position of project coordinator, making it his responsibility to oversee the activities of all 5 clubs, as well as organize special events (though each team also has their own local leadership).

It is Mambud's philosophy that the universal language of football can be used as a vehicle for social change. This belief is made manifest in the curriculum he sets out for SLASA's participants, which is divided into two main sections: football and agriculture. The former of these emphasizes physical education and therapy, while encouraging constructive social exchange between teams as they engage in matches. The latter is more academic, as it focuses on teaching young people in the community about agri-science, nutrition, and food security on a plot of farmland adjacent to the football pitch.

Passionate about his work, Mambud describes the mission of SLASA as follows: “In a discriminatory environment where their own government neglects them, we give disabled Sierra Leoneans hope, helping them reintegrate into society. When a person who feels like they’ve lost everything sees an amputee playing football and smiling, they understand the power of the hope we provide; a hope that allows us all to live together.”

This desire to give hope to the hopeless has led Mambud to ARI, where he seeks to improve the agricultural section of SLASA's program through the study of organic farming techniques and the philosophy of servant leadership.
Nilani is the founder of the Siddhartha Child Development Foundation (SCDF). A lifelong social worker, trainer, and mentor, she has devoted her life to helping others. The story of how SCDF came to be is one involving an unimaginable tragedy, and an incredible amount of grace and strength.

On December 26, 2004, Nilani’s life was changed forever. She was holding a training workshop on social work in a coastal town in western Sri Lanka. She brought her five-year-old son, Sidath to work that day. On that day, a 9.1 magnitude earthquake hit the Indian Ocean, sending a devastating tsunami. Nilani miraculously survived. Her son, tragically, did not.

In this time of grief, a coworker told Nilani, “You are not only one son’s mother, but the mother of many other children who need you”. With these words, and her son in her heart, Nilani was moved to action. Just seven days after the tsunami, Nilani took her savings, sold her land and went to a displacement camp where she began working with single mothers.

The following year, Nilani established The Siddhartha Child Development Foundation as a child relief organization for the victims of the tsunami. The foundation expanded to include children displaced by the civil war. Now, the organization strives to reach children in need throughout Sri Lanka.

Nilani utilizes a holistic approach to child relief. From experience, she explains that “the projects will fail if we do not empower parents and the community to provide a supportive eco-system to help the educational initiatives of the children.” One example of community empowerment is evident in the organization’s staff. The SCDF’s social workers are almost entirely local young people who were trained by Nilani herself. “These girls lacked in opportunity, not in ability.”

Nilani now works in Wilgamuwa in Matale District, located in central Sri Lanka. In this district, chemical agriculture is widely practiced. Observing the negative impacts of chemical agriculture on the local children made Nilani realize this aspect of the community needed to be changed. How can the children learn how to read if they do not have safe food? How can the children learn empowerment when their parents are dependent on agro-chemical companies? Basically, what the people of Wilgamuwa need is food security, and Nilani believes that can be achieved through organic, sustainable agriculture.

At ARI, Nilani hopes to gain the skills necessary to empower the people and children of Wilgamuwa. She wants to learn about organic agriculture hoping to incorporate it into the lives of the children. By showing that they do not need chemicals, and that they can be self-sufficient and self-reliant, Nilani believes the youth will be greatly empowered.

“Siddhartha”, and her son’s name “Sidath” both mean “One who does good in the world.” Nilani seeks to honor these names through the works of SCDF, which have impacted the lives of over 250,000 children throughout Southeast Asia.

Barbara Rose Hoover
Volunteer

“One who does good in the world.”
Though Takami Sensei has been a pastor by trade, it might have been more accurate to describe him as a dreamer; a man whose unwavering faith had the power to bring people together to share in ARI’s noble work of building an environmentally healthy, just, and peaceful world in which each person can live to his or her fullest potential.

During our US Speaking Tour last autumn, I felt as if I were following in Takami Sensei’s footsteps, sharing the dream of ARI with supporters old and new in New England, Virginia and Florida. This endeavor included three ARI and AFARI staff: Ms. Acivo Rhakho from Nagaland, India (current ARI Meal Service Coordinator, 2000 ARI Graduate, 2009 Training Assistant); Mr. JB Hoover (AFARI Executive Director) and myself, Ms. Kathy Froede (ARI Ecumenical Relations Coordinator).

Sharing the dream, as Takami Sensei did, is as vital today as was when he began his work before the 1970’s. Although the world is a ‘smaller’ place today with the current ease of travel and communication, we have not yet solved some of its most basic problems—hunger, clean water, education. ARI has one answer to these issues: training grassroots rural leaders to help their own communities. We have seen the effectiveness of the ARI training during the past 45 years through our graduates’ stories (Graduate Impact Study, Fetzer Study), and we believe our training is more important now than ever.

Many thanks to all of you who made us feel at home wherever we went, taught us about your lives, and listened to us speak about ARI’s hopes and dreams for our future and the future of graduates’ communities around the world.

Kathy Froede
Ecumenical Relations Coordinator

Connections That Challenge

For the tenth time in twenty days of the 2017 Fall Speaking Tour, Acivo Rhakho told her story: Nagaland, India (her childhood home) was a rigid patriarchy, where most held the belief that education was wasted on girls. Why invest in your daughter if her only value is to serve her family and then later her husband and his family? Boys will go on to get jobs, earn money, have a family, hopefully with more boys. Taken care of by their single mother, Acivo’s family was so desperately poor that her one brother, who would require an unequal share of the family’s resources for his care and education, moved in with another relative. Yet her mother knew from experience that her daughters had to be able to survive without husbands if necessary and, despite the difficulties, sent Acivo to school.

Why is it necessary for Acivo to come to the United States, meet directly with ARI supporters, and tell her story? Couldn’t an AFARI staff member or supporter just give a talk or show a video with this information? They could, but how effective would that be in helping supporters understand the depth of the impact ARI’s Rural Leaders Training Program has on its participants? When Acivo speaks to us in person, we connect with both the little girl who was constantly being pushed down and passed over for the boys in her school and community, and the confident, inspiring woman she has become. We cannot help but wonder, how did this happen?

Growing up the way she did, how did she make her way to Japan as an ARI participant? Then, out of the many graduates, how was she chosen to return to ARI as a Training Assistant? How was it that...
she became a missionary to Cambodia for several years? Equally amazing, how was she, out of so many hundreds and hundreds of graduates, chosen to become one of the very few full time graduate staff members at ARI? How did these experiences change her and how did she change others?

We hear the deep context that shows us ARI’s role in her personal transformation and later in the transformation of the individuals and communities where she served. We hear it in her voice, accented by learning English later in life but confidently conveying her truth. We hear it in the way she responds to questions, helping those struggling to grasp the realities of her background. We experience it as Acivo leads supporters in cooking a curry, similar to the way she has led hundreds of ARI Participants to grow in confidence as leaders while they grow in confidence in the kitchen. Her homestay families grasp it as she recollects a memory here and there during evening conversations about family and daily life in Nagaland, Cambodia, or Japan.

Later, as these supporters move on to their other appointments and go back to their lives, their encounter with Acivo will continue to resonate. She has challenged them to see the world in a different way. Her very life is a message of hope that, despite the obstacles, even a little girl from one of the most remote areas on earth can be transformed and transform others. We feel the urgency in her voice and know we must not succumb to apathy or cynicism. We feel compelled to ponder how we can join in common cause with her and this work of inspiring leaders, who in turn inspire the most marginalized people in their communities.

This is why we feel it so important to bring ARI graduates to the United States and other areas where they can meet with supporters. To all the supporters who last year opened their homes and churches and hearts throughout New England, we give thanks and look forward to meeting more of you on the next speaking tour.

One of my responsibilities as a graduate working at ARI is to be available for speaking engagements, which I have always felt are precious opportunities to talk to our supporters about their good works and introduce ARI to new people in Japan. But I never expected that I would get an opportunity to go all the way to the US to meet overseas supporters! While I was excited when Kathy first told me about the trip, I became more nervous about people being able to understand my English as the time drew nearer. Thankfully they did!

Meeting supporters and seeing their love for rural people they have never met and rural places they have never been was an amazing experience. This, as well as the passion I saw when my fellow presenters spoke of ARI, challenged me as a graduate to re-evaluate how I can best serve my people.

Over the course of our travels, I was given an image that aptly illustrates how ARI’s supporters are connected to the communities its graduates serve: that of a fruit tree which needs a healthy environment in order to grow up sturdy and laden with fruit. We graduates are the fruit in this metaphor, and like literal fruit, we are not produced overnight. It takes the presence of nurturing soil, gentle rains, and warm sunlight (our supporters), as well as great effort from the tree itself (ARI) to create fruit that has the potential to nourish the surrounding ecosystem.

Every supporter has a role to play, and only with their united teamwork, sacrifices, and selflessness can we achieve a common goal; a goal to give less fortunate people a chance to live a better life. Traveling with Kathy and J.B Hoover and meeting supporters in the US who are so passionate about ARI’s mission, helped me to deepen what Jesus told us to do: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10: 25-37).

Acivo Rhakho
Meal Service Coordinator
I first met Agnes Ansa Anim in 1990, when I had been on staff at ARI for just a year. In those years, the first weeks of the school year contained “seminars” by each of our new participants in which they had a fairly long period of time to tell us about themselves, their countries, and their work. I’d really enjoyed meeting new friends the year before (many of whom are still in my life) and was looking forward to new ones.

And then this West African woman stood up and took my breath away! She was not as tall as I, and she was just about as heavy as I, but she was wearing a bright 3–color green dress with yellow rickrack on ruffles around the wide areas! In my culture, women my size were encouraged to wear black or navy blue—or maybe vertical stripes—in order to not be seen. The message was that we were unacceptable to the eyes of our peers. Here was someone who had not gotten THAT memo! I was delighted; and my decision to emulate her was the first of many changes Agnes caused in my life.

A few years later when I was contemplating a visit to our West African graduates as part of ARI’s evaluation process, Agnes was the one I contacted for help with logistics. In the end, I flew in and out of Accra and spent a week visiting graduates with Agnes. I found that she was then the principal of the Presbyterian Women’s Vocational School in Begoro, a small town in rural Ghana. The school taught “catering and tailoring” in the British tradition, and had a fine reputation for really focusing on the “girls” and what they really needed, rather than just teaching to the government tests.

But, asked Agnes, what could she do for the “tailoring” students to enrich their training? I found myself opening my mouth to say we could build a small sewing factory and that I had done so once and would be willing to take early retirement and do it again.

And so we did. In 2001 and 2002 I lived and worked at the school, under Agnes’s supervision. We trained ten young women in “international quality” (their term) sewing and designed school uniforms and clergy shirts of African prints and small handicrafts to sell. We had a wonderful time and created something that had never existed in Begoro before. Late every Friday afternoon Aggie and I would meet on the back veranda to share snack (beer, cheese, and crackers) and brainstorm.

I’ve been back once, after 5 years or so. And though there had been turnover among the staff, the Begoro Maid Sewing Factory was still functioning, providing jobs for the school graduates. Though Agnes retired on her 60th birthday, the factory continued on. Agnes did as well, starting a nursery school and daycare school in her community, thereby upgrading considerably the daytime experiences of the children of working parents in Begoro.

Agnes died last fall, and it hurt that I couldn’t be present for her funeral. Thanks to her, my life changed and grew rich in friendships, experiences, sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. In my understanding, that’s how ARI graduates work in this world. We ARI people share a culture that transcends borders and transforms the world, one new class at a time. It works.

Barbara Mueller has been a missionary, supporter, and loyal friend to ARI. She was an AFARI board member from 2005-2008, and continues to be active in the life of our organization.
I have engaged in organic farming in Pocyon, a state located in the northern part of South Korea. My farm (called Peace Tree Farm) is about 2 hectares, and I raise various vegetables such as tomato, chili, onion, garlic, wheat, barley, millet, Chinese cabbage, radish, etc. I also breed livestock, including 25 cows, 20 pigs, 5 goats (for milk), and honey bees. I practice both biological circulation and biodynamic agriculture, which are farming strategies derived from organic farming philosophy. In order to honor these practices and to keep the use of outside resources to a minimum, I make much of my livestock feed out of the weeds and vegetable trimmings gathered from the fields. Furthermore, I keep these fields fertilized with the manure produced by the livestock, which creates a sustainable, cyclical relationship. I also process tomato juice and make parched flour from barley, soybeans, and millet to generate profit for farm maintenance.

Many people come from all over Japan to learn this kind of farming. Some are just temporary visitors, whom I give lectures to about the merits of organic agriculture. Others are students who come to the farm for several days at a time to get some firsthand experience in fieldwork. These students learn many practical skills during their stay, including observational livestock categorization, manure-fertilizer production, and farm management. From a more philosophical perspective, they are also taught about the ways in which people, animals, and soil are all connected and interdependent on each other; if the soil isn’t healthy, people and animals cannot live in a healthy way. All this knowledge is of critical importance, and I am very interested in this place as an educational experience for children. My concern isn’t just the children, however. I welcome all people who wish to take up organic farming, and I’m glad to teach them to understand the importance of agriculture in our modern world.

Even though it has been 28 years since my graduation from the ARI training program, ARI in my heart is still just like a hometown. Over the course of my year there, I had the wonderful opportunity to work with friends from various cultural backgrounds, and in doing so learned to live in harmony with people different from myself. I also learned effective methods of food processing, which I use to this day to financially support my endeavors. As useful as these skills have been, though, just as important was the knowledge of leadership I gained from Takami Sensei. Real leadership, he taught us, requires self-sacrifice, humility, and insight. These qualities in turn facilitate the development of skills and courage, which are used to find solutions to the problems of the people you serve. Takami taught us these kinds of things: that farming is a spiritual practice. I am praying for everyone staying at ARI and to all who are a part of its global community.
ARI's 2018 Philippines Study Tour was a fruitful trip for both tour participants and staff members, as we were able to witness the depth of ARI graduates' devotion to marginalized people. It was an impactful experience to see how the ARI training was being applied to facilitate transformation in their communities.

We were constantly energized by the friendliness and cheerfulness of the Filipino people. Wherever we visited we were welcomed with tables full of wonderful homemade meals or merienda (snack between meals). Such hospitality was present even in poor villages, who always treated us as well as their means would allow. This behavior touched us deeply and made us feel at home.

We learned much from the graduates who are dealing with many difficult issues faced by Filipino society: environmental concerns, street children, discrimination of minorities, and poverty. It was shocking to see such harsh realities but heartening to observe how graduates are tackling such issues.

One such graduate is Frida Laban (2017), who has achieved remarkable changes through her work with the Aeta Children’s Home. She has reorganized and refurbished its library, taught students and staff about organic agriculture, and established for it a beautiful terraced farm named F·A·I·T·H Garden (Food Always In The Home) using the knowledge she gained at ARI. Frida believes that the skills she offers will be important to the future of the Aeta children, and her ambition is to eventually go out with her fellow staff and teach organic farming methods to the larger Aeta community.

Another graduate we visited was Mr. Joel Aviar (1986), from the Zambales region. When he was young, street children were a major problem in his area. He decided to tackle this issue by traveling to the slums and trying to communicate with them face-to-face. Gradually, he began to take care of some of these children at home, as his hope was to give as many as possible a safe environment, a warm meal, and an opportunity to receive an education. This is how Jireh Children’s Home, an orphanage that operates to this day, was founded.

I cannot introduce all the graduates I met. However, there is a common trait which they all shared: a selfless devotion to their communities. What gives them the courage to put others before themselves? Japanese tour participants especially must have asked this question. In Japan, most people have an individualistic lifestyle. Filipinos, on the other hand, are strongly connected to their communities. Ariel (a 2005 participant) once told me, “We Filipinos are strong because we have trust in nature, neighbors, and God.” This is something we Japanese have forgotten in the name of development.

Lastly, on behalf of Study Tour group, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the people I met in the Philippines for their warm welcomes. Meeting all the ARI graduates on this tour has left us in awe. I appreciated ARI for this opportunity.
John Watton, a field operator for NCM Canada, and his wife Laurie visited ARI for a few hours in early winter 2016. Despite the brevity of this encounter, a seed was planted in John’s mind about how to connect ARI and his team in the Asia Pacific region. This came to fruition a few months later, when he contacted ARI about the possibility of allowing NCM missionaries to use our campus as the venue for a historic meeting.

John describes their time at ARI:

“Our first Asia Pacific Field NCM Coordinators Meeting is now in the history books. It turned out to be a wonderful time of fellowship, conversation, listening, community, fun, etc. as we experienced it all together. Our venue was the Asian Rural Institute near Nasushiobara Station north of Tokyo. Our theme for this gathering was ‘community’ and we were treated to a welcome and inclusion with people who seriously embrace a life in community.

“arnt. In addition to our program, ARI gave 3 workshops that helped us to understand ARI (Key Concepts), understand how ‘technology’ can be adapted to our communities (Appropriate Technology), and the Great Curry Challenge: cooking supper in different groups to practice team work and to connect our thinking of where our food comes from and what it takes to get it to the table.

Through witnessing and participating with all of you at ARI, I would like to believe that we also grew together in many ways.

All of God’s richest blessings to all at ARI... as you do what you do... and do it well.”

I began looking for volunteers who shared my vision and was able to find 9 interested individuals from Germany, the USA, Japan, and the Philippines. After several months of brainstorming and online meetings via Skype, the group finally developed a mission: “to create a unified network of past and present volunteers to preserve past wisdom, future inspiration, and provide a foundation for continued support for the Asian Rural Institute.”

**AVA Goals**

1. **Documentation**
   - collect stories of past volunteers about their experiences in ARI.
   - get reports from past volunteers about their current activities and how ARI affects their lives.

2. **Communication**
   - connect & present ARI to past volunteers by sharing updates and pictures.
   - organize volunteer reunions whenever and wherever possible.

3. **Sharing & Motivation**
   - convince people of the importance of volunteering.
   - to provide a space to listen and share experiences about volunteering.

4. **Support**
   - visit graduates if possible and share their report.
   - be of support to ARI through future programs, projects and fundraising.

**May Meeting**

For the 45th founding Anniversary of ARI, the ARI Volunteers Association Group organized a volunteer homecoming for all previous and present volunteers and interns for this May 4 and 5, 2018. I hope that this is just a beginning of something bigger.

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The Gospel for all Human Beings

Takami Sensei composed this article in 1974, two years after the official foundation of ARI. It was written as an appeal to the Japanese Christian community at large, imploring them to throw open the windows of their shuttered faith and embrace humanity in all its spiritual nuance.

Asian Rural Institute, Southeast Asia Rural Leaders' Training course was held on the 14th of May, 1973, and started the work of serving the people in Asia. All the attendants of the ceremony sang hymns, listened to the words of the Bible, and joined the prayers. They were old and young, and some represented various domains in the society, but most of them were non-Christians.

Today most of the gatherings at Christian churches are held only by Christians. There I find the inclination to a "monopolization of the gospel." Have Christian groups in Asia as a minority become ghettoized? We should not become like that. The gospel is for all human beings. The gospel should be spread to every person on this earth. The joy of the gospel has to be shared by all the people. I believe that the fact that ARI's opening ceremony was held in solemnity with participation from many non-Christians was divine providence and I am thankful for it.

Our target is all human beings; therefore, the ARI Rural Leaders’ Training course is open to all human beings. This year, all the participants from Southeast Asia are Christians; but in the future, we will have Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and others. Under one roof, we will eat together, work together, study together, and prepare together to serve people. In such a life, we will have true dialogues with people of different faiths and live together, having personal interactions and relations. It would be a great failure for us as Christians if we cannot testify our faith of believing in Jesus Christ in such a life. ARI hopes to continue to exist as a place to create a dialogue among different faiths.

The purpose of the Asian Rural Institute is, rooted in the love of Jesus Christ, to nurture rural leaders who commit themselves both to the upliftment of rural community people and to the building of a just and peaceful world. When I explain this vision, many people react saying that it is a huge task and that it should be a governmental responsibility. We believe that this task is truly necessary for the improvement of the life of Asians and that it is wrong to depend on a government or nation to complete it. It is the task that everyone of us should be involved in personally in one way or another. In this way, the idea of ‘that we may live together’ shall be materialized widely.