

Kurigasawa Baptist Church, February 15, 2026

"57 years since the Start of Evangelism"

Acts 18:5-10

Pastor Kazumitsu Kimura

Our Kurigasawa Church marks the 57th anniversary of its founding this February. Today's service commemorates that milestone. As shown in the earlier slideshow, I met with Mr. Yoshikazu Minohara, a founding member of this church, in Fukuoka last February. I learned from him how Kurigasawa Church began 57 years ago. Back in 1969, land development work had begun in the Koganehara area, carving up the mountains to create residential lots. Our church was the very first building erected in this vicinity. Consequently, it is said that if you looked north from the slope west of the Chiba Bank building at that time, you could see the church standing there. With few houses and residents around then, the General Secretary of the Baptist Federation at the time reportedly joked, "Are you planning to evangelize the raccoon dogs?" However, over the years, house after house was built, and today it is considered one of Matsudo City's most established residential areas.

Earlier in the slides, we saw a picture of Mr. Minohara standing before children in Sunday school. Mr. Minohara was born in Tokyo. He attended Kyushu University, graduated from its graduate school of agriculture, and then took a job working at a research institute in Kashiwa City. He said he heard God's question, "Won't you dedicate yourself and become a pastor?" many times, but he kept refusing, saying, "Please spare me." Commuting from Tokyo to Kashiwa proved difficult, so he moved to the Hikarigaoka Housing Complex, where residents were just beginning to move in. There, he took over the Sunday children's meetings started by a couple he knew. Despite it being public housing, the residents reportedly turned a blind eye to him using the community hall to run Sunday school for the children. There, Mr. Minohara held Sunday school for children in the mornings and Sunday worship services for adults in the afternoons. The worship location later moved from Hikarigaoka Housing Complex to the second floor of a sewing class building, but eventually, a prefabricated building was erected in Mr. Tomihira's garden, which became the worship space. Last spring, I met Mr. Tomihira's daughter at the morning prayer meeting of the Catholic Matsudo Church. When I showed her an old photograph, she exclaimed, "That's Uncle Minohara!" and was filled with nostalgia. I asked her, "Please come to the church for next year's commemorative worship service and share your memories from that time," but it was regrettable to receive a polite letter declining the invitation.

In 1969, Hikarigaoka Mission Station was officially recognized as a mission station directly under the Federation, with Ichikawa Church serving as its parent body. The following February 1970, Reverend Takeshi Kajita was dispatched. Under this bright and energetic pastor, Sunday worship services were held, the church grew in strength, and in August of that year, the first church building was constructed at its current location. The first church building (now considered the old church building) was a white structure with a cross towering on its roof, a building that looked very much like a church should.

The first pastor, Reverend Takeshi Kajita, was a robust, bright, and energetic man. While his children attended Neguchi Elementary School, he himself became the PTA president, deepening his connections with the local community. When I visited Fukuoka last year, I met the second pastor, Reverend Shun Matsumi. According to Reverend Matsumi, Reverend Kajita loved exploring department store basements. You all know what's sold in department store basements, right? They sell slightly upscale food items. He apparently enjoyed browsing those foods and ingredients. In fact, Reverend Kajita himself loved cooking, and some of you here may have even been treated to his home-cooked meals. Furthermore, Mrs. Midori Kajita held gatherings with local residents and participated whenever she could. The newly developed Koganehara Housing Complex lacked proper sewage systems at the time. When heavy rains fell, the road in front would

flood, turning into a pool. To prevent cars coming down the slope from getting soaked, it's said Reverend Kajita would strip down, stand in the road, and raise his hands to stop drivers from coming down the slope. In this way, the church gradually took root in this area during the 1970s, expanding alongside the development of this emerging residential district. I believe the present exists because of the work of these pioneers of faith. Subsequently, Kurigasawa Church held a church organizational meeting in April 1974, becoming a church with its own statement of faith and church constitution and bylaws. This marked its independence as a church. Following the first pastor, Rev. Kajita, the church invited Rev. Toshimitsu Matsumi as the second pastor, Rev. Toshio Kawakami as the third, Rev. Kaname Yoshitaka as the fourth, Rev. Yukio Yamada as the fifth, Rev. Chiyo Murakami as the sixth, and then Rev. Kimura as the seventh to serve as pastor. In 1969, I was still in elementary school. It wasn't the convenient era we have now. I recall that even road paving was not fully developed. In such times, the church began its evangelistic work in this area and has continued its ministry of proclaiming the gospel ever since.

Today's reading from Acts 18 describes Paul's pioneering missionary work in the city of Corinth. Corinth was the largest city in Greece at the time, boasting a population of 600,000. However, when Paul boldly proclaimed in the Jewish synagogue there that "Jesus is the Messiah," he faced fierce opposition from the Jews and was barred from preaching in the synagogue. After being barred from preaching the gospel in the synagogue, where did he proclaim Christ? He spoke the word in the homes of believers. The "man named Titus Justus, a worshipper of God" mentioned in verse 7 was a Gentile with a Greek name. Moreover, his house was next to the synagogue. Hearing Paul preach, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord along with his entire household. To illustrate with our church: imagine Sunday worship suddenly beginning in the house right next door. As Paul proclaimed the message of salvation there, imagine the entire family of the church's representative becoming members of that neighboring congregation and supporting Paul's ministry. Thus began the Corinthian church. Despite facing many difficult challenges, it would bear fruit as the largest church in Paul's ministry to the Gentiles (his second and third missions). One night, Paul heard the Lord's words in a vision: "Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent... for there are many in this city who belong to me."

These words apply to our church as well. In this very town where Kurigasawa Church stands, there are many of the Lord's people. Believing this, we continue to proclaim the gospel. As we mark 57 years since our founding, both our nation and the world are undergoing unprecedented, profound changes. Amidst such a shifting society, the church will continue to proclaim God's word—the unchanging, true word of God.

We pray.