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Christianity in Action

The Legacy of Paul Rusch
by Sandra Ferguson McPhee

On Sept. 1, 1923, the great Kanto earthquake destroyed the city of Tokyo. Into this devastation strode a young man, raised in the Episcopal Church in Louisville, Ky., a veteran of World War I, and a member of a team sent to rebuild the Tokyo and Yokohama YMCAs. He made his home in Japan for the rest of his life.

Paul Rusch viewed Japan as a vast mission field, where he could spread the message of Christianity in action, and encourage Japan's conversion to the ideals of Western democracy. After a year in Japan, he accepted an offer to teach economics at Rikkyo (St. Paul's) University in Tokyo, the only Anglican university in Japan. The Rikkyo motto, "For God and Country," focused his life as a missionary. He accepted as his personal goal the use of Christian principles to realize God's kingdom on earth for the benefit of Japan. At Rikkyo, he gathered around him a group of young men

and by conversation, prayer, and example nurtured their Christian faith.

Mr. Rusch started a chapter of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew at Rikkyo in November, 1927. By the mid-1930s, he sought a rural location where he could take young BSA members for summer camps which would emphasize spiritual training, physical activity and recreation. A site on the slopes of Mt. Yatsugataki near the village of Kiyosato was selected. Camp Seisen Ryo was dedicated in July, 1938. The Japanese entrance into World War II halted summer camps for the BSA, and on Dec. 9, 1941, Mr. Rusch was interned as an enemy alien. He was repatriated to the United States in 1942 and attended the Military Intelligence Service Language School in Minnesota. There he developed close friendships with many of the Nisei who had been recruited to the language school.

Returning to Tokyo with Gen. Douglas MacArthur's staff after the war, Mr. Rusch located many of his old friends and began in earnest to build a model rural community. The Kiyosato Educational Experiment Project (KEEP) was born in 1946, with the rebuilding of Seisen Ryo lodge. Centered around an Anglican church, KEEP grew to include a clinic, nursery school, farm training school and lodge. For three decades it grew and prospered, supported in part by donations from members of the American Committee for KEEP (the ACK). He returned to North America almost every year, visiting churches, preaching, teaching, and soliciting contributions for his experiment in "muscular Christianity."

Mr. Rusch died in Tokyo on Dec. 12, 1979, but the story of KEEP does not end there. The power of God's love shines in the transformation of KEEP during the past 20 years. Paul Rusch's successors at KEEP have developed his legacy to meet the world's changing needs.

By the early 1980s, KEEP had established a community development relationship through the Episcopal Diocese of the Northern Philippines with the village of Tulgao, located in northern Luzon. Tulgao is remote and isolated, with no industry or market for its products. KEEP has partnered with the people of Tulgao to implement projects deemed essential by the villagers. The first was the creation of a water delivery system with faucets, each serving several households. Currently, work is proceeding on a micro-hydro-electric system. Each household will have 50 watts of power. Villagers have been trained to install the system and the cost is being shared by the people of Tulgao, KEEP, and the ACK. In the planning stages is a reforestation project that will help to rebalance the ecosystem in the region.

Paul Rusch was dedicated to the concept of grassroots self-help community development and saw KEEP as a school for democracy. This approach to mission focuses on caring for God's children as a means of demonstrating the good news of Jesus Christ. o

Sandra Ferguson McPhee is the administrator of the American Committee for KEEP, Inc.