

On Beat—Off Beat

'Mominoki Gakuen' Built Thanks To Generous Gifts

By Takeo Matsumoto
Staff Writer

About a fortnight ago, more than 100 people were gathered on a grassy hill behind the scenic layout of Hirono golf course to celebrate the birth of Mominoki Gakuen, an institute for mentally retarded children.

Every celebrant present was naturally smiling radiantly. The occasion, however, meant something more than a just another happy event—at least for three of the celebrants because it marked the culmination of a dream extending over nearly two decades.

"It seems to be a clear manifestation that Providence was working with us. It was simply a miracle. That's the only way we can explain it," reminisced Shigemori Sakashita, 36-year-old superintendent and founder of the institute, which at the same time is a fruit of fellowship between Christians, Buddhists and those not interested in religion.

The humanitarian young man has been working for the better welfare of handicapped children for the past 15 years, and is known as the right-hand man of Brother Zeno Zebrowski, a Franciscan missionary.

Because of his devotion to the help of the poor and orphans, the well-known missionary whose humanity has been practised all over Japan is affectionately called the "Father of the Orphans, and a Friend of the Poor."

The two have been working in combination in many places, and their latest achievement has come in the form of the Mominoki Gakuen, a true revelation of God's Will and the goodwill of men.



Sakashita, seated in the foreground, is enjoying sunshine with children and staffers on the grassy premises of the institute.



Kanji Funagami, donor of the land.

For some time, Sakashita had been looking for suitable land on which to build a home for mentally retarded children. Some offers came in, but they



Father Zeno.

failed to materialize. Secret word came to him that a big landowner in Kande, near Hirono golf course, wished to offer his land for some

charity project. The ambitious philanthropist met the landowner and saw three prospective sites offered by the old man.

"I picked the best one, most conveniently located and suited for the purpose. It was surprised and overwhelmed with joy when Mr. Funagami gave me his assent without a moment's hesitation," explained Sakashita, the non-Buddhist and non-Christian founder.

Land Contributor

Kanji Funagami, 72, the charity-minded farmer, who offered some 2,000-tsubo of farmland, told The Mainichi Daily News: "I'm a Buddhist and devotee of Saint Kobo. Just about a week before Mr. Sakashita appeared, I got a revelation from the Saint saying that a great social work would be sent to me and that's the man who should get my land. Then he came, and that is it."

To make sure that no opposition would come to the offer from his family, Sakashita met his sons who gave unanimous agreement to the idea. In fact, Funagami's third son, Totomusi, 29, has joined the institute to help Sakashita.

The land being secured in November, 1964, construction began immediately by Tomura Kogyo K.K., Osaka. When completed, the company joined the chorus of goodwill by cutting down the construction cost from \$12 million to \$8.7 million, which was covered by some \$5 million raised by Sakashita and his immediate props, and \$3 million furnished by Kobe City.

"The remainder (\$1.7 million) has to be covered by donations. Brother Zeno has collected some \$320,000 so far," said the charity leader, who admitted that he had to persuade his sister to "appropriate" her funds for marriage.

To furnish the building, many generous contributions were sent. Among the contributors were: Obayashi Kashiya, president of Nada Seiken K.K., who gave boilers (\$400,000) for the kitchen and bath, Nomi Eosai Kogyo K.K., who donated fire alarm equipment (\$300,000), a bedding supply store in Tokyo which furnished 25 sets of sleeping quilts, and Toshiba Jimuki K.K., a Japanese typewriter, etc.

A Spanish mission school, Aitoku Gakuen, in Terumi also gave its old kindergarten structure, which was dismantled and transported by a group of young volunteers. Sakashita told the MDN that he has already secured offers from 80 students of Waseda University and Nippon Women's College, Tokyo to come and help build a clinic with the Aitoku materials August 20-30.

13 Children

The welfare home now has 13 handicapped children, 10 boys and three girls ranging in age from 11 to 15. The 13 staffers, including five men, work on an almost round-the-clock basis, sharing the rooms with the youngsters.

It is the self-assigned duty of the staffers to see that the children are in the best of health and clean because some can hardly control their own excrement.

Staffers who come to the institution often have problems of their own. Most of them come with their hearts inflated with ideals and a heavy sense of

self-appointed mission. But, at one time or other they are destined to frustration.

Then comes Sakashita's order to retire onto the privy "for meditation and brainwashing." Hung on the walls of the latrine—a room of meditation—are posters bearing such words as: "Share joy with children," "Monopolize the sorrows and cry as much as you want in privacy," "Never show wet eyes to the children."

Because of the flaws in society here, an estimated 1,200,000 to 1,500,000 "forgotten populations" are left uncared for across the nation. Establishments available are said to be able to meet only about 3-4 per cent of the need.

"We are expecting to accept by September some 50 more kids, which is our capacity. Our biggest headache is how to 'recruit' the staff," sighed the go-ahead superintendent.

Slowly but steadily, results are being won. Some children swallowed and ate tooth paste, taking it for some candy. After months of patient and affectionate training, that has stopped, noted Sakashita.

He has 10 children vocal; they grow up to return to society in. But it is on the other hand that society can adjust their need.

If everything inmates of the trouble. The owner is even 15,000 dollars build an excellent "graduate" school Gakuen stay on reaching to automatically stay in the law.

Ever come to a working colony; plan given his life