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PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT
For Immediate Release

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STORIES AND SONGS OF HOPE AND NEW BEGINNINGS
Priest Shyuko Katayama from Kesennuma, Miyagi, Japan Visits San Francisco

San Francisco (March 24, 2016) – During the week of February 24-March 3, 2016, the Priest Shyuko Katayama and representatives from the Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA) and NPO Hamawarasu visited organizations and schools in San Francisco. They shared their experiences and thoughts on the events and aftermath of the massive earthquake and tsunami that occurred five years ago on March 11, 2011 on their coastal town of Kesennuma in Miyagi Prefecture, Japan.

Priest Katayama, whose hometown is Kesennuma City, is the Head Priest at the Jifukuji Zen Buddhist Temple, which is located close to the Pacific Ocean and blocks away from Kesennuma Bay. On March 11, 2011, he lost many of his members and his temple was damaged more so by the tsunami than the initial earthquake. To help inspire the survivors Priest Katayama created the motto, "*megenai, nigenai, kujikenai*" – We will not break; we will not leave; and we will not give up! In 2012, he also restarted his jazz group Kasappa and began the "*Umibe no Mori o Tsukurou*" (Green Wall) Project campaign to wish for the recovery of the disaster area and to create a brighter future for the people of Japan. *The Green Wall Project* was his vision of creating a green wall of trees instead of concrete sea walls to protect against future tsunamis.

Along with Priest Katayama, Sayaka Azuma from SVA and Kazuki Kasahara from the newly formed NPO Hamawarasu came to share their stories, give updates on Kesennuma and share their plans for the new organization. The JCCCNC's Northern Japan Earthquake Relief Fund (NJERF) supported the SVA in its recovery and rebuilding stages because of their commitment to live/work in Kesennuma for several years. The SVA's time in Kesennuma is winding down but the newly formed NPO Hamawarasu has taken over the ongoing and successful programs that SVA initiated. Their focus is to empower children with the abilities to live, grow and work with nature, particularly in/near the sea, where many were once fearful and insecure after the 3.11 events.

The group's itinerary included visits to Rosa Parks Elementary School's Japanese Bilingual and Bicultural Program, where they spoke to classes in grades 3rd-5th; Kokoro Assisted Living; San Francisco Buddhist Church; six Japanese Language classes at Abraham Lincoln High School; The Sequoias Retirement Community; and the Nihonmachi Little Friends Afterschool Program.

Their presentations included a touching visual presentation and inspirational music created by Katayama with encouraging lyrics of hope for the residents of his hometown. Richard Grange, Director of Activities at Kokoro, mentioned, *"It was a moving experience for all who attended, helping to create feelings of goodwill and connectedness among people living far apart from each other. It was an honor to have them share their experiences, lessons, and messages of hope with the residents of Kokoro.*

The visitors enjoyed their full day at Lincoln High School commenting how "engaged and interested the students were." Koichi Sano, a teacher at Lincoln appreciated the visit and

sent this note, "*Thank you for giving us the rare opportunity for our students to meet people from Kesennuma affected by the events of 3.11. The first-hand stories shared by Priest Katayama were overwhelming, yet their presentation was very captivating, inspirational, and energizing. They left us all with hope for further recovery with a sense of duty.*"

On Saturday, February 27, community members attended a daruma (rock) making workshop followed by the presentation of stories and songs by Priest Katayama. He shared background of the daruma and how it was modeled after the Bodhidharma, the founder of his Zen sect of Buddhism. The famous saying about the daruma is, "nana korobi ya oki," which means "fall down seven times, get up eight." Because of its shape and the ability to return to its original position even when pushed over, it is seen as a symbol of perseverance and good luck.

Workshop attendees were able to create their own daruma rocks which Priest Katayama has been selling at his temple to raise awareness of 3.11and his motto "*megenai, nigenai, kujikenai.*" He handpicked the rocks from the shoreline in Kesennuma for participants to paint. Priest Katayama was amazed at the creativity of the rocks painted that day by those from age 10 to some in their late 80s. They included daruma with sunglasses and sayings, "hope," and "kokoro," which means "heart," in Japanese.

Paul Osaki, Executive Director of the JCCCNC, who created his own daruma said, "*I felt the energy from this stone that came from the sea – the same sea that devastated the community in Kesennuma. Knowing that Priest Katayama continues to go to the shore to find these treasures should be an inspiration to all of us of the*

perseverance and resiliency of those in Tohoku. It surely has reminded me that we must never forget."

The JCCCNC will continue its 5th Anniversary Programs with a project highlighting cultural arts including the kokeshi, daruma and akabeko in September. A special Japan Cultural Tour in October is also being planned. The tour will visit the six prefectures in the Tohoku region.

To learn more about our upcoming activities, the Fall Japan Tour or see photos from our Daruma Worskhop, please contact the JCCCNC at (415) 567-5505 or visit www.jcccnc.org.

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About the Northern Japan Earthquake Relief Fund

In response to the March 11, 2011disaster, the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC) established the Northern Japan Earthquake Relief Fund (NJERF). The fund was initiated on the same day and would raise over $4 million by the end of the fundraising campaign. Over 13,000 donors and 25,000 on causes.com contributed to NJERF and various organizations, community non-profits, businesses, schools and private individuals held over 300 fundraising events.

NJERF was divided into three phases – Relief, Recovery and Rebuilding – and the fund continued for five years. The JCCCNC will be officially sun setting the NJERF program this year, but will continue to visit and develop programs with the organizations that it has been working with for the past five years. Every year since 3/11, the JCCCNC has sent delegations to the Sendai and Kesennuma areas. In fall of 2016, a cultural tour to visit all of the six prefectures is being planned. In 2017, a delegation of Junior High School youth will participate in an inter-cultural exchange program with other youth from the affected areas.

About the JCCCNC

Envisioned by the Japanese American community, JCCCNC will be an everlasting foundation of our Japanese American ancestry, cultural heritage, histories and traditions. The JCCCNC strives to meet the evolving needs of the Japanese American community through programs, affordable services and facility usage. The JCCCNC is a non-profit community center based in San Francisco.