

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

My name is Junkichi Murayama. I am honored to have been appointed Chairman starting in the April 2017 academic year. I spent 15 years at Jiyu Gakuen, starting with the Kindergarten, which was then located in Mejiro; and now after a half century I have returned to my alma mater. Since graduating from Jiyu Gakuen, I have been involved with music and teaching (on every level from pre-kindergarten to graduate school). What I learned as a student at Jiyu Gakuen has provided the foundation for how I think and for how I live ever since. My education taught me to try to see the true nature of things whenever possible, to pay attention to what is going on around me as I explore ways to creatively live life in my own way, even in trying circumstances, and, most importantly, to live according to my feelings guided by Jesus Christ.



MURAYAMA, JUNKICHI
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

As I assume my duties from this academic year, I am committed to helping every person who will pass through Jiyu Gakuen in following their own unique path and in living an authentic life only they can live. I look forward to your support as I work to achieve this goal.

Being there for the children: the lesson of the piano theater

A scene from one of many that I have experienced over the years.

“Knock, knock.” During a break, I hear an excited knock on my door. It is a group of elementary school students coming to visit my room. I keep the room dark. The light is on the grand piano, keyboard lid open. Amid this enchanted setting, I greet the children bursting into my room.

The children ask, “What is today’s story?”

“Hmmm... how about exploring inside the school?”

And then we start to set up what we call a “piano theater.”

The children arrange little gadgets they have made on top of the piano; and when the impromptu piano begins, their faces sparkle. Some of the children play the piano together with me, others put together a story, while still others bring little gadgets they made themselves. Everyone has fun in their own way, and the story builds.

Through activities like this, I sought as much as possible to become a part of the world that they found interesting and fascinating, rather than pulling children into my world. With that

in mind, I would settle on the broad framework of a story, and then the children and I would have fun developing it further. Indeed, it was because they always enjoyed it that the children came to my place during break time.

One day during our piano performance, I heard the conversation of some of the children as they gleefully joined in with monster paper puppets that they had made at home.

“Mr. Murayama’s monster shouldn’t come out here. It’ll come out much later!”

While I tried to respect their feelings and made an effort to make the paper puppet performance exciting as possible for them, the children—who knew how I would react from how I improvised in our play in the past—tried to maximize the excitement by carefully deciding when to join in.

If adults and children each have their own world and their own culture, then between these two unmingled cultures there must be gentle points of contact where these two worlds draw close to one another. Paying due attention to these little points of contact is vital to bringing peace of mind to children and ensuring their steady growth. I believe that education begins with valuing little things such as these.

School is the society where the next generation lives

Japan’s society is aging, and children are now a minority. The problem posed by Japan’s aging society has been viewed overwhelmingly from the adult point of view; namely, that there are fewer and fewer young people to support the elderly. But from the child’s perspective, it is we adults who make them feel uncomfortable—although we are unaware of this because society in general revolves around adults compared to several decades ago when there were more children. Given this situation, rather than the demands of adult society or what is best for adults, where can we build a society in which the presence of the young people who will lead it in the future is truly valued and in which young people feel comfortable? In our present age, I believe that place is none other than our schools. If we put into practice in our schools valuing each other, developing strong skills, and joining these skills together in a cooperative effort to make life better, we have already laid the foundation for the society in which the next generation will live.

Student life in Jiyu Gakuen itself is a mirror of society. We are committed to sending students into the world who live authentically by following their own unique path and living a life only they can live no matter what the future brings and no matter the circumstances around them.