

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan Copies Communist China - State Seizure of Churches

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June 30, 2025



Worship service in the newly renovated sanctuary of the [Family Federation](#) Isehara Church - Isehara City, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan



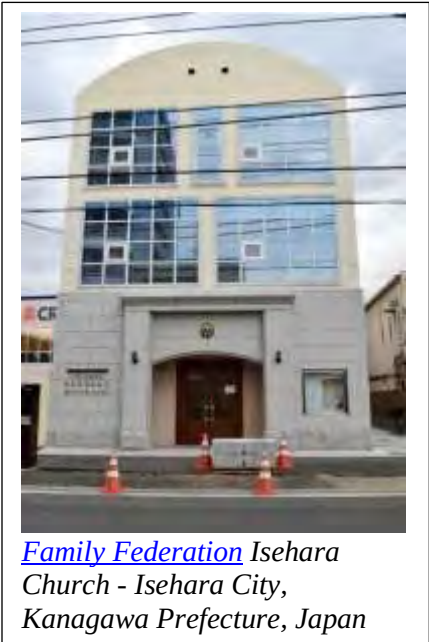
Japanese state using tactics reminiscent of totalitarian regimes like China and North Korea: Believers who have done nothing wrong face seizure of the church they built with their own hands

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[Series] Where Will the Believers Go? The Issue of the Family Federation's Dissolution and Its Corporate Facilities (Church Properties) (Part 3)

"Seizing the Church Is Heartless"

Isehara: A New Church Built by Having Discussions



[Family Federation](#) Isehara Church - Isehara City, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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Located in central Kanagawa Prefecture, Isehara City lies just north of Isehara Station, where one can see Mt. Ōyama spreading out from the Tanzawa mountains. This region has long been known for its strong grassroots religious traditions, such as pilgrimages to Mt. Ōyama since the Edo period.

About a 10-minute walk toward Mt. Ōyama brings you to a white stone gate marked with the name of the "Isehara Church" of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly [Unification Church](#)). This building is one of the [organization's](#) corporate-owned facilities.

In early June, around 60 believers gathered in the second-floor sanctuary for Sunday service. After the service, the preacher shook hands with each attendee, smiling and engaging warmly. The church, which has about 200 members, only had its dedication ceremony on 22nd September of last year. The long, narrow plot of about 250 square meters faces a busy road, and the three-story building - formerly housing banks and other offices - was renovated into a church facility.

Inside, a wall displays the names of contributors to the "Church Dedication Fund". The nameplates show families and individuals who donated to transform the building into a church. Church staff member Tomihiko Horikawa (堀川富彦, 62) explained that contributions were made "within each family's means, without overburdening anyone". Over 100 people donated to help purchase the facility.

To build the new church, the Isehara Church formed a "Dedication Committee" in March 2023. After each Sunday service, committee meetings were held where 24 representatives of the congregation discussed details like the renovations to be made.

Teruo Yamazaki (山崎輝夫, 74), a believer who worked tirelessly as the committee chair, emphasized, "This church reflects the voices of believers - from the floor plan to the wallpaper. That's why we're deeply attached to it,"

The committee reportedly held more than 50 meetings to finalize the details.

The previous facility, used for over 30 years, was a rental property in poor condition, with cracked walls and the appearance of an abandoned building. Hana Sato (pseudonym, 28), a second-generation believer whose parents are members, said,

"It was the kind of place you'd hesitate to enter. Compared to that, the new, clean building is a world apart."

As a committee member, she also gave input on things like wallpaper design. When the new facility was completed, she said she was "truly happy" and smiled as she showed off the youth room where other second-generation believers gather - a room she feels especially attached to because her ideas were included.



However, if the dissolution of the [organization](#) is decided, liquidation procedures will begin, and corporate assets will be frozen. During this process, religious activities in buildings registered under the corporate name will, in principle, be prohibited. Liquidation is expected to take at least one year, potentially several. Until a decision is made on whether the property will be sold, religious activities by church members will be restricted.

Sato expressed her sorrow, saying:

"Now, second-generation members gather in the youth room for lunch, spending more time together. We've gotten close enough to talk about things we never could before. Just thinking about losing this place is heartbreaking."

She added:

"Some say it's okay - we can meet somewhere else - but that's far from easy. There are things we can only do in this space, which belongs solely to us. Even without making specific plans, we can come here, relax, connect without worrying about time, people, or surroundings, and expand what we can do. This facility we poured our hearts into - built through so much effort - must never be taken from us."

There remains concern about whether the voices of second-generation believers - who chose their faith of their own will - will be heard. Yamazaki also raised his voice:

"If this facility, less than a year after its dedication, is taken away and sold, that would be a heartless decision that completely ignores the voices of the believers on the ground."

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“Fears of Elderly Believers Dying Alone”

Suginami – Over 100 People Gather Daily

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

See part 1: [“Liquidation Is Like Being Robbed of Our Assets”](#)

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A 12-minute walk from JR Nishi-Ogikubo Station in Tokyo’s Suginami Ward takes you through a residential neighborhood past antique shops and Showa-era bakeries. There, a four-story pink building appears, marked by a large sign reading: “Religious Corporation [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) Suginami Family Church.”

Inside the entrance, a lobby with desks and chairs is lively with 5 or 6 women chatting. The building, which belongs to the Suginami Church with about 700 affiliated members, was purchased by the [organization](#) 15 years ago. Worship services are held on Sundays, and even on weekdays, around 100 people come and go.



Demonstrators in Suginami, Tokyo 1st May 2025, protesting the dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#). Photo: [FFWPU](#)

However, if the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) is finalized, the property could be lost during liquidation procedures.

Yosuke Yokokawa (横川洋介), the church’s leader and pastor, argues,

“Losing the church is not just a matter of losing a place of worship.”

He notes concerns that religious events such as the *Seonghwa Ceremony* (akin to a funeral) and prayer meetings could be banned in regular facilities due to regulations, making it difficult to find alternative venues. Yokokawa emphasized,

“The biggest loss would be the disappearance of the community formed around the church facilities.”

He added, “Looking at the congregation, I believe their faith wouldn’t waver even if the physical church were gone.”

However, he expressed concern that “losing the church means losing the opportunity to gather, and the community would vanish.”



Demonstration by young members of the [Family Federation](#) outside the national parliament on 6th May 2025, protesting the authorities’ attempt to dissolve the [religious organization](#) and seize its assets. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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Religious practices would shift to the home, but in families where not all members are believers, he stressed,

"There are limits to what believers without family support can do at home."

A long-time female member explained,

"For those who don't have their family's understanding, the church has become a spiritual sanctuary."

This is especially true for elderly believers. Yokokawa voiced concerns:

"Many elderly members could end up dying alone."

Elderly believers who have lost their spouses and live alone often visit the church two to three times a month, providing an opportunity to check in on one another. Without the church, there's a risk of unnoticed solitary deaths, with individuals eventually being buried anonymously in unmarked graves.

On a Sunday in mid-June, a youth gathering was held at the Suginami Church. Separate from worship, it was called a *Restoration Meeting*, a monthly event for young believers. That day, around 15 men and women in their 20s and 30s – working adults – attended. They drove together to a riverside in northern Saitama Prefecture and enjoyed a friendly game of park golf, their laughter echoing across the area.



Demonstration by young members of the [Family Federation](#) in Kyoto on 22nd June 2025, protesting the authorities' attempt to dissolve the [religious organization](#) and seize its assets. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Between rounds, they spoke about the dissolution order.

"The church is part of my life. I can't imagine it disappearing."

These were the strong words of 22-year-old *Saki Tanaka* (alias). Born to a Filipino father and a Japanese mother, Tanaka is what's known as a "second-generation believer" and is in her first year working at the Suginami Church as a [Family Federation](#) staff member.

Tanaka said her turning point came in her second year of high school when her father collapsed in front of her. He had a brain hemorrhage. Though he survived, he was left partially paralyzed, and their family life changed dramatically.

She recalls wondering in despair, "Why did this have to happen only to my father?" What kept her going through that painful time was "having a place where second-generation believers could gather." For Tanaka, the church became her emotional anchor during those hard times.

She explains, "Even if the Suginami Church disappears, the relationships among believers will remain," but she also appealed that,

"There must never come a time when we have no place or environment to connect through our faith."

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Featured image above: Entrance to the Suginami Church of the Family Federation – Suginami Ward, Tokyo. Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda (豊田剛)

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