

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japanese Regime Buries Key Church Records

Knut Holdhus
April 6, 2026



Hiroshi Ogasawara, born in 1963 in Hiroshima Prefecture, graduated from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Tokyo in 1988. While at university, he studied the doctrines of the Family Federation. After graduation, he joined a general trading company and worked both in Japan and overseas. In 2020, he left the company and started his own business in Chiba Prefecture as a small and medium enterprise management consultant. In January 2024, he founded the "Chiba Citizens' Association for Protecting Freedom of Religion and Human Rights" and became its representative. In the summer of the same year, he established the political organization "Association for Protecting Japanese Families."



Closed-door religious oversight sparks transparency concerns as disclosure of crucial religious council minutes are denied from a meeting where authorities allegedly lobbied to suppress opinions

Tokyo, 6th April 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

[Part 2 of a Series] In Search of a Spiritual Anchor - One Month After the Dissolution of the Family Federation

Internal Rules Changed to Make Religious Council Minutes Non-Public

by Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀)

See part 1 of the series: [Beyond the Ban Believers Sustain Community](#)

Hiroshi Ogasawara (小笠原裕), a believer of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) and representative of the Association for Protecting Japanese Families, filed a request with the Agency for Cultural Affairs to disclose the minutes of the [Religious Corporations Council](#), which have been kept non-public. He revealed on his blog in March that the Information Disclosure and Personal Information Protection Review Board determined that the agency's decision not to disclose the records was appropriate. We spoke with Mr. Ogasawara, who is calling for open discussion in religious administration.

Interviewer: Takahide Ishii (石井 孝秀)

- When did you first file a disclosure request?

I first submitted a request on 8th September 2023. I asked for the release of eight sets of minutes related

to the exercise of the right to question (質問権行使) [See editor's note 1 below] and notifications of an administrative fine (過料通知) [See editor's note 2 below]. After the request for a dissolution order against the [Family Federation](#) was issued, and when the organization was specified as a "designated religious corporation" (指定宗教法人) [See editor's note 3 below], I also filed additional requests for disclosure of minutes, but all resulted in decisions of non-disclosure.



I also filed an administrative appeal against the decision not to disclose the minutes concerning the exercise of questioning authority [See editor's note 1 below] and the dissolution order request, but the Agency for Cultural Affairs rejected it. Subsequently, in April 2024, the agency referred the matter to the Information Disclosure and Personal Information Protection Review Board under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. On 18th March 2026, the board issued its recommendation that the non-disclosure decision was appropriate, effectively finalizing the decision. It is now difficult to expect open discussion in Japan's religious administration.

- What were the key points of your argument in the appeal?

According to the internal rules regarding the minutes of the [Religious Corporations Council](#), they are, in principle, to be disclosed. However, it also states: "When the chairperson deems it necessary, after consulting the council, all or part of the

minutes may be withheld from disclosure for a necessary period."



The Religious Corporations Council discussing the use of the questioning rights by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (previously known as the [Unification Church](#)) - December 14, 2022, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo

However, this sentence was added on the very first day discussions were held on the exercise of questioning authority [See editor's note 1 below]. There were other changes as well, but the revised internal rules were not disclosed. If I had not filed a disclosure request, they might still remain undisclosed. Although my request for the minutes was rejected, some materials such as the list of committee members were partially disclosed, and the revised internal rules were included among them. The revision date was also specified.

This is the issue I consider most problematic. In my appeal, I argued that it was unjust to keep even the minutes related to the revision of the internal rules non-public. This raises concerns that not only this case but future matters may also be handled internally in ways convenient for the authorities. Given that this is an important council concerning the nature of religious corporations, the lack of transparency fails to adequately consider its impact on other religious organizations.

- What is the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's position?

The ministry explains that the minutes in general, including the revision of internal rules, fall under information exempt from disclosure under the Act on Access to Information Held by Administrative Organs. Specifically, they argue that the minutes contain confidential information about the [religious organization](#), which must be protected, and that disclosure would hinder free and open discussion among committee members.

Frankly, my impression is that the law is being invoked to prevent the minutes from ever being disclosed. If the goal is to ensure free and open discussion, then disclosure should still be possible through measures such as anonymization or abstraction. I argued this in my appeal, but the ministry dismissed it, saying my point was "unclear in meaning".



The Kudan Church in Tokyo belonging to the United Church of Christ in Japan, which together with Japan Alliance Christ Church provided a strong foundation for anti-[Family Federation](#) groups. For decades, pastors and members from those two churches were actively involved in abducting, forcibly detaining, and [coercively breaking the faith](#) of members of the [Family Federation](#)

Among the committee members were individuals from groups such as the United Church of Christ in Japan, which is openly critical of the [Family Federation](#), indicating that not all members were neutral. For that very reason, it should be difficult to ensure neutrality without making the minutes public.

A Role in Preventing "Closed-Door" Oppression

- What do you expect would happen if the minutes were made public?

The original purpose of establishing the Religious Corporations Council was to serve as a supervisory body to prevent the government from suppressing freedom of religion when conducting religious administration.

It would be problematic if the council is not fulfilling that function. The principle of disclosing minutes can be seen as a safeguard for that purpose.

I hope to clarify whether discussions were guided by the ministry, whether committee members actively voiced opinions, and to what extent opposing views were expressed. The deliberations on the dissolution order request have become a "closed-door trial" as a non-contentious case [See editor's note 4 below], and I hope this situation will also be reformed.

I do not believe that the [Family Federation](#) has no points requiring reflection. However, in the series of discussions and media coverage regarding its dissolution, the perspective and

opinions of the [religious organization](#) have been excluded. Some criticize it as having a "blame-others mentality", but exclusion is never desirable, and it is important to clearly state one's own position. Using such labels to dismiss all objections and protests amounts to silencing dissent.

After properly hearing opposing views, I hope each member of society will make their own informed judgment.

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[Editor's note 1: The literal meaning of 質問権行使 (shitsumon-ken kōshi) is "exercise of the right to question". This refers to the government formally using its legal authority to question an organization. In this context, it means authorities (such as the Agency for Cultural Affairs) requiring the religious organization to submit reports, answer specific questions, and provide documents or explanations.

It is not casual questioning - it is a statutory investigative power used when there are concerns about compliance with laws governing religious corporations.]

[Editor's note 2: The literal meaning of 過料通知 (karyō tsūchi) is "notification of a non-criminal fine". 過料 (karyō) is an administrative monetary penalty, not a criminal punishment (so it does not create a criminal record).

通知 (tsūchi) means "notification." This term refers to official notice that such a penalty is being imposed or initiated, typically because the organization failed to comply with the questioning authority (e.g., didn't respond properly or at all) . In the case of the Family Federation, the authorities claimed it did not respond properly. The Family federation claimed some questions were "impossible" to answer.

In simpler terms, the expression means "formal notice that an administrative fine is being imposed for non-compliance."]

[Editor's note 3: The literal meaning of 指定宗教法人 (shitei shūkyō hōjin) is "designated religious corporation". This refers to a religious corporation that has been formally designated by the government for special oversight under Japan's Religious Corporations framework. The designation is not neutral - it typically indicates that the authorities see potential legal or public-interest concerns, and the organization requires closer administrative monitoring than ordinary religious corporations.

There are legal or administrative implications. When a group is labeled a "designated religious corporation", it may be subject to enhanced reporting obligations, more frequent or detailed inspections or inquiries, use of powers like 質問権行使 (exercise of questioning authority), and potential escalation toward measures such as administrative penalties or even dissolution proceedings.

Unlike a standard classification (e.g., simply being a registered religious corporation), this "designation" functions more like a regulatory flag. It does not automatically mean wrongdoing has been legally proven. But it signals that the government considers the entity problematic enough to justify intervention.

In the context of the above article, the term is used to describe a stage in the government's handling of the organization. After concerns arise, it becomes a "designated religious corporation". This enables stricter scrutiny, which can eventually feed into actions like a dissolution order request.]

[Editor's note 4: A non-contentious case refers to a legal matter where there is no dispute between parties. These cases typically involve administrative, procedural, or uncontested legal actions, such as probate (handling a deceased person's estate), uncontested divorces, adoption, or registering a trademark. Since there are no opposing parties or legal conflicts, these cases usually proceed smoothly through the legal system without litigation.]

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Beyond The Ban Believers Sustain Community

April 5, 2026 • Knut Holdhus



After ban on use of hundreds of church properties, members gather in bingo halls, parks, and living rooms and talk of stronger bonds in hard times



Tokyo, 4th April 2026 – Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

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Month After the Dissolution of the Family Federation

Bonds of Faith Strengthen as Churches

Close

Believers Shocked by Sudden Arrival of Liquidators

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial
department of *Sekai Nippo*

Published 5th April 2026 at 11:21 pm, updated 6th April 2026 at 8:08
am

See part 2 of the series: [Transparency Concerns: Non-Disclosure of
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AI illustration of Sunday worship service held by *Family
Federation* members in a park in Japan 5th April 2026

It has been one month since the [Tokyo High Court upheld the order](#) to dissolve the religious corporation of the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the [Unification Church](#)), and [liquidation procedures](#) began. While believers have [lost their places of worship](#) and prayer, some say that “the bonds between members have grown even stronger.” This report follows developments among those connected to the group and its followers.

See also [Experts Question Legal Basis for Dissolution](#)

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On Sunday, 29th March, as cherry blossoms began to bloom, a group of people gathered on blue tarps in a park somewhere in the Kanto region for a flower-viewing party. “Long time no see,” they greeted one another warmly. Among the group – comprising several dozen people – were slightly older men and women, couples with small children, and university-aged young people. A man in his forties who appeared to be a leader encouraged the group, saying, “These are difficult times, but today let’s enjoy games and lunch together,” lifting everyone’s spirits.

Those gathered were members of the [Family Federation](#), who until February had attended Sunday services at a local church facility. However, following the [High Court decision](#) on 4th March, a court-appointed liquidator seized the group’s [religious facilities](#) nationwide.

On social media, many believers posted about the [loss of their churches](#) and the inconvenience it caused. At the same time, some reported holding services in each other’s homes or renting spaces such as event rooms or karaoke rooms to gather.

As the timing coincided with the graduation and school entrance season, events celebrating children were also held in various locations. A woman in her 30s living in the Tokyo metropolitan area, whose child participated in a graduation event, said,

“My child will start elementary school this spring, so they seemed very happy. I want to make a fresh start and do my best.”

In some cases, liquidators arrived at church facilities less than an hour after the [High Court decision](#) was reported.



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AI illustration of Sunday worship service held by [Family Federation](#) members in a park in Japan 5th April 2026

“It was a huge shock that something so ordinary – gathering together and sharing meals – suddenly became impossible,” said Kimihiro Okamitsu (岡光君啓 – 46), who served as the head minister of the *Shinjuku Family Church* (Takadanobaba, Tokyo), which had more than 400 members.

On 4th March, about 20 believers were watching a live broadcast from in front of the Tokyo High Court in the church sanctuary. When the [announcement of the group's dissolution](#) came shortly after 11 a.m., Okamitsu recalled, “The atmosphere was suffocating. No one in the sanctuary could move or speak for a while.” At that moment, a staff member informed him that “15 to 20 representatives of the [liquidator](#) had already arrived and had been shown into the building,” leaving him stunned.

The lawyers representing the liquidator explained that they would take over all bankbooks and cash in safes, verifying them against accounting records and data. They also announced that entry into the church facility would be prohibited. However, there was one issue: funerals for believers had been scheduled for the following two days.

Okamitsu negotiated with the representatives, and as an “exception” for funerals, permission was granted to proceed as planned – but with many restrictions. “We were told that as staff we were prohibited from conducting religious ceremonies, so we should participate only as individual believers,” he said.

One believer asked to offer prayers in the prayer room during the funeral, thinking access might be allowed, but this request was denied. There were also negotiations to use the church facility as a relay venue for couples unable to travel to South Korea for a [mass wedding](#) ceremony scheduled in May, but permission for that was also denied.

Currently, Okamitsu has been instructed by the liquidator to remain at home, with little additional guidance. “Religious activities as individuals are not prohibited,” he noted, so they have been managing by filming sermons on Sundays in borrowed homes for believers to watch online.

Regarding the difficulty of obtaining permission to conduct religious activities in church facilities, Okamitsu speculated,

“If it were solely the liquidator’s decision, it’s hard to imagine to be rejected to this extent. They may be trying to avoid having people gather at church facilities due to public opinion.”

Kyoko Niiyama (66, pseudonym), a female believer with over 40 years of faith who has belonged to the same church since her marriage in 1992, emphasized,

“The emotional bonds among believers who are hurting have actually grown stronger.”

On 20th March, Niiyama attended a barbecue event organized by believers. About 180 members gathered at a park in Tokyo. Many were seeing each other for the first time since the [dissolution was finalized](#), and Niiyama felt a strong sense of relief. She said with a smile.

“Some people were so moved that they spontaneously hugged each other. We may have [lost the building](#), but it made us realize that the foundation of our faith was

right here.”

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Featured image above: *Family Federation members gathering on a Sunday in a park in Japan after ban on the use of hundreds of church properties. AI illustration*

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