



Ministry in an Aging Society



To Create Products Of Excellent Quality...

Miyoshi Oil & Fat was founded in 1921 as a manufacturer of soap for the textile industry.

In 1941, the Foods and Oils Division was established and Miyoshi began producing Margarine, followed by shortening, lard and other products. Today, Miyoshi produces more edible processed oils and fats than any other manufacturers in Japan.

While diversifying the applications of oils & fats, Miyoshi has remained true to the goal it set itself eight decades ago: **to create products of excellent quality.**



Main Products

- Margarine
- Lard
- Whipping Cream
- Frozen Dough
- Shortening
- Powdered Oil & Fat
- Fillings

MIYOSHI OIL & FAT CO.,LTD.

66-1, 4-CHOME, HORIKIRI, KATSUSHIKA-KU, TOKYO 〒124-8510

BRANCHES : OSAKA, NAGOYA, FUKUOKA

FACTORIES : TOKYO, KOBE, CHIBA



An elegant cracker for those special occasions

YAMAZAKI BISCUITS CO.,LTD.

Encouraging, inspiring, and equipping the members of the JEMA community

Forward

- 4 Happenings
- 5 From the Editor

26



Regulars

- 28 News
- 30 New Voices
Lessons from the good soil
by Jordan Cole
- 32 Modern Tech
Get the most out of your photos
by Karen Ellrick
- 33 Voice of Experience
Senior ministry by a senior
by Jack Garrett
- 34 Church Planting
Small groups build healthy churches
by Dan Iverson
- 35 Language & Culture
Risk adversity and multicultural teams
by Simon Pleasants
- 36 Member Care
Feeling stretched?
by Janet Dallman
- 38 Off the Bookshelf
by Don Schaeffer
- 39 Good Writing
Motivate people to care
by Wendy Marshall

Feature Articles

- 6 We are the arms of Christ
by Celia Olson
- 8 God is calling us to minister to Japan's elderly
by Wendy Marshall
- 10 No longer on the fringes
by Dawn Birkner
- 13 To continue to worship our whole lives
by Maki Okamoto
- 14 An old lady "stole" a Bible
by Ken and Toshiko Reddington
- 16 To a thousand generations
by Kenneth See
- 18 Walking alongside my elderly neighbor
by Ginger Tobin
- 19 A challenge to the older generation
by Ester Ruth Waehrer
- 20 Samurai Projects: training the next generation
by Charley Ballinger
- 22 Generous hearts
by Kari Miyano
- 24 Not just songs and sermons
by Christy Snowden Van Dam
- 25 Ministry to one elderly person
by Karen Nakamura
- 26 Reaching seniors through arts and crafts
by Renee Williams



36

*Please note that event details are subject to change.
Please check with JEMA or organizers for confirmation.*

Every other month

JEMA Online Prayer Gathering

The last Tuesday of each odd-numbered month:
May 30, July 25, September 26, etc.

Includes breakout rooms based on language

To register, scan this QR code or go to:
<https://forms.gle/3Q1G8nAVCc8oo2y27>



April



Still Waters Retreat

April 17–20, 2020
Yamanaka Chalet, Yamanakako
For more information: jp.mca@omfmail.com

May

Okutama Prayer Summit

May 23–26, 2023
Okutama Bible Chalet, Tokyo



Prayer Summit for Western Japan

May 22–24, 2023
Nosegawa Bible Camp, Hyogo

July-August

Karuizawa Union Church Refresh Conference

July 30–August 6, 2023
Latest info: <http://www.karuizawaunionchurch.org>



October

WIM Fall Day of Prayer Plus

October 12, 2023
Rose Town Tea Garden, Ome, Tokyo



Details about future JEMA events can be found on the JEMA website:

jema.org

Also see our magazine online: **japanharvest.org**



Volume 74 No. 2
Spring 2023

© 2023 Please do not copy any article, photo, poem, or report unless permission is granted. Contact Managing Editor.

Japan Harvest Staff

Executive Editor: Simon Pleasants
Managing Editor: Wendy Marshall (wmarshall@jema.org)
Associate Editor: Rachel Hughes
Editorial Assistants: Elena Kua, Jackie Peveto, Ariane Peveto, Jenn Bello
News Editors: Peter Swan, Ken Reddington
Art Director: Karen Ellrick
Advertising Director: Ai Nightingale
Fact Checkers: Sara Wolsey, Jocelyn Williams
Proofreader: Ken Reddington
Consultant (theology): Wesley Redgen

Printer: Printpac

JEMA Leadership Team

President: Nathan Snow
Vice President: Simon Pleasants
Treasurer: Emerita Sakai
Secretary: David Scott
Ministries Facilitator: Chad Huddleston
Communications Facilitator: vacant
Membership Facilitator: Paul Ewing
Members-at-Large: Stephanie Schatz, Brett Rayl

JEMA Administrative Assistants (part-time):

Atsuko Tateishi, Mayumi Penner, Michiru Pleasants, Ai Nightingale

Submissions

The editors welcome unsolicited articles. Non-JEMA members are also welcome to submit.
Writer's guidelines are available at: japanharvest.org/submissions

Submission Deadlines

Winter issue: August 31
Spring issue: November 30
Summer issue: February 28
Autumn issue: May 31

Price overseas is \$30.00 (USD) per year.
Price in Japan is ¥2,800 per year.
Single copy is ¥750.

Postal Transfer: Account #: 00130-4-180466
Name: JEMA

Moving?

Contact the JEMA office so we can update our files!
JEMA
#204 OCC Bldg., 2-1 Kanda Surugadai
Chiyoda Ku, Tokyo 101-0062
Tel: 03-3295-1949 Fax: 03-3295-1354
Email: jema-info@jema.org
Website: jema.org

Japan Harvest is the official publication of the Japan Evangelical Missionary Association (JEMA). It is published quarterly. Individual articles or advertisements express the viewpoints of the contributors and not necessarily those of JEMA.

Japan Harvest publishes articles in either US English or Commonwealth English, depending upon the author's primary English background.

Are we ready to be world leaders?

Aging societies are a worldwide concern. I've learned that there are a variety of ways to measure how "aged" a society is, but the simplest is how much of the population is 65 or over. Many countries in Europe have more than 20%. Australia, my home country, has 15.9%, similar to the US (16.9%).

But no matter how you measure it, Japan, with 29.2% of its people 65 years and older, is leading the world by a long way. It's the only country in the world with more than 25% of its population older than 65, and no other Asian country comes close.¹ We are facing a situation of a magnitude that no other missionaries in the world are facing.

Does anyone have anything to say?

However, I was beginning to wonder if JEMA members had anything to say about this. In Autumn 2015, our "Silver Society" issue had only four articles related to the topic. And we initially only received four proposals for this issue.

I had several conversations with people about why the response rate was so low. Someone suggested that this age group isn't a strategic group to target. Certainly, I've met almost no missionaries who came to Japan with the goal of doing ministry with the elderly. One Japanese pastor wondered if it was because many missionaries retire in their mid-sixties and aren't thinking so much about reaching their peers.

Another person thought she couldn't write about such a large topic as an "aging society." However, the chaplain I interviewed for my article on page eight pointed out that Jesus mostly worked on a one-to-one basis with people. It's easy for the statistics to overwhelm us when thinking about ministry in Japan, but if we focus on the individuals God brings within our circles of influence, it's easier to feel as though we can make a difference.



Non-native English writers

On a completely different topic, one JEMA member asked if we could work harder to publish articles by people who aren't native English speakers. I'd like you all to know that we do often work with authors who aren't native English speakers. We are also happy to receive articles that have been written in another language and translated by someone known to the author. If you know someone who isn't confident writing in English but might have something helpful to contribute, please consider asking if they would.

Practical factors to consider

I'm a qualified Occupational Therapist and I've worked with the elderly. So my background makes me think of practical implications that an aging society will have on ministry. Things like access. Can elderly people get into our buildings and access the bathroom facilities? Are they able to read the small print in Bibles and church notices? Can they get to church? Are they able to access the technology that churches are using to broadcast their services?

It's well known to people who work in the aged-care sector that older people generally have more rigid attitudes and habits, and that makes it harder for them to make or accept changes. This also means it's difficult to find ways to include elderly as well as young people in one church.

Whether or not we feel ready to "lead the world," let's not neglect to pray for Japan.



Blessings in Christ,
Wendy
Managing Editor

The themes for the upcoming issues are:

Summer 2023: Japanese Church History

Autumn 2023: Singleness (proposals due by May 31)

Winter 2024: Discipleship (proposals due by July 31)

Spring 2024: Triumphs in Ministry (proposals due by October 30)

1. All the figures in the first two paragraphs come from: *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/japan/#people-and-society> (accessed November 22, 2022).



We are the arms of Christ

By Celia Olson

In two small, rural churches, Celia expected to see loneliness but found connection instead

For years, my artist's eyes have been drawn to the weathered boards, rusty tin roofs, and peeling paint of abandoned buildings. Hokkaido's countryside is littered with such buildings, left behind in the wake of low birth rate and aging population (*shōshikōreika*). I like to photograph these structures. It feels like I am documenting the life of some unknown person. At the same time, my own loneliness finds expression in photos of abandoned buildings.

In summer 2022, my husband Keith and I started working in partnership with the four JECA¹ churches in Sorachi, a fertile valley bridging Sapporo and Asahikawa filled with rice and soba fields, apple trees, and sunflowers. The region has seen sharp population decline, and there are many elderly people here. From shuttered shopping streets

to battered farm houses, I find ample material for my photography habits. I wondered, given the circumstances, if church members felt lonely or isolated, and if so, what could be done to help.

To try to find answers to this question, I talked to six people in two churches. Takikawa Church is in Takikawa City (population 38,929²) towards the north end of the Sorachi region. Their pastor, Shinsuke Tanaka, and his wife, Rumiko, have served there since 1997. Eriko was born, raised, and baptized in Takikawa. After attending university in Sapporo, she returned to teach school and take over her family's *ryokan* (traditional inn).

Sunagawa Church is located in Sunagawa City (population 16,011³), immediately to the south of Takikawa. At the time of writing, Pastor Tanaka also served as advisor pastor for Sunagawa Church since their pastor died in January 2021.⁴ Mieko, the former pastor's widow, has served there since 1999. Kayoko teaches at OMF's Japanese school in Sapporo, but returns home to Sunagawa each Sunday to support the church. Sunagawa is Nori's home church; after a series of job transfers, she returned to retire there.⁵

A lonely situation

The Japanese word for lonely is 寂しい (*sabishii*). In the world of tea ceremony, *sabishii* has positive connotations. Imagine a windswept mountain landscape with a rustic tea cottage—perhaps a bit like the abandoned buildings I find so appealing. No one is around except you and your host, who

will entertain you with sweets and tea and join you in enjoying the natural beauty. This kind of “lonely” isn't really lonely at all. It's intimate and exciting, with twinges of artistic pathos.

When it comes to interpersonal relationships, however, *sabishii* loses these positive connotations. Loneliness implies loss of connection. In a society that values community as Japan does, it can be difficult to admit to feeling lonely.

That being said, “*sabishii*” was the word church members used to describe Sunagawa and Takikawa cities. Class sizes have dropped and some schools have merged. Over the 25 years of Pastor Tanaka's ministry, the city has lost 20% of its population, while Sunagawa City lost 25%, and two of Takikawa's six Protestant churches have closed.

Why the decline? The Sorachi region, beautiful countryside surrounded by snowcapped mountains, has clean air, clean water, and delicious food. From my outsider's perspective, it seems like a great place to live. But there are no universities and few jobs for the university-educated to return home to. When children leave the community to further their education, most find employment near their universities. There are exceptions: city employees, health care workers, and school teachers can find job security in these small cities. Eriko was able to return to Takikawa as a teacher. Pastor Tanaka's daughters received their nursing training locally and found work in Sunagawa Hospital, but both dream of moving to Sapporo.

Regarding children moving away, Mieko commented, “Of course it’s lonely, but it can’t be helped.”

Kayoko, who has a burden for the children of Sunagawa, told me that many church members have children and grandchildren in the area. The problem is not so much the lack of children, but that evangelizing one’s own family is difficult. Also, children in a large city church may have friends at Sunday school and even Christian classmates; in a small town with a small church, children from Christian homes may feel isolated or even be bullied at school.

Since Mieko has been there (24 years), Sunagawa Church has buried about half their members, including their pastor. The average age of members is over 70, and finances are tight. Even though Takikawa Church is younger on average, no children attend, and some important outreach initiatives are still on hiatus due to COVID-19.

Embraced by the family of God

Church members talked freely about difficult circumstances, but how did they feel about them personally?

“I have often heard Christians in small towns talk about feeling lonely and isolated. What about you?” I asked.

“No,” said Mieko, “I’m sorry; I can’t say that I do.” She smiled sheepishly. I think she knew what sort of answer I was expecting.

Nori likewise said she had never felt lonely. “I know that God is with me in times of suffering. When my husband died, God provided helpers when I needed them.” The other four interviewees were unanimously not lonely.

I was surprised. When I considered the challenges facing these two churches, I expected loneliness. Perhaps, I thought, “I’m lonely” is hard to say in connection with one’s church community. But as they talked about their churches, I began to see a picture of close-knit and loving church families.

To Eriko, Takikawa Church is laid-back and easy to enter. Her church family was a big part of her decision to return home after university.

Sunagawa Church, said Nori, is a place where she can have fellow-

ship with others and with God. “We are God’s family.” She chose to retire in Sunagawa because of her home church. Mieko described Sunagawa Church as patient, prayerful, and generous.

Just as my loneliness shows up in my photography habits, I realized that I was looking through the lens of my own experience. Missionary life can be very lonely, especially when misunderstandings happen with Christian friends. We are vulnerable, far from our homes and emotional safety nets. In my past, church has been a *cause* of loneliness, not a solution. But even these small churches are doing something about the problem of loneliness in their communities. This realization convicted me of my cynicism and moved me to tears.

We are the arms of Christ

What is unique about these churches that builds community and wards off loneliness? Certainly the connection between the four JECA churches in Sorachi is significant: joint women’s fellowship, pulpit exchange, and a yearly gathering (pre-COVID). Their easy distance from Sapporo churches (one to two hours by car) also means that in challenging times, outside help is near.

But more than that, I think their secret is in cultivating a ministry of being—spending many years in fellowship and friendship with one another, and quietly inviting others into that friendship. I asked them to share their wisdom with us.

Pastor Tanaka has mastered the art of walking at the pace of the community. “Pay close attention to the people and culture of your church,” he advised. “Each church is unique. Find ways to use your own gifts and the gifts of those in your community.”

Nori suggested joining community activities. “Be the fragrance of Christ, even when circumstances do not allow direct evangelism. People will notice, and you will find opportunities to speak about faith.”

Rumiko shared tips for Bible studies with the elderly: keep things simple and short so that seekers don’t give up before they start. Give them a little and let them ask for more.

When Pastor Tanaka came to Takikawa as a young father, he connected easily with other families. Now he is nearing retirement age. “My point of view has changed. I have begun to think like an elderly person. I find it easier now to make our church welcoming to the elderly and to think of activities they might enjoy.” With his mature eyes, Pastor Tanaka envisions a simple community outreach with exercise and tea time. He showed me the beautiful homemade Christmas cards that the church will send to elderly seekers. He expects them to be well received. A personal touch helps convey the church’s warm regard for seekers in the community.

I leave you, dear readers, with words of encouragement on behalf of the Christians in Sorachi. When I talked to these six people, as I prepared to write this article, they each thanked me repeatedly for being here, as if I were a representative of all missionaries in Japan (it was unlooked for and frankly embarrassing). Even more than what you do, it is important that you are here, in Japan. Your very presence expresses the love of God and the global church for the small, struggling, aging churches where you serve, for the cities and towns where you live, and for the people living in your neighborhood. We join our Japanese brothers and sisters, becoming the arms of Christ to embrace the lonely. Take heart, friends. May your loneliness lead you to connection, as did mine. **JH**

1. Japan Evangelical Church Association/日本福音キリスト教会連合
2. 2020 figure, “滝川市 年齢別・町別・年度別人人口.” City of Takikawa (Japanese website). <https://www.city.takikawa.hokkaido.jp/210shimin/02shimin/05koseki-juumin/jinnkou.html> (accessed Feb 20, 2023).
3. March 2021 figure, “砂川市:世帯と人口の推移.” Sunagawa City (Japanese website). https://www.city.sunagawa.hokkaido.jp/data_sunagawa/setai_jinkou_suii.html (accessed Feb 20, 2023).
4. Praise God, Sunagawa Church welcomed a new pastor in December 2022.
5. Nori’s name has been changed for privacy; all other names are used with permission.

Photo by author

Celia Olson is from Seattle, US, and has served in Hokkaido with OMF since 2009. A Japanese tea ceremony practitioner and professional cellist, her passion is to connect people to God and each other through art.

God is calling us to minister to Japan's elderly

Perhaps we need to adjust our mindsets?

By Wendy Marshall

Mrs. Fujiwara wanted to sing. Not everyone on her floor in the three-floor nursing home wanted to sing, but, to the surprise of the Christian chaplain, Sanada Osamu, the singing group grew. As time went on, some in the group moved up to the third floor into the dementia section, and some were moved downstairs where residents spent all day in bed and needed greater support. A new group formed on the second floor, and Sanada realised that God was spreading the group. He said, "They might not have a confession of faith, but nonetheless they praise God and touch others with their singing."

This story is from Shalom Higashikurume, a Christian nursing home run by the Seventh-day Adventists in our local area. Our pastor, Morimoto Taizo, introduced me to the chaplain and Gaja Satoru, the chairman and general manager of the nursing home.

Ministry in a local church

Before I talked to the two men at the nursing home, I interviewed our pastor and his wife, Kimiko, who works in an elderly day care centre. They have ministered at Kurume Christ Church (KCC) since 2003. The church has around 160 members, and the average age of attendees is late 40s. But Pastor Morimoto (67) estimates around 30% of the church is older than he is.

Though the church has focused on younger people, they have also ministered to older people. For example, for

many years, they've run Grace Café—a Monday-morning coffee, cake, and chat time at the church. Younger retirees have been active by organising events such as blossom viewings, driving tours, and outings to do peach picking. Trips outside the church have been great opportunities to invite people from outside the church to join. Organising events such as these has been difficult during the pandemic, but the Morimotos are encouraged that things are starting to open up again now.

In the past, the church has also taken groups or individuals to care homes to do performances and give testimonies. At Christmas especially, these homes have been open to people performing, singing Christmas carols, and sharing the Christmas story with a short DVD presentation.

Practical ways that Japan's aging society impacts the local church

These days, five or six of the elderly members of KCC need help getting to church. One seeker who is 98 comes to worship services, but he's hard to communicate with due to his hearing loss. He comes because he needs the community.

During the pandemic, the church didn't meet in person for many months. These days, the church continues to record one of its three morning services and broadcasts that on a pri-



*Back: Pastor and Mrs. Morimoto
Front L-R: Mr. Gaja and Chaplain Sanada*

vate YouTube channel. Pastor Morimoto said that people in their 60s and 70s are able to access this recording, but those older than that struggle to operate a smartphone, so they usually don't see the online version of the service.

Pastor Morimoto said it's very difficult when a church member has to move into a nursing home; then they can no longer come to church. Pastors can visit them, or used to be able to before the pandemic. In the last three years, his contact with them has been almost solely via letters.

When talking about how the local church can make an impact in Japan's aging society, Morimoto gave an example of a church in Iwaki, Fukushima (Fukushima First Baptist church), that is caring for elderly in their congregation in very practical ways: providing a care facility as well as an apartment for elderly to live in.

A Christian nursing home

Shalom Higashikurume has 90 residents and around 300 people on the waiting list. The vision of Seventh-

day Adventists is to reach people from babies to seniors. Their philosophy: showing God's love by respecting life, loving life, and serving life.

Pastor Sanada runs worship services for some of the more able residents, but most of his time is spent one-on-one with people. He listens to their stories; talks with them about things they're interested in such as faith, singing, reading the Bible; and, when needed, offers practical assistance. He said that there are many lonely people. They don't often express their loneliness when he first meets them but only later, after he's built a relationship with them.

He talked quite a bit about singing. By singing, the residents are praising God, even if we don't know what their true heart believes. Christmas songs are popular as they are the most common Christian songs heard in Japanese society.

The nursing home offered Christian funerals prior to the pandemic, and during those events, staff had the opportunity to give testimony to their faith. Even during pandemic times, when someone died, there has sometimes been opportunity to talk to family members about faith.

Why should we prioritise ministering to older people?

I asked if ministry to older people was strategic. Because the life expectancy of Japanese people is so long, Pastor Morimoto and his wife think that it is important to reach out to people in their 60s and 70s because people in their early retirement years still have plenty of energy. They are still responsive, probably have many years yet to live, and are able to reach out to their peers. There are lots of opportunities to minister to this age group because they have lots of free time and low-cost activities are very popular.

Pastors can tend to think about ministry to elderly people as conducting funerals and visiting the sick. But Pastor Morimoto said, "To get to that point, you need to provide certain care, so people can live well, spiritually and physically."

Pastor Sanada said, "People in their 80s and 90s remember post-war times when there was a Christian boom."

They respond more easily to the gospel because some heard Bible stories as children.

Why is ministry to older people hard?

Ministry in Japan in general is hard, and that's not much different when ministering to elderly people. Even Japanese people can find working with elderly people difficult—a lot of time needs to be invested in listening and building relationships.

Poor hearing and pronunciation can make communication difficult. And you rarely see people coming to the Lord. In 30 years of ministry, the nursing home has only seen two or three baptisms. Sanada said that residents of their nursing home "are often reluctant to be baptised because they feel they need permission from their family members."

Mrs. Morimoto said, "It's very tough. You need patience and love. With young people, or children, it's very easy." She noted that ministry to the elderly is similar to working with little kids, except it's sad. The elderly are declining, not gaining or growing. How do you help them find joy and satisfaction?

What would you like to say to missionaries?

I asked this question of all four people. Pastor Morimoto said, "We have to think about it seriously. We have to serve senior people more. It's a serious ministry that God is calling us to do. Jesus commands us to take care of the needy. These minorities are becoming majorities. This kind of ministry is not attractive; it may seem like a waste of time. It can be disappointing and no fun. But you will see God's blessing if you do this." He encourages missionaries to change their strategy and start focussing on people in their 60s and 70s.

Sanada and Gaja told me that foreign caregivers are quite popular at the nursing home. People like to talk to them and are interested because they are foreigners. They listen and ask good questions. This seems to be a potential ministry opportunity for Christian foreigners.

The men at the nursing home also want to encourage missionaries to stay in Japan longer. They told a story about some Korean missionaries who came to serve in Japan, but many of them stayed only five years. Their conclusion is that five years isn't long enough to make an impact in Japan; 20 or 30 years is more effective.

They note that people might not profess Christ publicly. Gaja said, "Missionaries and pastors like to see tangible evidence, results, fruit of our ministry. But in elderly care, it doesn't necessarily look like people being baptised, becoming members of a church, or building churches." He encourages us to "keep on planting the gospel seed. We never know how the seed will grow." We might never know who has believed on this side of death.

Talking about their own ministry, he said they will never get tired of doing elderly care because they don't expect those tangible results; their goal is to come alongside lonely people. Sometimes they see in the end that a family is glad that they sent their mother or father to the home because they had peaceful terminal care.

Sanada's own father was baptized only three years ago at age 76. The decision came as he considered where to have his ashes interred—in the church gravesite or the traditional family gravesite at a Buddhist temple. His decision took into consideration that his older son (Sanada) would look after his gravesite and his family would visit his gravesite after he was buried. Sanada's father wanted to prepare matters for after his death while he was still able to make decisions.

Sanada points to Jesus feeding the 5,000. Jesus did not tell his disciples to gather that many people. He served people one by one and ended up with a great multitude. Sanada thinks that missionaries should take time to meet individual needs, and then at the end, they might be surprised at how many people gather. **JH**

Photo submitted by author

Wendy Marshall is the managing editor of Japan Harvest. She's Australian and has been in Japan with OMF International since 2000 with her husband David. She also does mobilisation for OMF using social media.

No Longer on the

By Dawn Birkner

Seeing older adults as key to the evangelization of rural Japan

By 2065, in less than 40 years, the proportion of Japan's 65+ population is projected to reach 40%.¹ When the church meets needs unique to the graying communities, hearts of all ages can open. This group also comprises the bulk of the church's potential labor force. Japan has entered an unprecedented era where ministry to and by older adults is essential in evangelizing Japan. This can be optimized by reaching out to and mobilizing the elderly in ways that factor in needs, stamina, and limitations at each phase of aging. Much is possible when we recognize the strategic opportunities an aging society presents.

Why are older Japanese a key group for the church?

Older still-working adults and young retirees are more available for relationship and activities. This group is the most strategic to reach in order to plant and sustain a rural church. Most youth move to cities, then decades later, a subset return as older adults (often the eldest son, and seldom Christians). One rural church I know of has led 150 mainly children and teens to Christ over its 60 year history, yet only 15 people now attend that local church. It's not that the rest no longer follow Jesus; rather, they faithfully attend churches in the urban areas they have been living in since early adulthood. This pattern has become typical in rural areas. Because of this, no matter how many youth are saved before they move away, a rural church cannot sustain its presence into the next generation if it is only reaching out to young people. Rather, to maintain local gospel access for many generations via a local church or believers in rural towns, those moving back to rural

areas (known as U-turners,² often aged 50 to 70) especially need to be won to Christ. They are a rural church's backbone and are the "new young."

The oldest subset (75+) needs to be reached as well. They are closer to eternity, and while they are unsaved may be stumbling blocks for their children. They're more likely than their children's generation to have attended a Christian event or preschool, or "mission school," so they would be more open to the gospel than their adult children. But time to water and harvest those seeds is short!

Jesus wants all people to know him, yet without intentionality many elderly won't, since a high proportion live in rural towns with no church (currently more than 1,600 towns).³ The elderly in urban settings are less visible so are also easily overlooked. Mobilizing older Christians to more active involvement can help avert a kingdom worker shortage and reach more older adults.

How can we reach and mobilize older adults?

Adjusting our ministry to each life stage of older adults is key. Let's take a look at strategies for outreach and mobilization for full-time working adults, homemakers, caregivers, and young and old retirees.

Full-time workers (aged 50 to 70)

Outreach: Though those in their 50s have limited time for Christians to get to know them outside the workplace, if reached, their potential kingdom impact is large. So, seek to get to know them during slower work seasons, lunch breaks, and join activities they are already involved in such as evening sports, weekend hikes, park golf, community meetings, or weeding

days. Working adults over age 60 work less overtime, so may be more open to invitations to outreach events.

Mobilization: As their careers wind down, if proactively encouraged, Christians in their 60s often find new purpose through outreach/ministry. Because of the pressures they'll face as Christians, many avoid their rural hometowns, yet there is great potential if more older Christians in urban areas are discipled with a missional mindset to instead return to their rural hometowns to live or visit and sensitively reach out. By retiring early, those between 50 to 60 years old could help solve the pastor shortage by being retrained to serve as pastors for up to three decades or to lead a church plant in an unchurched area while young enough to see it to completion. If a group of young retirees with missional intent move to a rural area together, they could form the starting core of a church plant, shortening the process by years.

Women with empty nests (age 50 to 65 with grown kids)

Women whose children are grown may have part-time jobs or be farming, but still often have more free time and schedule flexibility than men who are not yet retired or young moms, so they are a key target group/resource.

Outreach: Typical forms of outreach are effective as long as it's during hours that do not interfere with cooking responsibilities (e.g., weekdays 9:30—11:30 a.m. and 1:00—4:00 p.m.).

Mobilization: Homemakers, often the first in a family to be saved, can reach extended family. Encouragement can release their latent potential to do more than clean the church and make fellowship meals.

fringes



Caregivers (aged 50 to 80) of a shut-in spouse, parent, or in-law

Outreach: Caregiving isolates and is emotionally and physically taxing; it leaves many overwhelmed, under-stimulated, trapped, and without respite or outlet for their own needs. Some feel a loss of purpose or personal identity outside the caregiver role. The church can make an impact by “seeing,” affirming, and being there for them. Outreach must be brought to their home for them to encounter Christians and the gospel, since they cannot leave the home regularly. Visiting them in their home, genkan, or garden is possible. One caregiver commented that the church, by visiting, is starting to fill the gap created as Buddhist priests increasingly withdraw from rural areas. Providing Christian literature (in large print) can also be a tool.

Mobilization: Churches can mobilize believing caregivers by identifying ministry roles that could be done from

home, e.g., phone calls, letters, church accounting, and cooking meals at home for use in a church-run cafeteria (*shokudō*) or disaster relief. Some can open their home for a home or cell group, depending on the condition of the one they take care of.

Younger retirees (age 60 to 78, good health, ambulatory)

This group has more time than any other adult group. They are the “new young” in rural Japan, and are a key target group for evangelism and mobilizing.

Outreach: Christian literature and event flyers are most effective in large print, (it is commonly reported that most literature given in Tohoku after the tsunami went unread due to small print). Events are a means of outreach to older women who are social and easier to gather. It helps to remind older ones on the day of an event, provide chairs, and use a nearby, ground-

level venue with easy access (and, in winter, well heated). Venues that elderly women can walk to are best, as they typically don’t drive. Offered rides may be declined, because the person is unsure whether they’ll feel up to coming on the event day or they don’t want anyone to go out of their way on their account. English interest varies in rural areas, but it can scare away more elderly than it draws. Crafts and cooking can be attractive to women in this age group. Music, karaoke, eating, coffee, and age-appropriate exercises appeal to both genders.

Events are best held during the day on weekdays because retirees are in bed early and rarely go out at night; many also spend weekends with families,

In outlying sections of rural towns and villages, neighborhood bonds are strong. For various reasons combining events across neighborhoods seldom works. It could be because there is discomfort about unknown expectations

in an “outside group” or there may be rivalries between neighborhoods. Separate events in two adjacent areas may each have good turnouts, yet those same people will not attend a joint event for both neighborhoods.

This age group lacks experience forming new relationships. Those longing for connection may lack the courage to seek and make new social connections. It often takes a trusted external source to help lonely elderly connect with each other via putting on events like monthly salons in a neighborhood. This is a role some churches fulfill already and far more could.

Older men prefer activity-based interaction, for example, clubs for hiking, exercise, park golf. Both genders join walking groups. Missionaries can meet elderly people by joining secular clubs.

Rural towns also often have informal places where older men can drop by to chat in small groups at the business/home of a particularly hospitable man. These are low-key, unscheduled, unadvertised, and simple (e.g., green tea and folding chairs in a store or shed). Finding informal men’s hangouts can take time, but they are great places to connect with older men.

Elderly are often lonely. Many of both genders are open to visitors, as they either live alone and may have little contact with their families or they live with family but lack quality time with them. I heard in a television documentary that retired men who live alone often only interact with someone else a couple of times a month. They may not join a gathering, but outreach possibilities include home visitation, meal delivery, and basic cooking classes.

Mobilization: Young retirees, with more time and in good health, can do almost any outreach or church role. Yet most won’t unless encouraged by the church or pastor. This large pool of human resources in Japan’s church has tremendous potential.

Older retirees (Age 78 to 100+)

Outreach: Many in this age group are in good mental and physical shape, yet functionally are nearly homebound because they experience pain while walking, poor eyesight, or hearing issues. Others are truly shut-ins. Both

are lonely and welcome visitors. Some need to be coaxed gently to “come out.” Churches can provide sermon tapes, communion, and a few members to visit Christian shut-ins, or mobilize them as prayer warriors. Teaching them how to view the online service could help.

Many in this group only went to elementary or middle school and use a limited range of kanji in daily life, so take care if asking them to read aloud.

Those in elderly day care have limited mobility and energy, yet many can use transportation and restrooms unaided. The majority are in the last life stage, but their mind is clear enough to reach. Elderly day care centers often allow churches to hold activities, and follow-up is possible in homes or events off-site.

Most in nursing homes aren’t mentally clear. Churches can still show God’s love by treating those near life’s end with dignity (e.g., mini-concerts, caroling). Visitation access is limited, but missional Christians living in a nursing home can reach fellow residents.

Mobilization: As retirees reach their 80s, they are often considered no longer able to contribute. However, as long as they begin to share their church responsibilities, many can continue to contribute even as their stamina declines. Similarly, they can transition to a role as a helper and not as the sole person in case their health declines. For example, we had an 80-year-old lady assisting at a kids event, which allowed attendance to increase several-fold. She loved it, even crawling under a table during hide and seek. Later her health prevented her continuing but the event goes on.

New ministry opportunities

Even as ministry to and by older adults is becoming more important in Japan, the graying of society itself opens new doors. Many rural communities lack younger people for physical tasks. Volunteers from urban settings can help the elderly via the local church by performing physical chores (e.g., snow shoveling, weeding, clutter disposal, basic repairs) to show God’s love—this opens hearts.

Business as mission is another opportunity. The labor shortage in rural Japan caused by Japan’s aging society provides tremendous potential for foreign and home missionaries to go to Japan’s unchurched towns and villages to simultaneously plant a church while working a paid job. New visa platforms (e.g., in fishing and agriculture), growing needs in home health fields, as well as rural towns offering incentives for urban Japanese to relocate all make this option more favorable in rural Japan. This is especially true for tentmakers from developing nations. If missional Christians take up these opportunities in large numbers, the impact on Japan’s unchurched rural towns/villages and rural Japan in general could be tremendous. Some Japanese Christians have started home elder-care businesses. If done on a broad scale, its potential can be realized as a “bivocational” ministry platform that builds relationships while meeting felt needs in unchurched areas.

Helping elderly adapt to technology is a ministry opportunity too. The pandemic accelerated the pace where basic technology literacy is essential. This is a dilemma for those who have smart phones they use only for calls and lack experience with the internet/computers. Christians can help them learn, and build relationships in the process.

As Japan grays, ministry to and by older adults is not a sideline but a core essential. An aging society creates new opportunities to show God’s love in tangible ways. Adjusting the pace can optimize the latent potential of aging church members to serve. **JH**

1. “Population Projections for Japan (2016–2065): Summary,” from the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, https://www.ipss.go.jp/pp-zenkoku/e/zenkoku_e2017/pp_zenkoku2017e_gaiyou.html (accessed January 23, 2023).
2. U-turner is a common term in Japanese for people returning to rural areas. <https://kimi.wiki/work/u-turn-i-turn>
3. Source: Rural Japan Church Planting Network. Current figure = 1,640.

Dawn Birkner has served since 2001 as a church planter in aging rural towns, coordinated Christian relief work after 3 disasters, and leads the Rural Japan Church Planting Network and Reaching Japan Together mission agency.

To continue to worship our whole lives

By Maki Okamoto

Can we create spaces so that everyone can worship, even if they have physical or other limitations?

I loved my grandparents and spending time with people like them, and I enjoyed being involved with the elderly in church work. At the same time, I had a burden for mission and evangelism. When I was in seminary, I visited elderly people in their homes during my free time.

The evangelistic work of talking to people with dementia about the Bible and giving them an “invitation” each time was one of my joys during my seminary years. However, after 10 years in the pastoral field in Japan, I realized that I was not doing much work with elderly people, despite the burden I had felt for it.

There is so much to do in the church. After 10 years of doing this and that, I decided to take a one-year sabbatical to stop for a while and do “what I wanted to do.” I traveled abroad and I was able to see the ministry to the elderly in churches in Japan from an outsider’s perspective.

I was inspired when I saw that in other places there are residential

spaces for the elderly near churches and churches that hold weekly meetings for the elderly. I began to wish to devote my time and energy to continuing the worship service for everyone, at all times, and in all places, whether they are elderly, disabled, or have additional physical limitations that make it difficult for them to go out.

My father became ill during my sabbatical and his strength was failing. During that time I invited him to church. One thing I realized was that the chairs in the church were unbearable for him as he was losing strength and suffering from back pain. The traditional worship program and time had become painful for him. This made him think, “I am not welcomed. I shouldn’t go.” The church invites everyone to worship, but in reality, I wonder if the church is causing a “barrier” that wouldn’t be felt if one was healthy, but that might cause people to shy away.

I also thought about other issues due to the challenges of getting older, such as people losing their means of trans-

portation to go to church (people who can no longer ride bicycles or no longer have their car licence). All these issues can create “worship refugees.”¹

When I returned to the pastorate, I was given the opportunity to serve in a home for the elderly in Gifu in addition to my church work. It is a small fellowship, and we have prayer meetings and worship services with five or six people. A small fellowship can be tailored to those who attend. I could explain the worship program as I went along, get closer to people who were hard of hearing and speak louder, and for those who had back pain, I could let them sit in a chair that they were used to. In this way, various problems, including back problems, which had been a concern, could be overcome.

So, I wondered, is there no other way but to build facilities to overcome the problems? Can’t we do it in existing churches? I am still exploring this. We need to think about it, but we can’t spend all of our time on this one issue.

Right now, I don’t have all the answers, but I want to create a fellowship where everyone can continue to rejoice in their fellowship with the Lord without fear of growing older! “Please, Lord!” is my prayer. **JH**

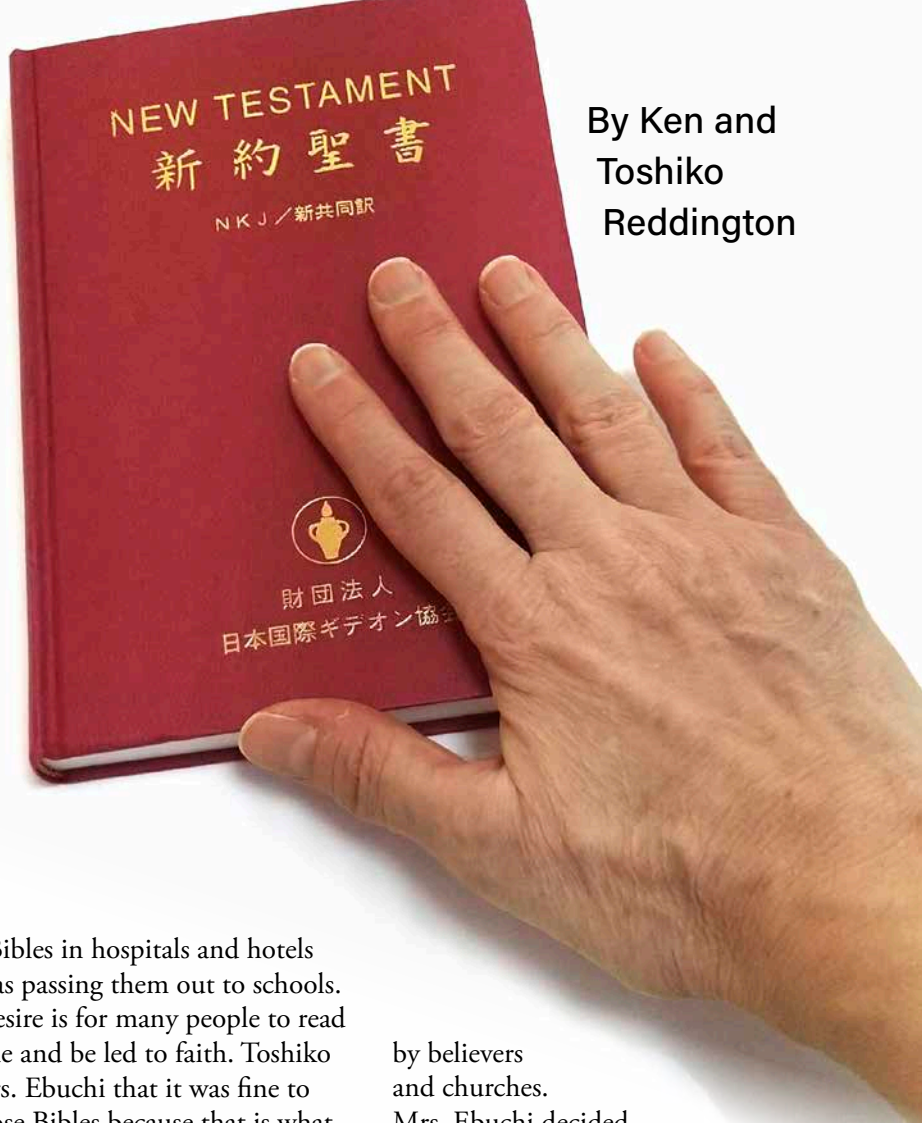
1. 礼拝難民 (*reihai nanmin*) is phrase used by the author, literally “worship refugee.” 難民 is used in Japanese to describe a group of people who have nowhere to go. For example, カフェ難民 (*café nanmin*) refers to people who wander from one cafe to another, simply trying to find a table or seat during peak hours in a large city like Tokyo. ネットカフェ難民 (*netto café nanmin*) is used for homeless people who spend nights in internet cafés. 礼拝難民 means people who, for various reasons, have difficulties in attending a worship service.

Photo submitted by author



Maki Okamoto is a Japanese pastor who serves at Okazaki Christ Church, of the Japan Free Evangelical Church denomination (同盟福音基督教会). (Article translated by Judith Ricken)

An old lady "stole" a Bible



By Ken and
Toshiko
Reddington

God took her from fierce opposition to Christianity, to leading her husband to the Lord

Mrs. Emiko Ebuchi (94) is a member of our church, and it all started with a Gideon Bible. Here is her story, first from our perspective, and then from hers.

She first came to our church on December 31, 2006. She'd been invited by her grandson, Atsushi, who was a staff member of Japan Campus Crusade for Christ (he is now the national director). Soon after, we heard from Atsushi that she had prayed with him. We went to Mrs. Ebuchi's house to confirm her faith, and from that time on we (though usually just Toshiko) held a weekly Bible study there with her. One reason we did that was because she had not yet decided to come to church weekly. Her husband was present at every Bible study. One time, she said that she had something to confess. She said that in 2002 she had stolen a Bible from the waiting room of a hospital. She had read a little, but decided to take it home so she could read more. But, she said she took the Bible back afterwards.

Toshiko said, "Mrs. Ebuchi, everything is fine. It's OK to keep stealing [the Bible]." She made sure that Mrs. Ebuchi had "stolen" a Bible placed by the Gideons and told her that the Gideons International is a group that

places Bibles in hospitals and hotels as well as passing them out to schools. Their desire is for many people to read the Bible and be led to faith. Toshiko told Mrs. Ebuchi that it was fine to take those Bibles because that is what they are there for.

Opposition to grandson fuels spiritual inquiry

In 2002, when her grandson told his family that he planned to begin work as a staff member for Campus Crusade, they were opposed. And his grandmother, Mrs. Ebuchi, was the most resistant. Her reason for opposing his

*I have no regrets,
and I can live my
life in peace.*

plan was that instead of working at a regular job, he would be asking people to give him money to make a living—unthinkable! Of course, she had no understanding of how workers in a Christian organization are supported

by believers and churches.

Mrs. Ebuchi decided that even if it made her seem like a demon, she would fiercely oppose her grandson's plan. Around that time her husband was sick in the hospital, and that's when she saw the Bible. She wondered what it was about this God that her grandson believed so strongly. So she decided to read some of it, and then she decided she wanted to read more.

Regular Bible study

After three months of Bible study at her house in 2007, Mrs. Ebuchi began to come to the worship service at our church every week, where her faith was strengthened. Then, on the first Sunday of 2009, her agnostic husband, who always said he didn't believe in God or religion, came to church with her and the family. That fall, her husband was hospitalized again. In the early morning of November 20, 2009, she talked with her husband about eternal life. Though very weak, he was surprisingly alert and

believed in Christ as his Savior. God called him home to heaven about a month after he came to faith.

God used many people and other things to lead Mrs. Ebuchi to faith. And God used her faith to draw her husband to salvation though he had been a stubborn man who said he would never believe in God.

As it says in 1 Corinthians 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be firm, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (NASB).

Mrs. Ebuchi's testimony

In 2002, I was astonished to hear that my grandson wanted to be a missionary [actually a Christian worker] after he graduated from college. All the family were against it, so he took a job as a businessman. But he didn't give up, and two years later, he decided again to work for Campus Crusade, even if it meant being disowned by his father (my son). I decided that there was nothing for it but to try and understand my grandson. By coincidence I saw a blue Bible in the waiting room of the hospital where my husband was laid up. I picked it up and read it at the hospital, and I even brought the Bible home with me. I looked it over but naturally I didn't understand anything other than that God is a great God who created the heavens and the earth.

Five years later, I went to my grandson's wedding at a church in Tokyo. I was moved by the warm expressions of blessing from each person who attended the wedding. I think it was from that time I began to pray, “Jesus, please be with me,” though I had always been a faithful Buddhist until that time.

When my grandson and his wife came home at the end of that year, I went with them to Tenno New Life Chapel. [Another grandson also attended for the first time.] Ken Reddington gave the message, and my grandson, Atsushi, gave a ministry report. After the worship service, the warmth of the pastor and the church members made me feel at home, and I almost didn't want to go back to my home. The character of the pastor and his wife made me want to know more

about Christ than ever before. The next day was New Year's Day, and Atsushi and his wife had to return to Tokyo. I asked him a quick question, and he said, “Well, let's pray together.” And I prayed to receive Jesus into my heart right then and there. It was a busy time as they prepared to return, but it just seemed so natural to pray like that. From that time on, the pastor's wife came to my home every week. When we studied the Bible, I felt warm all over, and I gradually began to understand the gospel. Now I always look forward to times when I can study the Bible with others.

At the end of 2009, my husband's situation got worse, and Atsushi and his wife came back to see him and talk about the Bible. My husband said, “It's too hard to understand.” Our spirits sank, and we stopped talking to him. But in the early morning hours, I was able to talk with him and he said, “I want to pray with Atsushi.” So when Atsushi and his wife came back to the hospital, Atsushi prayed, and, in spite

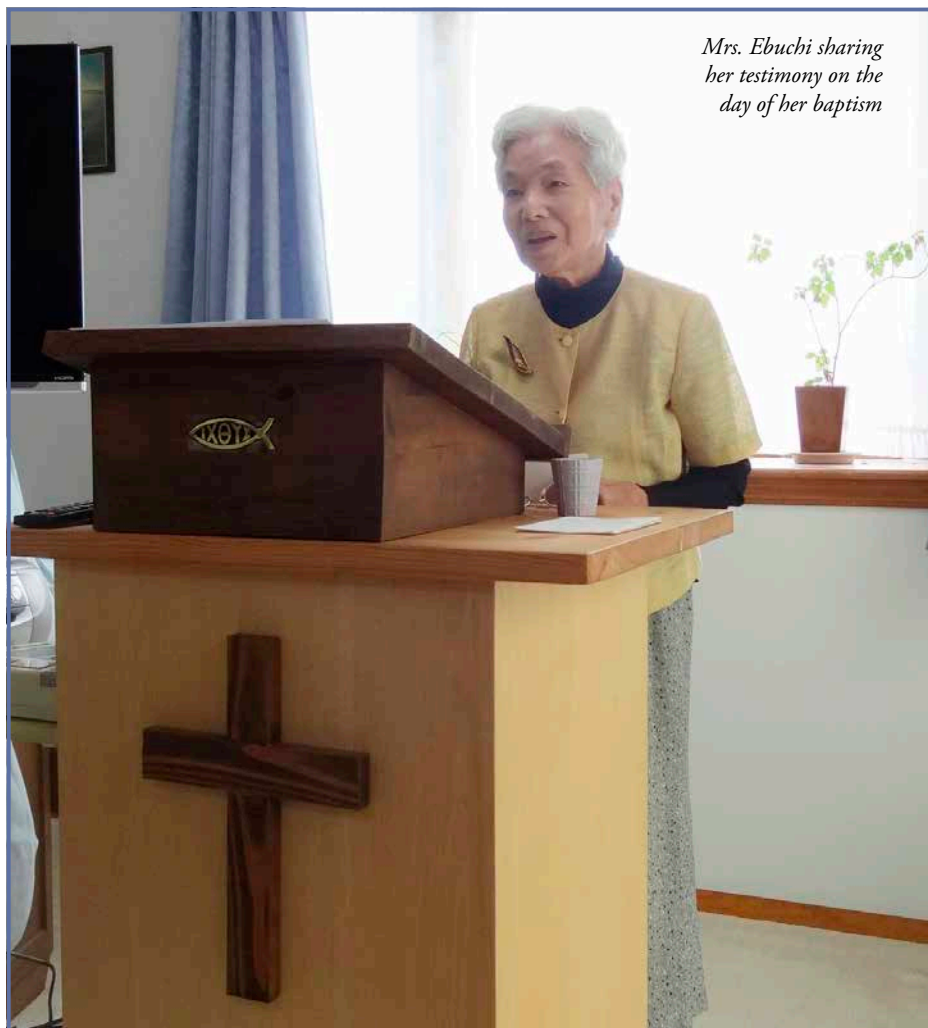
of his hard breathing, my husband prayed from the heart to believe. I was so happy! Not only my husband, but I, too, have no regrets, and I can live my life in peace. [He died in his sleep on December 26, Emiko's 81st birthday.]

Conclusion

Mrs. Emiko Ebuchi was baptized on September 2, 2018. For a long time after being saved, she did not get baptized because, as she said, “I know I'm saved. I know where I'm going when I die.” But she finally realized that baptism would be a testimony to her family. So she was willingly baptized. That day, her grandson gave the message and I baptized her in our *ofuro* bathtub. **JH**

Bible photo by Karen Ellrick
Ebuchi photo submitted by author

Ken and Toshiko Reddington are church-planting missionaries in Kochi-ken. Ken is an MK who returned to Japan as a missionary from the US in 1978. He grew up in Yamanashi-ken, and Toshiko is from Fukushima-ken. (Emiko Ebuchi's testimony in the article was translated by Ken.)



Mrs. Ebuchi sharing her testimony on the day of her baptism

To a thousand generations

How can we encourage the older members of our churches to help pass on our faith to younger generations?

By Kenneth See

Covenants dominate the themes and narrative of Scripture. The Lord ensures that he will continue his covenant through our ministry here on earth. I wish to focus on how the elderly in our congregations still have a very important role to play in that ministry.

A covenant continued

In Genesis, the Lord makes a promise to a man named Abram. It was a promise to be Abram's God and to create a nation through him that would bless the other nations of the Earth (Gen. 12-15). The Abrahamic Covenant is referenced all throughout the Old and New Testaments. It's the linchpin in understanding the new covenant under Christ. A deep dive into just that one covenant alone would be worthy of its own article but let's shift our focus to the main text at hand:

"He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant" (Psalm 105:7-10, ESV emphasis mine).

The focus of this text is that God will remember his covenant with Israel forever. He will ensure it continues on throughout the generations. Now, granted, the people of Israel had work to do on their end as well. Deuteronomy 6 says that the commands and statutes of God are to be endlessly taught to the next generation. This was how the covenant was to be passed on. Who was commanded to do this

work? The older to the younger. Fathers to sons. Parents to children. In several other places in Deuteronomy the phrase "and your children's children" is often used to show that this wasn't just for transmission from parent to child but also from grandparent to grandchild and beyond. The people of Israel understood that there was not an age that they were released from their duty to pass on the statutes of God.

Modern day covenant keepers

To ensure that the new covenant of Christ is passed onto the next generation, we need to follow God's command in Deuteronomy 6. This has understandably led to a worldwide focus on children's and youth ministry. In my experience as a minister on church staff, lay leader, and regular church member this focus on youth has resulted in many elderly Christians feeling as though their season of usefulness had come to an end (though I'm

in no way suggesting that we should not be ministering to the unique needs of children and students). At a church I served at in Dallas, Texas there was one retired business owner who had made a comment that he was only viewed as a "walking wallet" and never asked to be involved beyond financial contributions. This broke my heart. He had so much wisdom and understanding of the Scriptures to offer!

I suggest that the greatest need our elderly brethren have is to be useful once again. Our Lord said it best: "The Son of Man came to serve rather than to be served" (Matt. 20:28). The best way to minister to an aging population is to have ministry flow from an aging population. They have much to offer in terms of wisdom and experience that will prove invaluable to the youth of our congregations. Wisdom and experience that came at the cost of pain and loss can be shared freely to anyone who asks.



What can we do?

First, work hard to encourage many of them to take up leadership or support roles for small groups and Bible studies. This could be as a teacher who guides the others in the group to greater understanding of the text or as the host who allows the group to meet in their home. Even being willing to cook a nice meal for the group is a huge way to contribute to the gathering of believers. This may seem small, but let's remember that several times Christ ministered over a meal and we are told to imitate him. So, allow those who have the gifting to prepare meals to do so. This might not be feasible every single week. Yet having several elderly Christians on a cooking rotation will give them all a sense of purpose and involvement, which is exactly how we hope to minister to them.

Second, not all of them will feel comfortable being teachers or leaders of small groups, but I'm sure that many would be completely okay with one-on-one conversations. Several Christian survey and research groups have found that one of the greatest needs of young Christians is mentors in the faith. Someone to explain how Christianity is done on a daily practical

level. Elderly Christians have the time and space to meet that need. It's rather simple: a young Christian (a person of any age who is new to the faith) meets

The best way to minister to an aging population is to have ministry flow from an aging population.

with an older Christian and talks about their walk. Several known issues are remedied by doing this. Chief among them is elder loneliness which is at an all-time high. However, for our purposes, it helps the elder Christians in our churches become modern day covenant keepers. Through these interactions they pass on the faith and the commands of God to those who follow after them. Their season of usefulness is far from over.

Third, with advances in dictation technology (or simply employing the deft hands of younger typists) it's never been easier for elderly Christians to

write their stories down. The testimony of what God has done in their lives is an abundant treasure for their fellow brethren. The people of Israel constantly remind each other of their shared history. Christians can do this by writing and sharing the testimonies of the elderly among us. They have amazing stories to tell, and we'd be remiss if we didn't encourage them to share those stories with the church at large. These would act as a record of God's faithfulness among us and would double as a record of God's everlasting covenant with his people.

Conclusion

The aged in our churches need to be shown that they are not done yet. There is ministry to be done in passing on the covenant to those who follow. Despite their age they have much to offer, and it's my hope that I have given some good starting points for church leaders to utilize that population in their congregations. Helping those advanced in age be useful for the kingdom will breathe life into their bones, and you will see the joy on their faces once again. I truly believe that leaving this source of ministry untapped will hinder our church members and leave us starved for wisdom that the elderly can provide.

There is a great opportunity in front of us—where the elderly's need to be useful and the command to pass on God's everlasting covenant to the next generation can both be met at once. As church leaders, let us strive to equip our aged members to continue the work of ministry that we all have been called to do. That, I believe, is the best way to minister to an aging population in this generation and for a thousand more. Gloria in excelsis Deo. Soli Deo Gloria. **JH**



Kenneth See is an independent tent-making missionary currently serving in Gunma Prefecture. He does ministry in Japan and all over Asia. You can learn more about his work and contact him at silkroadmission.org.

Walking alongside my elderly neighbor

After sharing earthly interests with my neighbor, I hope to share life in heaven

By Ginger Tobin

I was high in a tree in front of my house trimming branches to stop them rubbing on the power line. I looked down at the street, which was littered with the fallen branches, and saw a kimono-clad woman. I called down to her, “Excuse me!” Satō-san looked up at me in great surprise and concern for my safety. Assuring her that I had grown up farming and logging, I said, “Would you mind pulling those branches to the side of the street so they won’t obstruct traffic?” She kindly did as I asked.

Some of you may remember my writing about Satō-san in the Autumn 2015 issue of *Japan Harvest* (<https://japanharvest.org/the-silver-harvest>), and I wanted to tell you more about our growing and life-giving relationship. By our next encounter, I had moved diagonally across the street and was weeding in my yard when Satō-san came walking by, as always, in a kimono. When I mentioned the neighborhood children’s parties I had been holding, her eyes lit up. At 82, she was still serving as a school crossing guard and was a favorite with the elementary school children. At first, it didn’t look as though the parties would fit her busy schedule, as she was singing in two choruses and taking shamisen lessons. However, we did enjoy several years of fun with the kids at Christmas, Easter, and later Pentecost on an annual basis.

Our next adventure was the White Chrysanthemum Association, which I joined to donate my body to science. When she heard that I had attended the annual regional meeting, held at the nearest participating teaching medical university where students learn anatomy by dissection, she thought that attending the meetings would be a fun thing to do together. In hearty agreement, I mentored her in the application process, which requires providing written approval by family members for the applicant’s full-body donation.

Although I had readily received my siblings’ approval, Satō-san ran into a snag when her children were shocked that she would consider leaving the Buddhist system of cremation and subsequent payments to the local temple. Their refusal was devastating to Satō-san, so we spent some time at my house processing her disappointment. I was saddened to see the grip that the Buddhist system has on people but am still prayerfully watching for an open door. At the time, I tried to encourage her with the reminder that I could not apply when I first wanted to either because the association had all the applicants the university could handle and was not accepting more. Years later, I happened across the business card of a professor who helped me confirm that applications had reopened. I hadn’t realized that the White Chrysanthemum had any spiritual connections, so I was amazed at the joint funeral service for those who had passed in the previous year to hear a string ensemble play “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” by J.S. Bach and to hear Jesus’s assurance in my heart, “I am near to the broken-hearted” (author paraphrase from Ps. 34:18, cf. Is. 61:1; Luke 4:18).

Birthdays have been a continuing opportunity to enjoy time with Satō-san. For her 89th birthday this year, I cooked *takenoko gohan* (bamboo shoot rice), *chawan mushi* (steamed custard), and *miso shiru* (miso soup) for her and a new US neighbor family of mixed race. It was a delight to observe international citizen Satō-san conversing with the children in their brand-new Japanese!

This year, my most recent adventure with Satō-san has been to witness the one-night blooming of 10 of my 11 heavenly-scented white *Cereus* cactus flowers. We had some wonderful nocturnal visits, even sitting on my front



step chatting one full-moonlit night, just as my mother and I did when I was a child. Satō-san’s health has suffered in the past few years—in part from her many walks up and down our steep street, which she reports have worn away most of the cartilage from her knee joints. She missed the *Cereus*’s last bloom of the year, but as a consolation prize, I printed out photos for her.

So far she has shied away from Bible study, except for reading the Christmas and Easter stories to neighborhood children, but throughout our seven-year friendship Satō-san has enjoyed attending Christian concerts with me. Remembering her attendance at a Christian school as a child, she often rides home with me humming “Amazing Grace.” At the time of writing in late 2022, we are looking forward to attending a Christmas concert in early December. Walking beside Satō-san has been a privilege and a joy, from the day I saw her on the street below, to yesterday, when I passed her and another neighbor in my car. By God’s mercy and grace, I look forward to walking with her in heaven! **JH**

Photo submitted by author

Ginger Tobin serves with Aijalon Ministries International, developing Heart Change transformational retreats that originated in her home state of Oregon and leading Bible studies in Japanese and English. Her hobbies include bicycling, swimming, and tree climbing.

A challenge to the older generation

We need to repent of our failings to reach younger people in the past

The day I arrived in Japan, the little church in Yokohama—made up of a few elderly members, two young couples with children, some students, and single members—gave a nice welcome supper. Because I had no knowledge of the Japanese language we had some puzzling and laughter-filled communication. I was warmly received, and everyone prayed for me to learn Japanese quickly.

Early steps

My first Sunday school lesson was a disaster. I drew some pictures to explain the story and rehearsed it many times. But standing before the group of children with adults in the back made me freeze. No words came out of my mouth! The pastor realized what was happening and told the story much better than I could have done. Many people in other churches also prayed for me daily.

After about a year, I gave my first sermon in Japanese. Soon everyone was asleep, the Bible school student being the first. Only the oldest member listened intently and after the meeting said, “I am so happy I understood a little of what you said. I will continue to pray for you.” Afterwards I realized it was her polite way of saying she didn’t understand most of it! Much later, she heard another sermon of mine and told me, “Today I understood everything. Now I don’t need to pray anymore.” A few months later she moved to her eternal home, and I kept on speaking Japanese, albeit not perfectly!

Regret that we didn’t do more

After a few years, I moved to Toyama Prefecture and lived in Yokata,

a place along Toyama Bay. There was no church, so I held meetings, language classes, and cooking classes with Bible studies for children and adults. The first Christmas, two-thirds of the primary school children attended. Over time it dwindled down to around 20. All these students are now mothers and fathers, and sadly most are not connected to churches in spite of the summer camps they attended with local churches when they were younger.

Years later I moved to Tateyama Village at the foot of Mount Tateyama. Again, there was no church in the village, so I began a small Sunday afternoon service. We had whole families attending, some who became Christians. I felt it was more than I could handle as a single and introduced those families to nearby churches. It was a very wonderful time as I was able to connect quite a few in this way.

In all the churches I’ve been involved with, the format has been the same. Sunday school was before the worship service, and then the children were mostly left to play or study by themselves. It felt to me a loss for the children not to be involved at the same time. From junior high school they continued to be left by themselves and eventually drifted away into many school activities. I regret that we did not do more to include children from a very young age.

Seventeen years ago, I was led to be the pastor of Uozu Church in Toyama Prefecture. There were a few little children among the very elderly members. The congregation was small, and the Sunday school had closed years before.

By Ester Ruth Waehrer

Sadly, we were not able to reestablish the Sunday school. Now all those children are adults and live in other areas of Japan. While our church grew slightly in numbers, we lacked a young people’s outreach.

Considering what the Bible teaches about instructing from a very young age, I feel we should have done more. Also, I feel that we did not pay enough attention to the changes happening in our society, especially the ending of pregnancies out of convenience (exception: medical reasons), nor did we fully understand the importance of supporting whole families in and outside the church.

I believe we as a church need to repent (2 Chron. 7:14).

Dear God, loving Father of all who come to you through Jesus Christ, the only way of salvation. I repent that so often I did not see and love the young people as you do. I ask for your forgiveness, cleansing by the blood of Jesus and a fresh anointing by your Holy Spirit to love and pray for them. I believe you have a plan for our young people today. Show us the way and enlarge our hearts to receive them in our midst. Amen.

I believe and trust our Lord Jesus Christ will give us a new generation of very young believers mingled in with believers of all ages, living by the precepts of the Word under the leading of the Holy Spirit. **✠**

Ester Ruth Waehrer (Switzerland) came to Japan in 1974 to work in churches of the Holiness group in 日本基督教団 (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan). She received her Masters in Theology from Shalom Bible College, US.

Samurai Projects: training the next generation

By Charley Ballinger

An internship program helps Japanese churches train lay leaders and discover future pastors

For those of us from an English-speaking background, the adage “time stands still for no man” is familiar to many. It paints the picture that we are all subject to the inevitable passing of time. We cannot stop the ageing process or the inevitability of death itself. It’s a sobering thought and a challenge to the rhetoric of the age that says you can, and should, be young forever. We all need to be spurred on to address this march of time that is threatening the future of Christ’s church in Japan.

By 2030 the average age of a Japanese person is predicted to be 52.1, rising from 48.4 in 2020.¹ However the average age of a Japanese pastor is already close to 70!²

This is a sobering thought. The United Church of Japan is candid about its “2030 problem”: if these trends continue, the denomination estimates that half of its churches will have to close by the end of the decade.³ And another reality, I’m told, is that many seminaries are severely short on numbers.

Despite these factors, ageing pastors continue to faithfully teach Christ’s church, often doing so at great personal cost to themselves. I’ll never forget the church we attended where the pastor’s wife was joyfully serving, despite weekly dialysis appointments for her kidney failure.

Where are the young leaders?

Where is the next generation of servant leaders for Japan’s church? Why are so few young people training for full-time ministry? What is needed to encourage people to step out in faith?

One of the key issues facing young Christians in the church in Japan is that the jump from pew to seminary

seems too big. In many cases they have never had an opportunity to try out their gifts, in particular to see if they have teaching gifts. One young person now preparing for seminary reflected, “In a previous church my only area of service was on the church cleaning roster—it was a joy to serve but it wasn’t going to give me the chance to see if I could make it as a pastor!”

For many of us serving in Japan, our first taste of leading a Bible study at church or in campus ministry and seeing the Lord work through his Word was an early step towards entering ministry full time. Jesus has given to his church all the gifts necessary—presumably this means there are many young people with the gifts and character to be pastors and teachers, but they haven’t had the chance to discover this yet.

Samurai Projects

To help address this problem, The Samurai Projects (samuraiprojects.com) partners with local churches to promote the idea of a two-year, pre-seminary, church-based internship. The Samurai Projects Handbook explains:

The goal of the Samurai Projects is for interns to learn from an experienced trainer, as they have a go at ministry in their own church context. We believe as people try out their gifts in various ministries God will provide them, and their churches, with opportunities to see where they can be best used in the future.

Since its relaunch in 2021, Samurai Projects has been blessed to partner with eleven interns from nine churches in a variety of denominations. We hope this is win-win—a win for the “current” church (who get a staff member

now, albeit one in training), and a win for the “future” church as the internship leads to more well-trained church members, some of whom will go on to be the pastors.

Serving in their church

Each intern spends four days a week serving in their own church (or sometimes in a parachurch ministry). Practical service is a component, but a key requirement is for the interns to be involved in teaching ministries, whether one-to-one (Bible study), Sunday school leaders, or even preaching.

In addition to these ministry opportunities, each intern has a designated “trainer-pastor” from their church—and this is vital to the success of the internship. One aim of input and feedback from a trainer is growth in ministry skills for the intern. Another equally important aim is to provide a realistic idea of what church ministry is like. A third aim is to develop godly character. One intern recently commented, “My experience has been less of a trainer-trainee relationship as much as two brothers trying to become more like Jesus.” Indeed as Paul modelled to Timothy a life of servant-hearted leadership, faults and all, Timothy grew in confidence. And as Paul saw the work of Timothy he too was bolstered in his own faith in Jesus and his ability to persevere. That has been our experience at Samurai.

Samurai Projects aims to encourage and support these trainers. For many churches, employing an intern is financially difficult, so we also provide match funding—it’s the church’s responsibility to set the intern’s stipend, but we are able to provide bursaries up to half this amount.

Training outside of the local church

Alongside work in their churches, interns gather twice a week for fellowship and classroom-based sessions. These times are for fostering gospel convictions, godly character, and growth in ministry competence. More than 30 experienced pastors and missionaries are involved in the training, and we deliberately try to cultivate an ethos that we are a group seeking to train the next generation. One particular focus is giving people the confidence to teach the Scriptures faithfully in 21st century Japan.

This year we have been working through Mark's Gospel and Philipians. Twice a term, each intern gives a practice talk to the rest of the class. They are then given feedback, training them to be open



Classroom session

to seeking advice and feedback in the future. One intern realized, "I used to jump straight to thinking how to make the Bible relevant to people in my church; now I realize the importance of trying to understand what the author himself is saying, and teaching what God says is key."

Our trainers don't all teach in a traditional way. For example, we have also seen puppets make an appearance in class! CMS Australia missionaries Helane and Adam Ramsey and their team from Oyumino Church presented a vision of teaching the Scriptures to children in a way that is relevant and grace-driven. One participant com-

mented, "I was particularly struck to think that the whole program (including the songs, craft, and games) can be used to explain the gospel to children."

Looking to the future

Whilst we're praying that the Lord will raise up many full-time workers for the harvest fields, we know that



A mission trip to Hanamaki Megumi Christ Church, a chance for Tokyo-based interns to experience a church plant in a more rural area. It was one student's first chance to give a Sunday sermon.

many others will faithfully serve him in companies, schools, and the home. If someone does a church internship and then realizes full-time ministry is not for them, we also regard this as a success! We trust that their time as an intern still enables them to serve Jesus more wholeheartedly wherever they are called.

Samurai Projects is currently limited to the Tokyo area, but our dream is to see similar schemes set up in other regions. The opportunity to meet and study with other interns has been a key part of the Samurai experience and so we have resisted requests to make the classes available online.

However, the intern element is in many ways more important than the formal classes and so from April 2023 onwards we're experimenting with a hybrid method to allow interns from outside Kanto to join, with monthly in-person gatherings.

Besides finding interested partners, we also have to be flexible since training methods vary in effectiveness depending on context and subculture. Of course we're not there yet. When my husband presents the work of the Samurai Projects he often shows a picture of *tonkatsu*. Tonkatsu—a world-renowned Japanese dish—apparently entered Japan in the Meiji period as the humble pork cutlet. However, many decades of refinement have produced something that is molded to the Japanese palate. The commandment to train the next generation of workers is thoroughly biblical,⁴ but the culturally appropriate methods will vary.

As the government of Japan confronts the prospect of a growing elderly population, they are no doubt caught in moments of despair. In the church, we too may be tempted to similar hopelessness. But time for Christ's people does not march hopelessly to inescapable death. Rather it ascends heavenward to an age that will never end. We are hopefully praying and working towards a future of more and more servant leaders being raised up for the harvest fields of Japan. **JH**

1. "Japan: Median age of the population from 1950 to 2050", *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/604424/median-age-of-the-population-in-japan> (data released July 2019).
2. *Beneath the Surface: 30 ways to pray for Japan*, (Singapore: OMF International, 2020), 19.
3. "聖霊刷新協議会 教団議長招き「2030年問題」で研修", *KiriShin: The Kirisuto Shimbum*, <http://www.kirishin.com/2019/08/01/27708> (August 1, 2019).
4. E.g. 2 Timothy 2:2, or Matthew 9:37–38 in context (noting that Jesus instruct that we pray for workers, and then at the beginning of chapter 10 instructs (i.e. trains) and sends out the 12).

Photos submitted by author

Charley Ballinger (UK) came to Japan with her husband James in 2009 with OMF. In 2022, after an eight-year break, they returned with Japan Christian Link. They have four children and James is the Director of the Samurai Projects.



Generous hearts

By Kari Miyano

Giving thanks for a Japanese pastor and his wife

What's the secret to a soul coming to Christ in Japan? What's the secret of someone wanting to become a pastor? As we know, God's Word is the guidebook for life, but God also guides people when they come to feel and experience his love. This story is about how God's love changed and empowered the life of one young soul through the faithfulness of many missionaries and Japanese believers.

The story began over sixty years ago when Hiro gave his heart to the Lord at a hi-b.a. (high school born againers) camp.¹ From there he was introduced to a small local church in Yokohama. After the Sunday service, fellowship was held at the parsonage, an old and shabby Japanese house on the outside, yet the inside was beautifully filled with love and praise and worship. Hiro met people such as missionary Betty Hudson and Japanese believers, who helped strengthen and encourage him in his faith walk. It was a beautiful and faith-filled chain of relationships—each one leading to the next.

Another strong link in the chain was Clarence and Eleanor Swanson, who were friendly, faithful, and loving missionaries. They began building a friendship with Hiro by inviting him to their home in the afternoons. As they did this, they naturally taught and talked about the Word of God.

Hiro's faith began to grow, and he started to share his testimony and story with his friends. And they, too, were touched by the truth and the love of Christ. One by one, Hiro saw his friends come to Christ! Before

too long the group of believers had grown to about five other students, and Hiro said at that point they did not feel out of place praying before meals and opening the Bible at lunchtime at school. As I listened to this story, I could see how strong and genuine his faith was, even as a young teen. He had a strong inner conviction of eternal life along with the love of God in him. This naturally flowed from him as he shared this with his friends. After high school, he went on and completed a college degree while being involved in local fellowships.

In 1968, Hiro married a Christian woman, and the next year, he entered seminary. In 1972, Hiro was invited to join a missionary on a deputation trip in the US for six months. This was part of his training. He was all gung-ho for the trip, and he jumped at the opportunity to go and live by faith. His enthusiasm was catching and brought joy everywhere he went. He traveled to churches in 16 different states and had a wide variety of wonderful experiences along the way.

I asked him how he managed to communicate as he was not a fluent speaker of English. He replied that somehow the spirit of God helped him to communicate well, and there was no language problem. It was sheer adventure, discovery, and fun. This trip fueled the spiritual fire that was already in him, and he developed a great love and thankfulness for the missionaries and brothers and sisters in the US who helped him along the way. Through these cords of human kindness, he

again experienced God's love in a deep way. Because of this experience, he became comfortable with foreigners. He realized the value of working with other believers, traveling, and receiving God's love from people he hadn't known before.

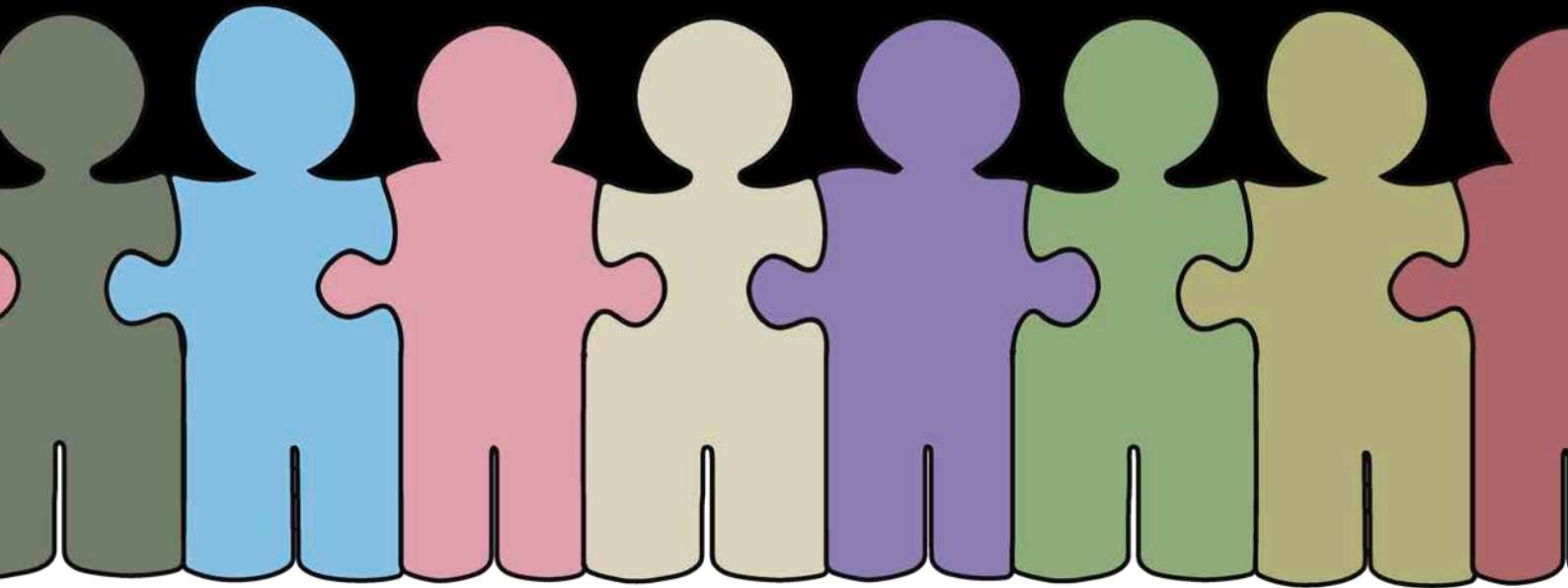
Campus ministry

After returning to Japan, Hiro joined the staff of Campus Crusade. On weekdays he would go to a local university campus and begin talking with the students. He ate lunch with them at the school cafeteria and began building relationships with them. Then he invited them to his home for dinner and fellowship. His wife cooked in the kitchen while he talked with the students in the living room. It was a beautiful team effort as husband and wife, working together for the same purpose of sharing Christ's love.

Hiro was giving in the same way that he had received from his mentors and faith fathers. Through these simple and meaningful interactions, students came to faith in Christ. Everyone, even in the 1970s, had a hunger for a place to be loved and accepted as they were. It was merely opening his heart and home with his wife, united in Christ for the sake of the gospel, that planted the seeds for an abundant harvest.

Church ministry

In 1975, Hiro stepped into the role of a pastor and started a church with a heart for young people. In addition to Sunday services, they held different gatherings. There were baptisms, and



sometimes seven or eight students at a time made a public declaration of their faith this way. Fellowship continued all day long on Sundays until late at night. Pastor Hiro and his wife laughed as they related the story that the students simply did not want to leave their home. Finally, when it got to be around 10 p.m., they would have to tell everyone to leave and go home. How contagious the love of God is! One of the largest gatherings had over 100 Japanese college students. There was no begging or pushing, but simply living out the gospel. Today, many of the youth who came to Christ at that time are faithfully serving as Christian leaders throughout Japan in churches and Christian organizations.

Twice he led a homestay tour to North America and brought around thirty Japanese high school and college students each time, a similar experience to what he'd had in his earlier years. This allowed believers in the US and Canada to share a part in the ministry as they opened their hearts and homes to these students. It reminds me of the simple acronym TEAM—Together Everyone Achieves More!

For several summers, Pastor Hiro invited an overseas short-term mission team to his church. His church partnered with the team by providing meals and accommodation, and created opportunities for them to interact with the families in his church and community. Although he didn't seek any reward or praise, his daughter was led

to marry a man who also had a heart for missions in Japan, and so he was blessed with a faithful and diligent American son-in-law. And even today, in his late seventies, he continues to

**“Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay”
(1 Pet. 4:9 NLT).**

interact and partner with foreigners.

Even during the pandemic, Pastor Hiro and his wife generously invited my husband and me to their home multiple times. His wife has a big heart and helpful hands as she still faithfully cooks the meals and serves up coffee and dessert as well. We enjoyed talking as a foursome, and it was through these visits that lasted several hours that I came to know the story that God has beautifully woven through their lives.

Inspired to do hospitality

As my husband and I pondered these stories in our hearts, we decided that it was time again to open our home to guests for meals and fellowship, as well as lodging. This has brought great refreshment to not only the guests who have come, but to our souls also. A few weeks ago, a 70-something friend from Kyushu came with her two sisters and brother-in-law. We enjoyed a meal, des-

sert, telling stories, and even listening to a Japanese folk song together. Last week we hosted Noemi from Belgium for several days while she was on a prayer mission in Japan. It was a time of encouraging each other in the Lord as well as learning about each other's countries.

Having meals with people and talking with people is in fact the method Jesus himself often used to draw people to himself and show them love. He affirmed their value as he spent time with them like this. In this busy land of Japan, may we open our hearts and homes to those

around us. Who can imagine what amazing results will be awaiting these steps of opening our hearts and homes?

Lastly, I want to encourage all of you. We don't often know where we are in the chain leading to faith in someone else's life. We don't know who may have planted a seed in them or whom they will encounter after they meet us. Let us be faithful in doing what God has called us to do, just as it was a whole team of people who planted, nurtured, and cultivated seeds in Pastor Hiro's life. It was a whole tribe working together that led to his life bearing much fruit. **JH**

1. Pastor Hiro wishes to remain anonymous, so we have not included details which identify him.

Kari Miyano (US) has lived more than half her life in Osaka. She and her husband delight in inviting people to their home and loving people where they are. She partners with Moms in Prayer International Japan.

Not just songs and sermons

Facilitating intergenerational relationships within a church

By Christy Snowden Van Dam



She watched from the perimeter as the children colored Easter eggs. She was fascinated by this new experience. Of course, we told her she could join in, along with her friend, the one she had been worshipping with for over thirty years. The two older women enjoyed the new experience and the opportunity to create something to be used as decoration in the service and then become part of the shared meal afterward.

I received the call to full-time ministry when I was in high school. I have had the opportunity to be a youth minister, missionary, children's pastor, chaplain of a daycare center, and senior pastor of an older congregation. These various positions were not stepping stones to reach my final career goal, but places where God called and used me throughout different periods of my life.

As a pastor of a church of mostly retired individuals, I thought I might have some ideas to share for this issue's theme. The more I thought about it, I realized the techniques I found beneficial in ministry to older adults are the same techniques I used in youth ministry, children's ministry, and childcare ministry.

Ministry is about connection—connecting people to a relationship with God but also connecting people with others so that they may grow and develop together. The church is the body of Christ and the family of God.

I was not raised in a Christian family, but the churches God led me to as a young person were small multi-generational churches. It was a middle-aged single woman who drove across town to where I lived—the last house on the dead-end road right by the railroad tracks—so I could attend the church my junior high school friend invited me to. When I relocated to a different state, it was a retired man named Justice who came door-to-door inviting children in the neighborhood to Vacation Bible School. In church we sang songs like “The Family of God” (by Bill Gaither), and I truly felt like a part of the family when Miss Zelda, a woman in her eighties, gave me knitted slippers she made just for me, the young teen who came to church by herself.

It has always been my goal as a pastor to help facilitate these inter-generational connections. When I served as a children's pastor, I paired older adults with children in the church as prayer partners. The children were encouraged, and it also helped the senior adults be less concerned with the noise and activity of the children because they were “their kids.”

Most of the time our church uses a basic outline for worship, but we are not afraid to put aside that outline and use worship time in different ways. We

have had worship services geared specifically toward children instead of just sending children out during adult worship. Sometimes we use worship time for seasonal outreach events.

All ages look forward to our annual holiday events. When we had sporadic attendance at our fall outreach for children, we began setting up activity stations and encouraging everyone to participate. Instead of having adults stand on the edges and watch one or two children do an activity, relationships were formed when teens and seniors did activities side by side.

In December, we have a Jesse Tree making event, an Advent tradition which traces the relationship of God and people from creation to the birth of Jesus. We use a chunk of worship time to create ornaments based on Scripture passages. Through media like iron beads, felt, and shrinking plastic, pairs of non-related children and adults

or individuals create ornaments. Then, we take turns reading the scripture passage, presenting our ornaments, and hanging them on the tree.

In the years when we had more children and grandchildren attending, the children presented plays and musicals at Christmas. More recently everyone brought their creative gifts to the Christmas service. In 2019, couples shared their musical gifts in duets, children played handbells, a teen used art to create a Christmas story, and an older woman used her gift for calligraphy to create a nativity scene with Japanese characters.

My primary ministry role is pastoring a Japanese congregation. Most of the regular attendees are past retirement age. Like many congregations, we have gone through phases. There was a time when these older adults were raising their young children together. Then there was a period where the church was full of grandchildren. Now it is mostly older adults, a few in middle age, and one or two teens.

We have discovered that everyone benefits from creative activities, and we must recognize that worship is for all generations and can happen in different ways. Everyone benefits from trying

new things and being challenged to present their faith and serve in new and creative ways.

Our definition of church is not just songs and sermons. Church is everyone of all ages serving, creating, and engaging. Church is a body and a family where everyone has gifts and everyone has value. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Christy Snowden Van Dam is a missionary and ordained minister with the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana). She enjoys serving people of all ages and currently pastors Nishi-Kunitachi Church of God in Tokyo.

Ministry to one elderly person

By Karen Nakamura

Budding friendship with one neighbor grew from timely encounters

Since I work for an organization that does student ministry, I thought I didn't have anything to contribute to the theme of Ministry in an Aging Society. But then I remembered my budding friendship with our 81-year-old neighbor! I met her because we were doing weekly co-op grocery orders with pickup at a common location. One week, she didn't pick up her order, and she didn't order anything for several weeks. I wondered what happened to her, but had no way to get in touch. I wondered if she was in the hospital—or worse. I started praying, “Oh, Lord, please don't let her die without knowing you!” Finally, after several months, she reappeared and told me she had been in the hospital and then rehab all this time.

I invited her to a Christian concert, and she came. Since it was our first time to do an activity together, I was surprised at how open she was about her past family troubles and tragedies. She also told me that for college she had gone to a Christian “mission school” and used to enjoy singing hymns. After that first concert,

she came to almost every Christian concert or event I invited her to and also joined my English Bible class.

One day, I got out the door later than I expected, but I ran into her outside our apartment building. She was having trouble walking back to her home, and I was able to help her. Another time, I happened to run into her outside our building again and was able to meet her son, who was visiting. Through these interactions, I have sensed that the Lord is in charge of every minute of my life, guiding me so that I can run into my neighbor exactly when he wants!

She started coming to church with me, and now she comes almost every week for worship service, handbell practice, as well as practices for singing Handel's *Messiah*. Near the beginning of our friendship, she told me, “My world has opened up so much since I met you!” But she said that she could not “change religions” because the ashes of her husband and one of her sons are at the Buddhist temple, and the priest has been so helpful to her. Recently, she told me again, out of the blue, that she cannot “change religions.” I think she brings it up because she is considering doing so. I believe she will put her trust in Jesus someday, and I am looking forward to that day!

So, though I don't have an official ministry to the elderly, God has given me a ministry to one older person. It has been a delight to me and shown that his hand guides every minute of my life. **JH**

Karen Nakamura, from California, US, lives in Tokyo. She and her husband, Mitsu, work with Japan Campus Crusade for Christ. They have three children in their twenties. Karen loves to talk and pray with friends.





Reaching seniors through arts and crafts

Senior citizens are able to share more openly about their problems while doing something creative

By Renee Williams

When I first started making trips to the tsunami-devastated area in Iwate in April 2011, we concentrated on bringing food and supplies to those who had lost their homes. Although they were grateful for the things we brought, they were hesitant to share about their experiences. Most thought if they just ignored what had happened and concentrated on moving forward to rebuild their lives, they would be fine. While living in the shelters, it was easier to focus on the present because there were children playing and elderly people who needed assistance. But once people moved into the *kasetsu jūtaku* (temporary housing), they were faced with the silence of an empty home, and those suppressed feelings began to surface.

Families with children were given first priority and moved into the *kasetsu jūtaku* with better access to schools. As a result, retired people were lumped together in more remote temporary housing facilities that had very few families. Some had lost spouses or loved ones in the tsunami and were living alone for the first time in their lives.

I realized that they now needed trauma care more than food and supplies, so I began holding “Heart Care Gatherings” once a month. We would sing songs, I’d give a short Bible message, and then we’d have teatime. Most of the participants were older women, and when we made Christmas wreaths in December 2011, I saw their eyes light up for the first time in months. These ladies had lost all their possessions and were now living in impersonal box-type apartments that looked exactly like everyone else’s. Everyone received the same appliances and furniture from the Red Cross and other charitable organizations. Having something homemade to decorate their living room or *genkan* (entryway) made

the temporary housing units feel more like home. So, we started making craft projects every month.

I noticed that it was difficult for the ladies to talk about their struggles when looking directly into people’s eyes. But when everyone was focusing on a handicraft, it was easier to share their true feelings. Some said they were still afraid to turn off the lights at night and needed to take sleeping pills or anti-anxiety medicine. One lady’s son was having nightmares after the horrors he saw while recovering bodies with the volunteer fire brigade. A younger woman had always cooked what her parents



wanted to eat; now that she was alone she couldn’t make any decisions—she just stared at shelves in the grocery store, feeling paralyzed. The continual aftershocks would reawaken fears. Tears came to their eyes as I said a simple prayer for them. They had never heard anyone pray aloud for them—they had only heard chants and mantras uttered by Buddhist priests. But after a while, some even started saying, “Amen” at the end of my prayers!

After they moved to permanent housing, the ladies still wanted to get together, so I searched for a new location. I found a small prefab building that I was able to rent, and in April 2018, another believer and I opened

Café Suika (Watermelon Café). Before the pandemic, we had gatherings once a month, but after social distancing became a requirement, we could no longer meet in large groups.

Instead, we’ve begun “One-on-One Heart Care.” We always have craft materials available, and any time anyone comes to the café who’s interested in making a craft, we sit down with them and work on the project together. Young people are now participating too! I’ve found that people are more open when in small groups or one-on-one. One woman who had participated for many years was hesitant to share her story in front of others, but when she came to the café by herself, she told us that her husband had committed suicide less than a year before the earthquake. Because so many people had lost loved ones tragically in the tsunami, she felt she couldn’t talk about her husband since he died by his own choice. She had no one to help her process her grief and was so thankful to find a place where she felt safe enough to share her true feelings.

Twelve years have now gone by and some of the ladies now have problems with arthritis and eyesight, so I prepare more simple crafts using sparkly stickers and decorative jewels. I started including glittery cross stickers to see if the ladies would choose them. Gradually, they became more comfortable using the cross stickers. They call the crosses, “Kirisuto-sama (Christ).” One woman put several crosses in the middle of her craft saying, “I’ll put Christ here in the center.” That’s my prayer for each of these precious ladies—that Christ would become the center of their lives. **JH**

Photos submitted by author

Renee Williams (US) came to Japan in 2003 through Foursquare Missions International, serving in Hiroasaki and Sapporo. In 2018, she opened Café Suika in Miyako, Iwate.



東京基督教大学
TOKYO CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY



Do you want to serve God in Japan? Then do college in Japan!

Learn to love and serve the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
Learn to love and serve your Japanese and foreign neighbors as yourself.

- ▶ You can study in our English or Japanese track, or in both!
└── Develop all your language skills in college!
- ▶ The cost is low, but the value is priceless.
└── Around 1/3 the cost of Christian colleges in the U.S.



Get news in your inbox about special lectures, concerts, and other events where you can connect with Christians in Japan!

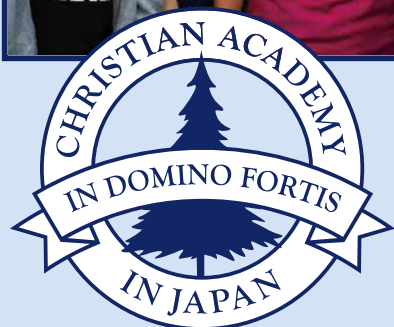
Do College in Japan
in 3 Easy Steps!

<https://www.tci.ac.jp/english>



Supporting missionary families today.

Preparing the next generation of missionaries for tomorrow.



Equipping students to serve Japan and the world for Christ



Phone: 042-471-0022

Despite “no success,” true love rescued him

Christian Shimbun, August 28, 2022

Translated by Hiromi Terukina

Recalling his university days escaping from the Unification Church, Kōji Ishikawa shares his thoughts on the group and its connection to the recent assassination of the former Japanese prime minister. Thanks to his parents’ rescue efforts, Ishikawa was able to escape from a dark situation and now works as a pastor in Okinawa.



during this final seminar that he became a “real member” of the Unification Church.

The members had two main missions: proselytization and door-to-door sales. Day after day Ishikawa and the others stood in front of the train stations, asking passersby to answer a questionnaire and to attend their seminar. During long vacations, they went door to door selling sets of three kitchen cloths for two thousand yen. The church taught “no freedom without success,” so, in order to meet his daily sales quotas he felt compelled to sacrifice all he had, as well as every bit of the money given to him by his family. He felt a strong bond with the other members and worked diligently for what they believed to be the “truth.”

Immediately after enrolling in university, Ishikawa was invited to an international exchange club. He attended two video-based seminars at a nearby apartment complex over several days, and was then invited to a six-day seminar. Right before that third seminar the club finally revealed that they belonged to the Unification Church. Ishikawa felt he had been deceived but was already too involved with the members. They worked all night to persuade him to join the seminar and he finally agreed. After that one he attended a forty-day seminar, and it was

Worried for their son, Ishikawa’s parents tried to persuade him to leave the group. However, Ishikawa could not understand why his parents were so determined to take away the “truth” from

him. However, after numerous visits from a Christian pastor, Ishikawa gradually began to understand how certain teachings of the Unification Church were not biblical. Once the realization that this was not the “truth” kicked in, it left a huge hole in his heart.

To fill that hole, Ishikawa began attending services at a Christian church. He pondered, “if God is love, why is my life so messed up?” One morning while he listened to the sermon, he felt as if the pastor was specifically talking to him. Ishikawa heard a small voice whisper, “This is the truth.” Realizing that God loves him just the way he is, even though he had “no success,” God’s love poured into the hole in the heart.

Now, Ishikawa serves as a pastor in Naha, Okinawa. The recent incident of the former prime minister’s assassination and investigation of the Unification Church brought up many of these memories. Watching the interviews gave Ishikawa the impression that nothing has changed in the organization. Ishikawa wishes that more people would come to know God’s true love, just like he did. ■

The Oikos Project: Delivering tracts to every family in Nakano Ward

Christian Shimbun, October 9, 2022

Translated by Tomoko Kato

The Oikos Project was developed in 2019 by Every Home for Christ (EHC), in conjunction with Japan’s Word of Life Press Ministries, and has set a goal to deliver the gospel through published tracts to all 50+ million families across Japan.

Because of the impact of COVID-19, few churches joined the project at the start. However, some local churches decided to focus their efforts on the project despite the challenges of the pandemic and now more than 250 churches are involved.

The tracts are to be delivered first to households in Nakano Ward, Tokyo,

where Word of Life is based, by June 2023.

EHC and Word of Life have distributed tracts to families across Japan in the past. This year they have drawn on the experience of their retired staff, who shared their knowledge of tracting, and have led a trial distribution with staff and volunteers in Maruyama in Nakano. The tracts included excerpts from the Christian Data Book which shared information about the churches in Nakano Ward. The trial showed that although each group had a similarly sized distribution



EHC staff and volunteers heading out to distribute tracts

area, some volunteer groups finished early, and some ran short of tracts. They also experienced problems with buildings that had automatic locking systems or that refused flyers. The same kind of trial distribution will be repeated several times before the end

West News

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, Your God reigns!”

Support for Ukrainian refugees from Japanese churches

Christian Shimbun, July 31, 2022 Translated by Grace Koshino

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Japanese government announced that they would be accepting refugees from Ukraine. At the time the original article was published, there were over 1,500 Ukrainian refugees residing in Japan. They mostly reside in large cities such as Tokyo and Yokohama. Oasis, a general incorporated foundation developed by JECA (Japan Evangelical Church Association) and Hongōdai Christ Church, supports Ukrainian refugees fleeing to Japan through the help of the humanitarian organization Hunger Zero, which performs aid work in Poland. Christian Shimbun interviewed Samuel Tsukii, an assistant pastor at Hongōdai Christ Church, who worked in Poland as volunteer staff for Hunger Zero and acted as a bridge between the refugees and Oasis. They also interviewed three Ukrainian women who currently take refuge in Japan.

Tsukii first went to Poland as an aid worker at the end of March 2022. He returned to Japan briefly after three weeks, but then went back to Poland for another two months. During that time, Hunger Zero set up the “Japan Desk,” an information help desk for

refugees seeking shelter in Japan. Tsukii worked as an adviser at the help desk. “Currently 15 Ukrainians have sought refuge in Japan through Hunger Zero,” he says. Churches and organizations that responded to Oasis’ and Hunger Zero’s requests have become guarantors to refugees, and many more refugees are preparing to apply for Japanese visas. Oasis, itself a guarantor, provides consultation and support for the refugees in preparing them for life in Japan. “Some refugees do not want the Protestant faith pushed on them, but we still accept them and build personal relationships with them, serving them in Christ’s love,” says Tsukii.

Christian Shimbun interviewed three Ukrainians including Katerina Furutova and Yana Lavrishko. Yana is from Donetsk, currently a very dangerous place to live. Yana and her family first sought refuge in an area three hours outside



Left to right: Katerina, Kristina Korobka, Yana, and Tsukii

of Kyiv. However that eventually also became dangerous, so they fled abroad. All three of the women shared that they chose Japan because they believed it to be safe and the people to be kind. Katerina, who is from Odesa, initially fled with her family to Bulgaria. But

eventually she didn’t feel safe there either due to the prevalence of pro-Russian media in the country, so she decided to come to Japan.

“Yokohama looks like what Odesa might look like in the future,” says Katerina. On the other hand, all three have also been astonished with the amount of paperwork that has to be done. Unlike Japan, in Ukraine, ID documents, passports,

and vaccine certificates can all be taken care of over the phone without having to go to a government office.

Katerina says she wishes to build a life in Japan and is studying Japanese in order to do so. She hopes to be reunited with her family in Ukraine one day. Yana says that even though she likes Japan, she would like to return to her home when it is safe to do so.

Hunger Zero and Oasis are currently seeking churches and organizations that would be willing to become a guarantors for refugees. Tsukii says, “The need is still great, so get in touch if you are interested.” You can contact Oasis at info@oasis-smile.jp or 045-894-3500. ■



Katarina saying goodbye to her mother in Odesa

of November to prepare for the final distribution across the whole ward.

Although they had no chance to directly hand out the tracts to the residents, praying while putting tracts into mailboxes and walking through the neighborhood helped them get to know the area well.

Nowadays, we can also use the internet instead of physical resources such as tracts. However, there are some people who can only get to know the gospel through these tracts. Some churches are reporting new mem-

bership because of this work. Of course, fruit does not appear right after sowing, and the crops bear fruit only through God. Word of Life wants to continue sowing, with the help of local churches.

The free tracts have also been available at the churches which support the project’s vision, and donations and prayers have been received from the people who cannot join the actual distribution. As such, the Oikos Project continues through the unified support of many people. ■

Lessons from the good soil

How waiting to enter Japan prepared me for ministry in a long-suffering society

From my balcony in Osaka, I can see the tallest skyscraper in western Japan and hear the rush of cars on the major street below. Just across that street, I can also see a stone path winding through a centuries-old Buddhist temple. This contrast is a beautiful picture of Japanese culture: the ancient and the new, tradition and progress coming together in unexpected harmony. Japan's people create a similar contrast with over 15% of the country's population now over the age of 75.¹ The rest of the world aches to know the secret to Japan's long life expectancy amid the stress of urban society.

During the COVID pandemic, my team and I waited for two years to get a visa to enter Japan. During that time I learned more lessons that would prepare me for Japanese society than I could have imagined. While we waited, my team and I worked at a church in Wisconsin with international students. As a Southern California native suddenly finding herself in the middle of a Wisconsin winter, I questioned God often. Why couldn't we just get to Japan already? Why was God keeping me out of the country I longed to do ministry in? The season was marked by unbelievable slowness and confusion. I was antsy and bored, and I saw no purpose in waiting. If I couldn't go overseas yet, I at least wanted some instant gratification from my ministry in Wisconsin, but even that felt slow. I resented the slowness.

Once, a friend told our team, "I think God's making you wait so long because ministry in Japan will feel the exact same way." I now think back to her words and laugh at the accuracy. The very slowness I resented is what prepared me most for ministry in Japan.

Wintering with patience

Japan's oldest generation has seen two world wars; two atomic bombs; conflict with Russia, China, and Korea; and the worst earthquakes in the country's history. All this makes them some of the most long-suffering people on earth. In his book *Silence and Beauty*, Makoto Fujimura writes, "In order for soil to become fertile, the ground must go through many a winter. Japanese soil is like that . . . Each death and trauma prepares Japan as an oasis for the gospel to find nourishment for the world."² Japanese people of all ages shoulder such winters over and over with

patience, many of them unaware of the gospel picture they already represent as they are shaped into the good soil of Matthew 13.

As I waited to enter Japan, God instilled in me a fraction of the long-suffering that characterizes Japanese society. Instead of the rushed and self-reliant laborer I was two years ago, God brought me to Japan with a far better understanding of the endurance required for ministry here. I had to go through a winter to deeply understand the gospel and the people with whom I would be sharing it. After growing in endurance myself, I can more fully love the long-suffering Japanese friends around me.

Living in the present

Another mark of Japanese society I learned while waiting was gratitude. The older generations of Japan are especially known for "inhabiting the present, rather than dwelling in the past or leaping toward the future."³ Unlike many others in the world, they know how to simply be.

As I wondered each month whether I would finally leave for Japan, I frequently prayed the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."⁴ Before entering a culture known for its unhurried gratitude, I needed to learn to simply be—to live as a child of God, not trying to control any more than the work entrusted to me in each moment.

Mirrored in Japanese society itself, the lessons I learned waiting to begin ministry in Japan are proving essential to my work here. Growing in long-suffering and gratitude before I came will help me sustain ministry long-term, rather than quickly burning out. So I can now meet my friends where they are, patiently love them, pray for them, and faithfully share the gospel without rigid expectations for the results. There's joy in the slowness of reading the Bible with a Japanese friend weekly, not calculating progress but living in the present. It may take a long time to see fruit, and that's okay. Because I serve a God who promises to draw his people to himself, I can truly live one day at a time and enjoy one moment at a time as I wait on him. **JH**

1. Jiji Kyodo, "Over 75s Make up Over 15% of Japan's Population for First Time," *The Japan Times*, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/09/19/national/japans-graying-population> (September 19, 2022).
2. Makoto Fujimura, *Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 198.
3. Iza Kavedžija, "An Attitude of Gratitude: Older Japanese in the Hopeful Present," *Anthropology & Aging* 41, no. 2 (2020): 58.
4. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The original Serenity Prayer," <https://proactive12steps.com/serenity-prayer/> (accessed March 15, 2023)

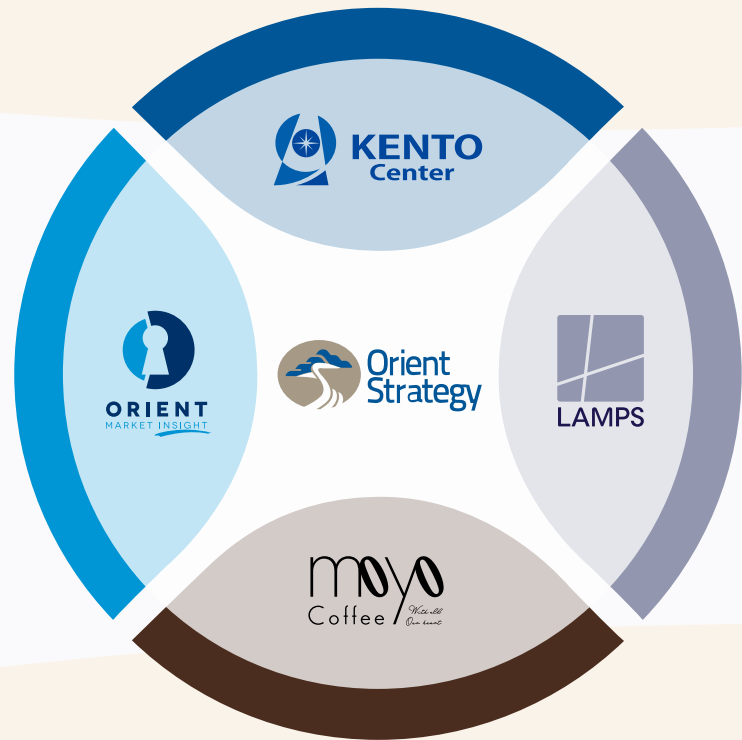
Jordan Cole is a missionary from the US serving since 2022 on a church-planting team with Campus2Campus in Osaka, Japan.

Live Your Faith Be Excellent at Work

Who are we?

Orient Strategy exists to impact the work culture of Japan with the Gospel. Our aim is to model Biblical values through demonstrating both grace and professional excellence. Our vision is to “plant” other companies that share this same basic DNA, transforming Japan one startup at a time. Through our work with business partners and clients we are able to live out our faith in a practical way and in the process develop organizational culture that is healthy, vibrant and balanced. While not expressly “Christian” in the products that we provide, our companies seek to earn the right to speak about who we are by providing high quality professional services that meet people’s specific needs, regardless of their beliefs, background or situation.

オリエント・ストラテジー株式会社は、聖書の価値観を基盤とした企業として、恵みとプロフェッショナリズムのバランスを取ることで、日本の社会や働き方に福音を届けることを目的としています。私たちのビジョンは企業・組織を立ち上げ、一つの企業を通して日本社会に影響をもたらす、質の高いサービスや商品をお客様に届け、信仰を具体的な形で示し、健全で、生き生きとした、バランスの取れた文化を作ることを目指しています。



Interested in joining one of our teams?

Interviewer (Focus Group Facilitator) インタビュアー(フォーカス・グループ・ファシリテーター)

Orient Market Insight is a market research agency specializing in the healthcare space. Our interviewer’s role is to engage with research participants and uncover clinical, social, and emotional insights that will become the key to unlocking marketing strategies for pharmaceutical clients. This full-time, paid position is based in Kobe and will involve facilitating market research interviews with doctors and patients and creating strategic reports for clients.

Child Psychologist 小児科 臨床心理士

The **KENTO Center** works with families and schools in the Kansai area to provide educational and therapeutic support for kids with special needs. We are looking for an additional child psychologist who is certified to do psychological/developmental evaluations (e.g. WISC, WPPSI, ADOS, BASC, etc.) as well as provide counseling and therapeutic services for English-speaking children. This full-time, paid position is based in Kobe and would part of a small team of professionals serving the community in Kansai.

Translator/Interpreter 翻訳者・通訳者

LAMPS is a translation and interpretation firm specializing in the healthcare and marketing space. Interpreters and translators help interpret interviews and translate several types of documents related to market research. Help bridge the gap of language and culture, optimizing the communication between companies and healthcare professionals. This full-time, paid position is based in Kobe and will involve interpreting market research interviews and/or translating market research documents from English into Japanese, or vice versa.

Barista バリスタ

MOYO Coffee is looking for baristas who are passionate about serving great coffee and loving people. MOYO is located on Rokko Island and shares a space with the KENTO Center, interacting with their clients as well as members of the local community. These paid positions are based in Kobe and will involve creating coffee, as well as managing the operations of the cafe and planning events to reach those in the community.

For Inquiries

Info@OrientStrategy.com

OrientMarketInsight.com

MoyoCoffee.jp

LAMPS-LSP.com

KentoCenter.org

Get the most out of your photos

Part two of a two-part series about photography and the handling of digital photos

In the last issue, I shared tips about taking photos, so now let's talk about what to do with digital photos afterwards. Yes, you could just leave them all on your phone and do nothing else, but most people want to use or share them.

Web vs. print—battle of the dots

You may have written for *Japan Harvest* and submitted a photo you previously uploaded to social media, and then were told that the designer (yup, that's me) says it's too small. In this case, you've run into the tension between the web and print. You might have thought, "It looks fine to me on this website," but you're experiencing an optical illusion. The screens of phones and computers make color visible in a completely different way from printed ink on paper. Additionally, the density of pixels (dots of colored light on a screen) is normally far lower than the density of ink dots on paper. Those two factors combined make it possible for an image to look fine on a screen (where your eyes are used to the low pixel density) but blurry if printed at the same physical size.



Two pixel densities

The original photos taken with a phone or camera usually have plenty of pixels for almost any purpose, including print. But websites don't send those full-size photos to the browser because that would cause the page to load way too slowly. For the sake of speed, websites will normally reduce the number of pixels to make the files much smaller. Even some email apps shrink attached photos by default. Online photo storage services like Google Photos and iCloud Photos will save "as original" if you choose that in settings, but due to the limited free storage, your main long-term storage of photos should probably be on your computer. Of course, there is no reason to save every shot you take—delete the duds and duplicates and only keep the good ones.

The right file type for the job

An image file doesn't simply store each pixel's color value—the data is compressed to make the file much smaller. There are various file types, each with their own method of compression that is better at compressing some types of images than others. JPEG (also called JPG) is by far the most common compression type for photos. There are a few very new ones that are more efficient but not yet usable on all devices. Another very common file type is PNG, which is good for computer-generated graphics that have a limited number of colors and sharp edges, like logos or screenshots.

JPG compression is "lossy," meaning that some of the color information is approximated instead of reproduced exactly. But this works fine for photos, as the compressor keeps more data in complex areas of the photo and estimates more in smooth, out-of-focus, or darker areas. Good software will allow you to choose the level of quality when you save an image as a JPG; a higher quality setting will compress less, resulting in a larger file.

It's important to use the right file type for the content. If you save a photo as PNG, the file will become much bigger than necessary because PNG compression is not good for photos. On the other hand, if you save a computer graphic as JPG, the compression will cause "noise" near edges, as shown here. Just remember to use the right file type.



Closeup of Japan Harvest logo as PNG (left) and JPG (right)

Simple editing

You don't have to own expensive software to improve your photos. Even your phone probably has basic editing, and there are many free tools for computers. Perhaps the first editing task to consider is cropping, particularly when using photos in social media—your photo will have more impact if you remove useless extra area before uploading. In an editing tool, cropping is commonly grouped together with rotation, which is also handy if the camera wasn't straight when the shot was taken. Color balance and brightness adjustments can also be helpful.



Common crop/rotate icon

If you use Windows, I highly recommend a free tool called Irfanview (irfanview.com). I set it as the default program to open all image files, and even though I own Photoshop, I use Irfanview for well over 90% of the editing I need to do because it's easy to use, fast, and capable. It's also great for batch processing (doing the same thing to many images in one step). Unfortunately, it's not available for Macs. (Tip: Even if you have 64-bit Windows, install the 32-bit version of Irfanview—see the website for details.)

This is highly simplified to fit on one page, but I hope you found something useful. Search the web to learn more or feel free to ask me any questions. **JH**

Images submitted by author

Karen Ellrick (US) and her husband, Dan, have been missionaries in Japan since 1996 and live in Osaka. Karen ministers through print design, web development, video/audio editing, etc. and is the designer for Japan Harvest. <https://L4JP.com>

Senior ministry by a senior

The language of love

It seems odd to me to be writing about senior ministry when, at 74, I am 10 years older than my father was when the Lord called him home. However, there are plenty of people in Japan older than I am! I feel the most important thing to remember in ministry of all sorts is that we are placed on earth to discover and to develop a right relationship with our Creator. Everyone's time on earth is limited, and older people are generally more aware of that than younger people. They might have outlived their parents, as I have, or they may simply be experiencing the gradual loss of childhood friends to death and realize they are in line as well. It's my experience that older people are seldom offended by being told that there is more to existence than physical life.

People I've ministered to

I have baptized a man literally on his deathbed, just two days before his physical heart stopped, and he and his Christian daughter were deeply grateful. He had been a soldier in WWII, and a personal acquaintance of the first *tokkōtai* member, commonly called kamikaze. That pilot had been told, because he had tuberculosis and wouldn't have lived much longer anyway, to commit suicide by flying his plane into an American ship. His friend, the man I baptized, was deeply aware of the emptiness of that kind of death, and it opened his heart to the gospel.

I have also baptized a man (77), who had been a prefectural government employee. His son had become a Christian years before, and when the son started coming to our church, he gave a testimony in which he said his parents were "beyond reach." The parents' home was over an hour away by car, but the mother had medical issues that required her, once a month, to come to Nagasaki Medical Center, a national hospital very close to our church. Having heard about us from their son, one day as they were

leaving the hospital, the father said, "We're going to go by the church." The mother was surprised but didn't argue. She had brought their very senior dog with them because she was afraid

they would get home to find him dead. I happened to be at the church at the time, and both were deeply touched when I welcomed the dog, he instantly accepted me, and I prayed for the dog.

In a matter of months, they announced at the Buddhist temple where they were registered that they were leaving, and a few months after that, I had the privilege of baptizing them both. I will never forget his testimony at that time: "I feel like I have been living in a fog. What on earth have I done with my life up to this point?" He was a very joyful believer. Less than a year later, he had a heart attack in his bathtub and slipped under the water. His memorial service was attended mostly by relatives, some of whom had been very upset when he became a Christian (one is a Buddhist priest). After the memorial service, more than one said to his widow, "Now we understand—he was drawn by the love."

That widow is currently in her eighties, living in a senior care center. We had hoped, and were actively planning, to build a senior care center ourselves right next to the church, but the Lord closed that door.

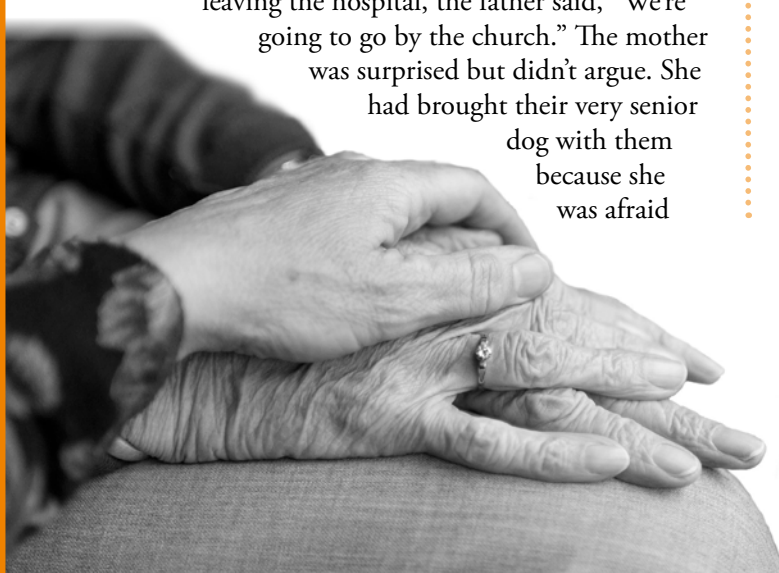
We are also currently ministering to a 97-year-old lady who was married to a British man for many years and lived in Britain for about 30 years. She became our friend because she wanted friends that she could freely speak English with. She's not close to her only living relatives, and she insists that we are the only people who genuinely care about her. She's not yet been baptized, but we certainly haven't given up hope.

Language of love

This brings us back to the issue of communicating the gospel to the Japanese, who seem uniquely resistant to it. And no one is more Japanese than the elderly! You may not be able to understand their *hōgen*, their local dialect, but everyone understands the language of love. I have the advantage of having been born and raised in Japan (Fukuoka), but my wife, Cathy, with her imperfect Japanese, is a far more effective minister to the elderly than I am because she speaks fluent "love." You are well aware that hugging is not a natural part of Japanese culture, so it is very moving to see my wife being greeted joyously and hugged by older Japanese women, initiated by them!

Remember that older people are just as valuable in God's eyes as active young people, and let God's love draw them to him through you. 卍

Jack Garrott was born in Fukuoka of American missionary parents in 1948 and has served as a self-supporting independent missionary in Omura, Nagasaki Prefecture, since 1981. He is married and has two children, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.



Small groups build healthy churches

In church planting, behind-the-scenes ministry is foundational

Our church plant went from three small groups to over seventy groups (years later). God blessed! We also made many mistakes. Here is some of what we learned.¹

Multiplying small groups

I was the lead church planter for the team which started Oyumino Church in Chiba. The continual starting and multiplying of healthy cell groups was one of my highest priorities.² I believed this priority was biblical and the right methodology from my study and church experience.³

My Japanese church internship during our first term convinced me even more that we needed to prioritize starting and multiplying lay-led cell groups. Our partnering denomination is full of godly pastors and members. However, I increasingly saw that it was largely made up of small, single-cell churches. The denomination had grown rapidly since the 1950s through church planting, but those church plants usually reached a maximum size between 20 and 50 members. The effectiveness of the evangelism, pastoral care, etc., was largely limited to what the pastor did. The “priesthood of all believers” was professed but weak. Few churches were implementing the Ephesians 4:12 mandate that pastors are not primarily called to do all the ministry but rather “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (ESV).

To help our new church (Oyumino) have cell group DNA from the beginning, we waited to start public worship until we had three small groups gathering weekly. We continued to start new groups and improved our mentoring of leaders.

Over the years, we regularly taught that we wanted to be like the early church, meeting both “in the temple and from house to house” (Acts 5:42 ESV; cf. Acts 2:46), that is, in larger worship gatherings and also in smaller group gatherings for closer fellowship. We stressed that both are the church.

I’m thankful that we tried to mentor our growing number of cell group leaders. On the other hand, I am sad that in my later years as lead pastor, I gave less priority to the mentoring of lay group leaders and less intentional time to the multiplication of new groups. That hurt church health.

In our best years, we had three identical training opportunities each month; group leaders joined one of those mentoring times monthly. The investment in those leaders brought much fruit as they cared for many people in their groups. Those three short meetings were among the best uses of my time.



Which numbers should we watch?

Over the years, we grew to over 70 small groups of different kinds. But what outside people saw was five Sunday worship services led by four Japanese pastors. When outsiders observe a church they can easily miss the fact that the smaller groups behind the scenes are foundational for the health of the more visible parts of the church. It’s like a healthy tree. Its unseen root system is vital for the tree’s healthy growth.

Numbers like blood pressure and pulse rate can be indicators for physical health. Similarly, churches often look at worship attendance, baptisms, and giving to evaluate church health. I now believe that the more important numbers to show church health are related to the small gatherings for fellowship, prayer, training, evangelism, and serving.

Vital signs to pay attention to are growth each year in:

- regular cell group gatherings within the church,
- number of cell participants, and
- cell leaders being mentored by church leadership.

Behind-the-scenes ministry is reflected by the continual growth of these three numbers. By God’s grace, this growth will generally lead to more fruitful evangelism, better pastoral care, deeper discipleship, and more church leaders. All that generally leads to more worshipers, baptisms, and giving.

Jesus will build his church (Matt. 16:18). We must believe this promise. We must be careful of pride and thinking too much of our human effort, wisdom, or church planting methodology. That is a great danger in my prideful, sinful heart. As Psalm 127:1 states, “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (BSB). This does not mean that human builders stop building. God also ordains the means and works through us. He calls us to be wise builders, using all the means and wisdom available. May we be wise builders as we labor under Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, to see Christ’s church built in Japan. **JH**

1. More in-depth analysis and free church-planting resources: <https://www.alive-international/church-planting-resources/>

2. We called our groups “cell groups” and “small groups” interchangeably.

3. Acts 2:42, 5:42. The Jethro principle of Exodus 18:13–26. See link in endnote #1 for a longer explanation of the biblical rationale and book resources on this subject.

Dan Iverson and his wife Carol (US) planted Oyumino Church in Chiba in 1992. They retired from the church in 2018 and Dan stepped down as JPM/MTW Japan Director in 2022. They have 9 children and 34 grandchildren.

Risk adversity and multicultural teams

How multicultural teams can make the most of the Japanese tendency to avoid risk

In general, Japanese people have a strong propensity to avoid risk. In contrast, Westerners often tend to view risk in a more positive light.

An article on Japanese risk aversion describes these contrasting attitudes. The author says Japanese people “interpret the word ‘risk’ . . . as ‘something dangerous that will lead to a negative outcome.’ As a result, . . . people living in Japan do their best to avoid risk.” This strongly contrasts with Western countries where “the concept of ‘risk’ . . . contains a stronger sense of ‘a calculated act that will be a great success if it goes well’ . . . It is the polar opposite of the Japanese usage, with its strong nuance of a negative outcome.”¹

Of course, this is a strong generalization, and counter-examples abound: there are many risk-embracing Japanese people and plenty of risk-averse Westerners. Also, faith can cause the most naturally timid people to take bold actions that appear risky to those viewing situations from a human perspective. Gideon is a great case in point. When we first encounter him, he is threshing wheat in a winepress out of fear of the Midianites (Judg. 6:11), but one chapter later we find him leading a band of 300 men against an army of around 135,000 Midianite warriors.

However, given the Japanese tendency to be more risk-averse than Westerners, how can mixed-nationality teams function well? The following three suggestions may be helpful.

Viewing diversity as an asset

Probably the most important observation is that, while diversity within teams can often be a source of friction, it can be a source of strength if harnessed well. And a diversity of attitudes towards risk is no exception. This requires recognizing the different contributions that members bring to a team and exploiting everyone’s strengths. For example, the Japanese hesitancy to take risks can provide a helpful counterbalance to the Western “can-do” attitude. Japanese people tend to be good at identifying things that could go wrong with a plan. By drawing on this skill, teams can plan for various eventualities that might go overlooked. Rochelle Kopp notes that the strong desire of Japanese companies to avoid risk can lead to “a high level of quality and carefully considered decision-making.”²

Addressing concerns by supplying information

In the context of making business propositions, Kopp points out that it is important for Westerners to provide as much information as they can to allay Japanese fears of risk. “When risk-averse people like the Japanese feel that they need more information, they tend to stall,” she says. “More information, and the right information, is what makes them feel less sensation of risk, and thus become more comfortable moving forward. The key, then, is to better understand what concerns your Japanese colleagues have, what aspect of the risk makes them most uncomfortable.”

She gives an example of a US subsidiary of a Japanese company that wanted to persuade Japanese management to market a new product line in the US. The proposal failed twice but succeeded on the third attempt when, on Kopp’s advice, they incorporated information on past market trends. “Without information on how the market had behaved in the past, most likely the head office did not feel that the proposal was sufficiently grounded,” she explains. “Once the historical information was added and other enhancements made to the proposal, the third time was the charm and it was approved.”

Shielding Japanese from the stigma of failure

One way that members of cross-cultural teams can help each other is by Westerners accepting responsibility when things don’t work out as planned and thereby shielding Japanese co-workers from a public perception of having failed. There is less shame from a Western perspective since it’s often perceived to be better to have taken a risk and failed than to have played it safe. This proposal of missionaries protecting Japanese pastors from the shame of failure came up in a recent meeting of the JEMA Leadership Team. Since Japanese pastors often feel increased pressure from public perception, overseas missionaries can help pastors by allowing them to take the credit when things go well and taking the blame when things don’t turn out so well. **JH**

1. Almoamen Abdalla, “Japan the Risk-Averse,” Nippon.com, <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/g00728/japan-the-risk-averse.html> (September 26, 2019).
2. Rochelle Kopp, “Overcoming Japanese risk-adverseness,” Japan Intercultural Consulting, <https://japanintercultural.com/free-resources/articles/overcoming-japanese-risk-adverseness> (accessed February 14, 2023).

Simon Pleasants works as an editor in the Tokyo office of a scientific publishing company and is the executive editor of Japan Harvest. Originally from Wales, he moved to Australia in 1988.

Feeling stretched?

Care plans for elderly parents back home may help missionaries stay in the field longer

Parents' needs rank third in factors influencing missionaries to leave Japan.¹ The likelihood that a missionary's parents will need care increases with time. And so many missionaries feel pulled in two directions: between staying in the field and returning home. But we aren't Elastigirl from *The Incredibles* or Stretch Armstrong™—the unnaturally stretchy action figure from the 70s. How should we respond to the “stretch” placed on us by the needs of aging parents?

My own family

I arrived in Japan aged 29, when my parents were aged 64 and 61. They lived full lives and I had no concerns about them. I was free to give myself fully to missionary work.

When I turned 40, my parents were 74 and 71; they didn't have significant health concerns and cared for one another. However, by the time I reached 50, my dad had died and my mum (81) lived alone. We began to be stretched.

My husband and I returned to Japan in 2022 after home assignment, leaving our mums who live alone, now aged 85 and 87. This was a hard decision, and we wrestled with it, especially because our siblings don't live close to our mums. God led us clearly, although I doubt all our supporters understood.

Honouring our parents

Referencing Jesus's care for his mother even as he was dying, one author urges that “we in the mission world intentionally seek to honour our parents and ensure they are cared for. This is an integral part of our mission—neither a liability nor a detour.”²

Honouring parents as God commanded and providing flexible and creative member care for missionaries with aging parents means that missionaries are more likely to be able to remain in Japan for longer.

For individual missionaries

Before coming or returning to Japan, it may be important to consider your parents' current and future needs, particularly if they are older and/or struggle health-wise.

These needs could be discussed with your parents, siblings, the wider family, and church family (as appropriate).

Dialogue about administrative practicalities is vital. For instance, getting power of attorney, knowing about wills, executors, and funeral plans are all helpful.

A practical needs assessment is indispensable for older or more vulnerable parents. For example, if cleaning is burdensome, consider arranging help. Getting a professional home assessment and assisted living aids (e.g., bath rails, emergency button) can enable independent living. Moving house might be necessary. Choosing an emergency contact makes sense.

Such conversations and practical steps take courage and humility on all sides. However, they provide concrete help and a sense of security for parents, siblings, and the missionaries themselves. All missionaries of any age or cultural background would do well to consider these subjects.

However, those coming to Japan for the first time as “older” missionaries and missionaries from East Asian backgrounds should give this area special thought and prayer during their application process and beyond. If care plans are not in place, difficulties may arise and impact the new missionary who is already dealing with the challenges of transition.

For missionaries with East Asian heritage, filial piety (or, duty to family) is significant. They need to give special consideration to how to honour their parents while being missionaries to Japan.

For mission agencies

Mission agencies also have a role in providing member care for missionaries with aging or frail parents.

On the home/sending side, missions should consider how to care proactively for the parents of their members. For example, discussing parental needs and care plans before departure to the field. This may also include holding events especially for missionaries' parents.

Mission leadership in Japan should consider how to provide member care for missionaries with older parents or those struggling with ill health, such as discussing parental needs during reviews, and flexibility in family visits—pos-

sibly outside regular home assignments—and certainly outside of missionaries’ personal holiday time.

Finally

There is no one-size-fits-all, permanent solution to caring for parents. Your situation and your parents’ situation are evolving. However you provide care for your parents, you will feel stretched, and guilt or doubt may lurk nearby. Nonetheless, be careful not to believe the lie that if you lived in the same country all would be well. Going “home” is the answer sometimes, but not always.

Further, there is no perfect mission policy to provide member care for missionaries in this situation. Regular prayer and re-evaluation by missionaries and their agencies in this stretching area is crucial. **JH**

Resource

Bradley Bell’s “A Liturgy for When a Loved One Is Ailing Back Home”: <https://www.theupstreamcollective.org/post/a-liturgy-for-when-a-loved-one-is-ailing-back-home>

1. Janet Dallman, *Staying Well: Highlighting Hazards, Highlighting Health for Missionaries in Japan* (self-pub., 2021), Kindle, p.79.
2. David, R. “Editorial: Elder Member Care,” Global Member Care Network (GMCN). March 2019. Accessed on 7 May 2020 at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/globalmembercare/> (private group).

Photo by Sarah Kickbusch

Janet Dallman (UK), with her husband Peter, came to Japan in 1998. She’s been involved in church planting, student work, welcoming new missionaries, and serving as OMF’s Candidate Coordinator. She’s currently OMF Japan’s Member Care Advisor. Contact her at jp.mca@omfmail.com.

Advertisements



Japanese Courses

Online & In-person in Nagoya

Equipping missionaries to reach Japan

- Weekly General and JLPT classes
- Intensive General and JLPT courses
- Missionary Courses

Apply now for your free online trial lesson!
nihongo.connectenglish.jp



JEMA Endorsed Ministry
Connect Japanese Classes is a part of Connect Mission Support Center

Connect is a Christian-owned language school based in Nagoya with a heart to reach Japanese people with the gospel

connect
JAPANESE CLASSES



RENEW

YOUTH CONFERENCE

RENEW YOUTH CONFERENCE

とは、日英バイリンガルの環境で、関係を築き、楽しい時を過ごしながら、福音を知ることが目的とした、中高生向けの3日間のカンファレンスです。

RENEW YOUTH CONFERENCE

is a three day event designed for middle school and high school students to interact with the gospel, learn language, develop relationships, and have a ton of fun.

➤ renewconference.jp

関東・Kanto

富士吉田市・2023年8月17-19日
Fujiyoshida City • August 17-19, 2023

関西・Kansai

高島市・2023年8月21-23日
Takashima City • August 21-23

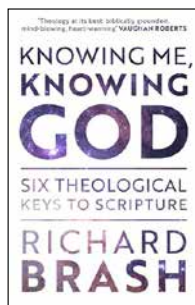
📷 @renewconferencejp



Knowing Me, Knowing God: Six Theological Keys to Scripture

Richard Brash (InterVarsity Press, 2021) 165 pp.

Brash, Assistant Professor of Theology at Christ Bible Seminary in Nagoya, presents a theological framework for interpreting Scripture focusing on three foundational pairs of principles in the Bible designed to help us grow in knowing both God and ourselves. The first pair (God is not like us/God has made us like himself) is about identity or being. The second pair (we cannot comprehend God/God makes himself know to us) is about knowing or epistemology. The third pair (our sin separates us from God/God overcomes sin and makes us his own) relates to ethics and salvation. Brash gives the biblical foundations for each pair and then looks at the implications of each set of principles.



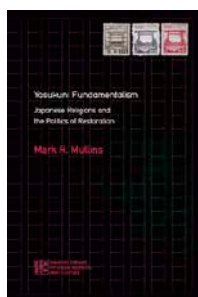
Each chapter ends with questions for reflection or discussion, making this an ideal text for group study.

The book has a helpful glossary of theological terms and includes an index of subjects and Bible references. Brash's wife Yuko translated the book into Japanese and it is part of the CBS Theological Series published by Word of Life Press. I will be using this incisive study in my teaching and highly recommend it as a great study for church discipleship groups. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

Yasukuni Fundamentalism: Japanese Religions and the Politics of Restoration

Mark R. Mullins (University of Hawai'i Press, 2021) 258 pp.



Mullins, Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Auckland and previously professor at Meiji Gakuin University and Sophia University, is a keen observer of developments in Japanese society. Mullins focuses on the relationship between organized religions and the postwar rise of neo-nationalism. He also writes about how the right wing of the Liberal Democratic Party, the National Association of Shrines, and the Japan Conference (Nippon Kaigi, an ultra-conservative, and nationalistic far-right non-governmental organization) are trying to reshape public life and institutions.

Part One, "Postwar Religious Nationalism," looks at the restructuring of religion and society in Occupied

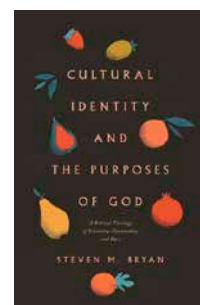
Japan (1945-1952) and Shinto responses to the Occupation. Mullins shows how the disasters and social crisis in 1995 (Kobe earthquake and the Aum Shinrikyo attack) and the triple disaster of 2011 were used to mobilize a restoration movement. Part Two, "The Neonationalist Agenda Contested," looks at the politics of Yasukuni Shrine (official visits and postwar enshrinements), patriotic education (civic duties versus religious rights), and constitutional revision (where the LDP is seeking to normalize nonreligious Shinto).

Mullins has engaged in thorough research—there are 23 pages of notes and a 29-page bibliography which lists numerous sources in Japanese—and argued his case well. For those seeking a deeper look at what is happening in Japanese society and politics, this is essential reading. Mullins has prophetically alerted us to the "clash between the values of global civil society, which give priority to individual rights and freedoms, and those values embraced by the . . . coalition supporting the LDP proposal, which regards the rights of the individual to be secondary and subservient to the needs of the nation or group" (p. 192). Reading this book will inform our prayers for Japan and its leaders. **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

Cultural Identity and the Purposes of God: A Biblical Theology of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Race

Steven M. Bryan (Crossway, 2022) 286 pp.



Bryan, Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, served as a theological educator in Ethiopia for over 20 years and writes from a wealth of experience and deep study of Scripture. This book is full of deep wisdom on the hotly debated topic of racism. Bryan grounds his discussion of cultural identity in careful exegesis of both the Old and New Testaments. His fresh insights remind us that just as every human being images the glory of God, so does every culture. God's plan from the beginning was to fill the earth with diverse families, clans, and nations who would share in God's rule. One day "the beauty of each culture in all its uniqueness will fulfil its true purpose in magnifying the glory of the Lord" (p. 247). **JH**

Reviewer rating is 5 of 5 stars ★★★★★

Don Schaeffer and his wife Hazel serve with the Christian & Missionary Alliance and came to Japan in 1984. They have planted churches in Saitama Ken and served in mission leadership.

Motivate people to care

You need to draw people in if you are to achieve your purpose for writing

What is the purpose of what you write? You might write a prayer letter inspiring people to pray. Or an update on your ministry on a social media site, encouraging people to give. Or perhaps you write non-fiction articles or books for publication. Whatever you write, you want people to care. Even fiction writers want people to care—I've stopped reading more than a couple of fiction books because the author hadn't drawn me into caring about the characters.

So, ask: Why should anyone care about what I'm writing? It's a confronting question. I can ask it now: Why should *Japan Harvest* readers care about this little column that I'm writing? My first answer is that they want to write well. But why? Because they want to communicate their thoughts clearly—to communicate what they are passionate about. Or through their writing they want to motivate people to act: to pray, to give, or to get more involved in mission. Or they want to write a book that they feel God is compelling them to write.

One way to encourage people to care is to tap into the things that people are already concerned about. For example, in a prayer letter, people who have been supporting you for a long time will probably be interested in how



their support has made a difference to your life and ministry.

Or you could make a connection between their lives and your own by introducing a report of your ministry: "The other day I went to the store to buy some milk [something readers can connect to], and while I was there I saw a middle-aged woman who's come to our church a few times."

Telling stories is another way. People are more likely to respond to a story about a single seeker that you know, than a list of statistics about how unreached Japan is.

Emotions also make an idea more memorable. Eighteen years ago, on our first home assignment, I told emotional stories that people still remember. Think carefully about how you can use emotion (not just happy and sad) to inspire your readers to care about what you've written.

Emotion transforms ideas from being abstract or analytical into something that readers feel and will stick in their minds long after they've finished reading.

If your writing propels people to care, it will propel them to act. **JH**

Wendy Marshall is the managing editor of Japan Harvest.

Advertisement

To be the leader in quality bilingual education based on Christian principles



- Safe and nurturing environment fostered by Christian teachers and staff
- Alumni at universities in North America, Japan and other parts of the world
- Scholarship available
- On-campus college classes available for high school students (dual enrollment)

KIU Academy (Grades 1-12)
<http://kiua.kyotoiu.ac.jp>

TEL : 0774-64-0804 Email : kiu@kyotoiu.ac.jp
 www.facebook.com/KIUAcademy.ac.jp

63-1 Yuden, Tanabe, Kyotanabe
Kyoto 610-0331 Japan



KIU Academy is fully accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and students are eligible for the High School Tuition Support Fund System by the Japanese government.



Good Day, Good Bread.

YAMAZAKI BAKING CO., LTD.
3-10-1 Iwamoto-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, 101-8585



www.yamazakipan.co.jp