

February 2008 Newsletter
SAY YES TO JAPAN
Associated with the Christian Church/Church of Christ

Dear Friends,

I can't help beginning as would the stereotypical missionary newsletter, "I'm sorry it's been so long since I've written." Catching you up . . . I was hoping to farm out various aspects of Say Yes To Japan, but no one is available to help just now. So I've cut back to at least keep up with what I think is most important: the exhibit at the annual National Missionary Convention, the Web site (I do hear from people who find it useful, and it's also an easy way for the convention goers to go home and look up all the CC/CofC missionaries), and answering the occasional e-mail request for help finding a Japanese church or resources. Newsletters will be less frequent, but I'll still accumulate interesting info and pass it along as I can.

CONVENTIONS

The National Missionary Convention (www.nationalmissionaryconvention.org) continues to buzz—and grow! The 2007 convention was barely finished when exhibit spaces for 2008 were all taken. The Say Yes To Japan exhibit makes a concerted effort to attract visitors and be fully staffed with people who know Japan and Japan missions. Besides speaking with tons of visitors, we hand out hundreds of Japanese souvenir prayer reminders that include a card with my Web site so they can link to all CC/CofC missionaries as well as learn about Japan in general. At the 2007 convention we spoke with many young people who aren't just *talking* about going to Japan—they're going! (If any CC/CofC Japan missionaries plan to be at the 2008 convention in Tulsa, Nov 20-23, or would like to contribute some souvenir giveaways, please contact me.)

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

Daughter Karis learned these stats at Seattle's Missions Fest (www.missionsfestseattle.org), Nov 2006: In 1800 1% of Christians in the world were non-Western; by 1900 10% were non-Western; and studies at the turn of the millennium placed 80% of Christians in the non-Western category. China plans on sending a 100,000 missionary march to Jerusalem, hitting every country on the way. Nigeria sees itself as the center of the global mission movement with their 50/15 vision. They plan to send out 50,000 trained missionaries in 15 years, many of whom will be heading to the States.

From Corey and Nicki Shields newsletter, August 2007: In the aftermath of the severe earthquake in Niigata, "We have heard of some people who, upon realizing that many of the temples in the area collapsed, have decided to turn from idolatry. There have been a few who have given their lives over to Jesus because of the quake."

From Marc and Yumiko Leis newsletter, spring 2007: The Leises had a land blessing ceremony for their new property. [It is customary in Japan to have a Shinto ceremony on site before a building is built, a sort of ritual purification.] This Christian ceremony began with praise songs. Then a Japanese minister gave a brief message on God's provision and

the vision for the property. The group joined hands as the minister prayed aloud for God to bless the property and to pour his love on all who would come here. The song “Seek Ye First” closed the 30-minute ceremony. Several neighbors watched from a distance, and one neighbor they had not met before came by to greet them.

Walter and Mary Maxey newsletter, fall 2006: There are 7,961 Protestant churches in Japan, with an estimated total membership of 512,211 which is only 0.4 percent of the population. [I don’t know what to make of this, since the usual figure for the Christian population is said to be 1 percent. And some recent reports have said as much as 6 percent of the population claim Christianity.] There is one church for every 15,931 people.

Neil Verwey’s December 2007 newsletter reported an item from the *Yomiuri Shimbun*: Japanese are looking for ways to receive the benefits of the New Year’s visits to the Shinto shrines without actually going. There are online sales of lucky charms and virtual visits to the shrines; visitors fill out a form, including their prayer/wish. Fees are sometimes charged. Objecting to this substitution for an actual shrine visit, the association of Shinto shrines issued the statement: “No Shinto god exists on the Internet.”

Steve Ingle sent news of this “fashion show” end of 2007 (not sure of the source): The Tokyo Monk Collection was revealed at Tsukiji Honganji when nearly 40 monks and nuns from eight major Buddhist sects joined in the event aimed at winning back believers. There was a rap version of a Buddhist sutra. Then monks paraded green and yellow clothes, some with gold embroidery. Others wore elaborate, multilayered robes. Prayers were chanted and then . . . a grand finale with confetti resembling lotus petals. Apparently, the Tsukiji Honganji offers theological seminars in English for foreign visitors, and has fitted its main hall with a pipe organ for Western-style weddings to attract young couples. Some other temples have also introduced cafes, art galleries, and other innovations to reach out to young people. “We wanted to show the young people that Buddhism is cool, and temples are not a place just for funerals,” said Koji Matsubara, a chief monk at Tsukiji. [What struck me about this is that churches here in the U.S. are adding cafes, etc., to attract people. But Buddhism is gaining in popularity in the U.S. without even having to employ such creative ideas.]

Paul and Rickie Clark newsletter reported that Paul performed a Christian wedding for a couple who had been married in a Buddhist ceremony 20 years before but wanted to exchange Christian vows after their baptisms.

The Japanese Christian Fellowship Network (www.jcfn.org) Nov 2007 newsletter included the testimony of someone who became a Christian in the U.S. and now faces the problems associated with living out Christianity back in Japan. The person wrote: “You need to have an unshakable identity as a Christian. You need to have answers to what you believe, why you go to church. I do not know how many people who became Christians overseas come back to Japan with such strong identity. . . . Think about this before you come back [to Japan], before you face these difficulties to lose your faith. . . . I want to be

a person who continues to seek how I am as a child of God without fearing what people would think of me.”

OK, I don't know where I got this next piece. It says “The Family Forum #7,” June 2007. It is an interview with Christian psychologist Yuichi Hattori on the topic of *hikikomori*, which is a condition of social withdrawal that has become a real problem in Japan. The afflicted person may shut himself in his room, refusing to go to school or work or anywhere. Experts estimate that there are 800,000 to 1,400,000 cases in Japan. Dr. Hattori believes that an incredible 60 percent of the population suffer with *hikikomori* but without the full withdrawal symptoms. The main causes of *hikikomori* seem to go back to a lack of healthy parent-child bonding, the pattern of which gets passed down the generations. Dr. Hattori says that even a young mother at church who appears to express love to her toddler may, at home, go for days refusing to speak to him. Such a child is conditioned to not express his true feelings, which leads to a general distrust. Some patients even attribute this “Japanese cultural disease” to the cultural oppression of the Tokugawa era (the days when samurai warlords wiped out Christianity). The severe measures to suppress Christianity and control society fostered a distrustful national temperament, since self-expression resulted in punishment. Dr. Hattori believes “Japanese society is headed for a meltdown of sorts.” But he points out that Japan has proven its ability to make drastic changes in desperate situations: at the end of the Tokugawa era, feudalism was replaced by westernization; and at the end of World War II, militarism was replaced by democratization. He believes that the new value system that Japanese will adopt in hopes of a better future will be biblical. He hastens to add that he doesn't think Japanese people will necessarily accept Jesus quickly, but that a majority of people will be attracted to Christian values.

NEWS

Japanese husbands say, “I love you”? CNN news article of 1/31/07 reported that with a 60 percent increase in Japan's divorce rate from 1985 – 2005, some husbands have decided to act. The Japan Adoring Husbands Association formed, with the idea of making it more of a practice to thank their wives and express love for them. Tsumagoi village, whose name sounds like the words “wife love” in Japanese, jumped on board and has started to market itself as a romantic destination for married couples.

Just for fun . . . Top 10 Wackiest Japanese Gadgets:

<http://ct.eneews.pcmag.com/rd/cts?d=184-5283-1-53-4583-673539-0-0-0-1>.

I'd heard of people in the U.S. being turned away for health care because they didn't have insurance (even though that's not supposed to happen). But I'd not heard of Japan's problem of people being turned away. And it's not for insurance reasons. According to a December 2007 AP article, a Japanese woman tried 30 hospitals before being admitted to one, because they were all full or doctors were not immediately available. The woman died the next day. The article also mentioned the death of a pregnant woman the previous year; same situation.

Paul and Rickie Clark newsletter reported a trend of more and more fathers coming with their families to the church Christmas program.

Minister Jinei Tomura reported in 2006 that an 86-year-old scientist made the decision to accept Jesus and be baptized.

In December 2006, the Baptist newspaper announced that a former missionary has been named president of Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka. Gary Barkley began mission work in Japan in 1984, joined the school's faculty in 1987, and most recently served as its dean of religious affairs.

Walter and Mary Maxey newsletter, fall 2006: Walter performed a wedding for a non-Christian couple, after having them consult with him about the Bible's teaching on marriage. Then he spoke to the wedding crowd about God as "the source of love essential for a happy marriage." Two weeks later, Walter conducted a funeral service for a man who was not a Christian but who had agreed to his wife's wish for him to have a Christian funeral. Walter was able to speak to more than 100 non-Christians on this occasion. [Many missionaries in Japan report similar opportunities. We must pray that the Lord will touch those who hear such messages.]

PROGRAM/MINISTRY IDEAS

Mark and Yumiko Leis reported that kids and their mothers baked Christmas cookies together with the Leis family (Christmas 2006). From this sort of casual event, kids can be introduced to the Sunday school program. Many Japanese kids experience bullying at school, so the church can be a haven where all are accepted and loved.

RESOURCES

www.interactionintl.org – Via Mission to Unreached Peoples, I learned of this organization that hosts seminars for missionary kids.

Operation Japan, third edition is available. Up-to-date info on each prefecture plus a system for praying through the nation in a year. \$5.25 plus \$1 for international postage. www.JEMS.org.

Japanese Christian TV programming 24/7. <http://japan.cgntv.net/> .

Newsletter for missionary women. This link takes you right to the archives, which may be the most helpful. <http://www.peterswife.org/PWListArchive.php> .

Though I didn't really check it out, I learned of this funding idea for missionaries:

<http://mission-world.com> . Overview:
http://mission-world.com/regsamplpdfs/mission-world_one_page_faqs.pdf .

Japanese Christian Fellowship Network (www.jcfn.org) Nov 2007 newsletter: "Returnees coming back to Japan are not surviving as Christians. . . . It is our desire to host a major conference in March of 2009 together with different churches, fellowships, and individuals in Japan and overseas so that the network of returnees would be expanded and

possibilities of returnees' ministry would be utilized more." [I have found this organization to be very serious in its efforts to help Christian returnees thrive back in their native Japan. This organization has assisted me in tracking down good churches for returnees when I knew of no churches in a certain area. I think it would be beneficial both ways to network with this group.]

I often read in missionary reports about missionaries specially preparing Bible study materials for parishioners. That's fine, of course. But it made me think. . . . Since I'm in the publishing business, I hear of churches in the U.S. that produce their own material instead of buying curriculum. Christian publishers are actively looking at material produced by churches to see if it could be produced in some sort of partnership so more people could benefit from it. I'm just passing on as a suggestion that missionaries could maybe find some way to network and share resources . . . or put your stuff in the hands of a Japanese Christian publisher. I can't help thinking that there must be a lot of effort being used to produce material that someone else may already have produced.

UPDATE ON "AMERICA BECOMING BUDDHIST?"

That was the title of a section in my newsletter of July 2006 (which you can read in the archives on the Web site). The situation is worsening by leaps and bounds. Many Christian authors who have become popular under the label of "emergent" or "contemplative" are promoting teachings that are decidedly Buddhist/Hindu/New Age/occult. I do not claim any knowledge of the character or motives of these teachers. But they seem to be on the same page as far as the teaching goes. All are quoting from/recommending the same list of other writers and teachers (living and dead). While many of the actual quotes used are harmless, researching those people quoted reveals that their own spiritual foundations rest on Buddhist/Hindu/New Age/occult beliefs and practices. Because so much of the terminology sounds Christian, the Christian public is not on alert. We are not grasping that some terminology actually intends a completely different meaning from the usual Christian meaning. I cannot stress too strongly that it must no longer be assumed that any given book published by a Christian publisher and placed on Christian bookstore shelves is Christian.

As these false teachings infiltrate the church, they produce increasingly unscriptural beliefs and behavior (including, for example, an aversion to the Scriptures and a mocking of Jesus' atonement). Who would have guessed there would be a Protestant church in America today offering sacred cakes to the ancient Canaanite goddess Asherah? Or numerous U.S. churches inviting Buddhist congregations to hold services in their buildings? In general, it's the writers who consider themselves "emergent" and "contemplative" who are promoting Eastern mysticism and are partnering with others more and more open to interspirituality (the mixing/cooperating of all world religions).

As an example of how the Christian population at large is subtly being influenced by this culture-creep . . . The Dalai Lama made his second appearance in Bloomington, Indiana, last summer. Several area ministers wanted to join together to provide some sort of official brotherly welcome—apparently unconcerned that the Dalai Lama's public speeches would continue the blatant Buddhist indoctrination begun on his first visit.

An easy way to do a little research on popular writers and their teachings is to Google the name of the person, along with the words “Eastern religion” or “mysticism” or “Buddhism,” “New Age,” “occult,” etc. This usually brings up telling information, including the person’s own direct quotes.

THANKS

Through e-mails and at the National Missionary Convention, I continue to hear from and meet people who have a deep concern for Japan and her people. Sincere thanks to all Japan cranes (those who pray), Japan fans (those who send), and Japan warriors (those who go)!

Lynn Lusby Pratt
SAY YES TO JAPAN
11745 Olympia Way - #226
Cincinnati OH 45240
513. 674. 1839
lynn@SayYesToJapan.org
www.SayYesToJapan.org

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