

July 2006 Newsletter
SAY YES TO JAPAN
Associated with the Christian Church/Church of Christ

Note: The Christian Church/Church of Christ missionaries referenced in this letter can be contacted directly via my Web site.

Dear Friends,

[[I recently had to completely redo my address lists. You may have mistakenly been added to this newsletter list. I apologize. If you do not wish to receive this newsletter, just send me a “remove from newsletter list” reply.]]

CONVENTIONS

I’ve been to a couple of conventions since I last wrote. I’m always glad to help keep Japan on the map and in the minds of the churches. This last NACC welcomed a number from the Church of Christ (non-instrument). It was wonderful to make some new connections. In 2008 the World Convention will meet in Tennessee. I’m considering a one-time trip to that convention to make new contacts. My next convention is the NMC Nov 16-19 in Indianapolis. This convention is HOT—registration keeps growing, tons of young people, the hotels were almost full months ago! I can always use Japanese giveaways for this convention.

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

6 PERCENT OF JAPANESE CLAIMING CHRISTIANITY?

Missionary Dave Cole had sent me some stats about how long it would take Christianity to grow in Japan, with the current 1 percent Christian population growing at 1 percent a year. In with those figures was the statement that “the cutoff point at which Christianity becomes indigenous and takes off on its own within a country without any need of missionary or outside help is about 7 percent.” Well, of all things . . . A recent Gallup survey—the most extensive ever attempted there—has produced astounding figures. The survey showed a Christian population of 6 percent . . . 7 percent among teenagers! Even allowing for some error in this survey . . . or even allowing that many of these may not be serious Christians but just naming Christianity as their religion of choice . . . I find this most encouraging. To be able to tell Japanese people that more and more of them are openly claiming Christianity . . . well, that can only be an extremely positive and encouraging thing. I’m telling everyone I see!! You can read the article at www.christianpost.com/article/asia/915/section/more.people.com. Additionally, the spring 2006 *Japan Harvest* magazine has an article expanding on some of this information.

In Japan, there is no religious prohibition against suicide. Suicide “was once a form of ritual atonement for samurai warriors and in modern times is a way to escape failure or save loved ones from embarrassment or financial loss.” Japan had 91 Internet suicide deaths in 2005, double the number from 2004. Total Japan suicides in 2004 were 32,325. *Inochi no Denwa* (Phone of Life) is a suicide counseling service. They report that these Internet suicide groups appeal to people who are afraid to die alone. Japan’s suicide rate is second only to Russia among Group of Eight industrialized nations. (from “Japan Internet Suicide Deaths Soar to 91 in 2005” by Elaine Lies, 2-9-06, sorry not sure what source)

About 200,000 Japanese a year travel the route of the 88 temples of Shikoku, believing that such a pilgrimage gains spiritual merit. An interesting job opportunity has emerged--substitute pilgrims. These entrepreneurs can be hired by people too ill or busy to make the pilgrimage. The substitute pilgrims zip through the process by car or motorcycle (versus the traditional walking), taking pictures or having a book rubber stamped as proof of the visit. (Neil Verwey's newsletter quoting *Yomiuri News* of 9-15-03)

Missionary Jennifer Huddleston, quoted in Team Expansion's *TELL* 2006 update, tells of the effect of actually believing Luke 10:2: "I began to believe that the harvest *is* plentiful. In John, Jesus says, 'Open your eyes, the fields are white for harvesting.' Beginning to 'see' the spiritual landscape of Japan through faith changed me. I no longer blamed Japan, the Japanese, culture, societal problems, Shintoism, Buddhism or any of the things that hinder people from coming to Christ. Those challenges are here, but I choose to believe by faith that, despite it all, the harvest is plentiful. . . . Until we began to think this way, it took about three years on average for a Japanese person to come to Christ. That time was radically reduced as we began to pray and act as if God already had people prepared with open hearts, ready to obey and follow Jesus." Perhaps this attitude at least partly explains why the Huddlestons in 2005 saw 17 Japanese people give their lives to Christ.

NEWS

A Christian woman named Emiko was told that she must join all her coworkers at the Shinto shrine to offer incense and prayers for the company. She bravely refused to go. Her stand opened the door for a couple of coworkers to express to her their interest in Christianity.

Japan's NHK TV aired (at least twice) the story of a Japanese WW II military officer finding the Lord after reading a tract given to him by Jacob DeShazer (who was a member of the Doolittle raid, captured by the Japanese, and later a missionary in Japan).

I heard that there's a proverb about the city of Kyoto: "If you throw a rock in Kyoto you will hit a Buddhist monk or a college student." This, because Kyoto supposedly has over 3,600 temples and shrines and more than 160,000 college students.

Currently only males descended from emperors through the paternal line can become sovereign. But there has been discussion about changing the law to allow women to inherit the throne. This, because no royal males have been born into the imperial family since 1965. The emperor's second son and wife are expecting a child this fall—naturally, the hope is for a son. (from March 2006 news report)

Ayumi Saito's newsletter reported that in spring 2006, Campus Crusade for Christ opened their new student center building, a facility they've been praying for more than 10 years (sorry, I don't know the exact location).

Older Japanese accepting Jesus—Walter Maxey has seen a 72-year-old retired merchant marine officer become a Christian. And Ayumi Saito, fearing that her grandfather was on his deathbed,

shared the gospel with him, though he could only nod his head. He unmistakably indicated that he wanted to accept Jesus.

Manga evangelism—Word of Life Press indicates that there are huge possibilities for manga evangelism. The problem is the cost and the lack of “highly skilled Christian comic artists and editors.” Did you know that our missionary Makoto Miyazaki is an extremely talented manga artist?

Chad and Jennifer Huddleston report the baptism of a young woman named Chieko. After group prayer and mentoring, Chieko said she felt as if she’d been “born again.” She was unaware that Christians refer to coming to Jesus as being born again.

PROGRAM/MINISTRY IDEAS

Paul and Rickie Clark continue to have success with their “International Nights,” informal get-togethers where the snacks and decorations revolve around a certain country. Contemporary music, light Bible study.

A Japanese schoolteacher (I don’t know whether he is a Christian or not) returns from his day to answer e-mails from troubled young people who are just milling aimlessly on the streets. Then he goes there to try and help them in person. Most are deeply troubled and on drugs. “They need adults who listen and care.” What a great ministry idea. (reported in Neil Verwey’s newsletter based on info from the 5-9-04 *Yomiuri News*)

Yuri Mori held a concert at Machida Church of Christ, targeted to parents with young children. The first part of the concert was directed to the children. Then children went upstairs for crafts while the parents enjoyed a concert and Ms. Mori’s testimony about losing her brother in the Kobe earthquake.

On October 4, the Worldwide Day of Prayer, Campus Crusade for Christ’s worldwide staff of 24,000 takes the day off to pray for their ministry’s vision to reach out to the 6 million college students in the world.

Missionary Walter Maxey offered Japanese-English New Testaments to his university students, and 115 students took one.

Missionaries Chad and Jennifer Huddleston are beginning several new house churches, as well as a “café church” in downtown Osaka.

The Japan Journal (not a Christian magazine), June 2006 issue features an article called “Second Lives.” It’s all about still-healthy older Japanese people making themselves useful. (Japan has about 7 million baby boomers.) The article reports a growth in nonprofit organizations for which retirees can volunteer, and mentioned one in particular: New Start. New Start helps the *hikikomori*, socially withdrawn young people who cocoon themselves in their rooms for months or years. The weekly New Start potluck dinners introduce recovering *hikikomori* to volunteers, who hope to discuss business skills and eventually help the young people enter the work force. Wouldn’t this be a great program for Christian workers to join?

Missionary Walter Maxey has been a chaplain at Kagoshima prison for 27 years, going almost every month. Bible classes are usually attended by 13-15 prisoners. But one special session found 110 inmates in attendance. Maybe you didn't know there is prison ministry in Japan, but there are even annual meetings of Christian prison chaplains there.

AMERICA BECOMING BUDDHIST?

It is my unpleasant, but necessary, task to send a warning concerning the contemplative prayer movement. Briefly, the problem is that words like *contemplate*, *silence*, *meditate*, etc., are neutral words that can have both Christian and pagan/Buddhist connotations. Almost overnight, it seems, our churches have naively bought into the contemplative prayer movement, which encourages practices that are of a decidedly occult/Buddhist/New Age nature. A few of the names being quoted as appropriate spiritual leaders in the area of prayer are: Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Basil Pennington, Richard Foster, Thomas Keating. Many of these were Catholic mystics who studied with Buddhist monks to learn their practice of total emptying of the mind in order to become one with the universe. The goal of the contemplative prayer movement is a "spiritual" unity, in which we can all get above Buddha, above Jesus, beyond God . . . and participate in a superior spirituality of peace and harmony, discovered in this nothingness of the silence. The book *A Time of Departing* by Ray Yungen clearly outlines the dangers with convicting quotes from those named above (and others). For immediate research, you need only Google, for instance, "Thomas Keating Buddhism" and you will be taken to numerous Buddhist sites—because his views mesh nicely with Buddhism. (This doesn't happen when you Google "Billy Graham Buddhism.") The situation is so drastic, some Christian watchdogs wonder if this could be the great delusion spoken of in the Bible. Some churches have built labyrinths into their facilities; our publications/ministers are openly quoting as guides people like Thomas Merton, failing to mention that Thomas Merton said, "I want to become the best Buddhist I can." Those of you with Asia experience will no doubt grasp the dangers immediately. But . . . warn your friends.

RESOURCES

Two new bilingual Bible studies are available: "Becoming a Friend of Jesus" and "Making Disciples for Jesus." I don't know anything about these, but you can check it out at www.jesuslifehouse.com.

Another new study, "Life Changing Truth" is available also. See a sample at www.lifechangingtruth.com.

www.worshipquest.org is a directory of U.S. churches, cross-denominational. If you have Japanese friends in the U.S. and need to find a church . . .

Let's Start Talking sends teams for short-term, intensive English-Bible studies. Chad and Jennifer Huddleston have had much success with this program. Check it out at www.LST.org.

Sincere thanks to all Japan pray-ers, fans, and warriors.

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BOOKS

Lynn's book *Devotions by Dead People* was a Retailers' Choice Award finalist in 2005. "Look inside" that book and *Debt Free College—We Did It!* at www.berean.com. You can order from various online stores. *Beyond* is the companion art journal to *Devotions by Dead People*.

I highly recommend the youth fiction series, *Elijah Creek & The Armor of God*, by Lena Wood. The first 6 of the 7 books are out. *The Severed Head*, *The Ancient Omen*, *The Raven's Curse* . . . After the first 3 or 4 came out, people (of all ages) started contacting the author and publisher, wanting to know when the next book was coming out. Fans have already read their copies several times over. This is deep spiritual stuff and great writing. Fans of Japan will love the Japan connection with the Mei character. Book 7, which will release soon, actually takes place in Japan. Check the author's Web site (under construction) at www.lenawood.com.