



Hello from Japan!



Greetings to all of our sponsoring congregations! We hope that this letter finds you and your ministries doing well and thriving. We can't thank you enough for the support that you give toward our mission here in Japan. Without you we literally could not be here. Please continue to keep us in your prayers as we keep you in ours.

Our time in Japan seems to be flying by. Our six month period of language training is almost over (we finish at the end of March) and so our ministry is beginning to pick up speed. In the immediate future, directly after language training, Christie and I hope to focus our ministry on outreach to the English speaking community that surrounds Tokyo Lutheran Church. Our church is located in an area of Tokyo that is densely populated with foreign families from Korea, the Philippines, and other ex-patriots such as ourselves. Our goal for the coming months is to reach out to these communities and hopefully make our church part of their lives and their lives a part of our church.

Tokyo, as you probably know, is one of the biggest cities in the world and so of course it has its fair share of social struggles. The church in Japan does not necessarily have a well-developed tradition of outreach to the more impoverished people in its society, which is why increased social outreach is another goal that Christie will be focusing on in the coming months. Our goal is that Tokyo Lutheran would become an outward focused church rather than an inward focused church, and so we will be working to involve members of the congregation in a regular monthly service project to the more disadvantaged people of Tokyo.

Our daily lives at this point are still pretty much focused on learning as much Japanese as we can. Some of the highlights of the past month have been watching the this year's batch of seminary students prepare for ordination and for the various ministries that God will send them to at the end of the school year. Also, our weekly English Bible study continues to be one of the highlights of our work. Currently we are working chapter by chapter through the Gospels of Matthew and John. Because our study includes Buddhists, people of the Shinto faith, Christians, and people who have no faith affiliation whatsoever, our discussions cover some of the most fundamental aspects of Christian theology. We are constantly reminded in our study that the image of a gracious God is oftentimes a very new and strange image to people raised in a non-Christian culture who, for the most part, did not grow up thinking about God in terms of grace. We are constantly reminded that the concept of a gracious God is not necessarily a "natural" thing for people to believe in, and oftentimes it is a very difficult thing to believe in. One man from our Bible study said that it is very difficult for him to trust that God actually forgives him *personally* and loves him *personally* even though he hears the church tell him that every week. Words like that remind us of how important it is that

Christ's story be told again and again and again. God's grace is a difficult thing to put trust and hope in even for those who have grown up in a Christian culture. For those who have not, it may be even more difficult.

Our congregation has been growing these past few months, as has attendance at the weekly Bible study, but soon some of our members will be moving away from Tokyo to other parts of Japan and/or back to the nations from which they came. One of the tough parts of ministering to an international congregation is that we seem to say good-bye a lot, and those good-byes may be permanent. Hopefully the church was able to touch their lives while they were here. They have definitely touched the life of Tokyo Lutheran.

We once again thank you all for your financial and prayer support. We apologize for the rather impersonal mass email update, as we are sure that you have questions about our ministry and our experience here that we have not even come close to answering. Christie and I invite any of you to email us whenever you like. We are more than happy to tell you more of what we are doing here. Feel free to address questions to either of us to my yahoo email address (anspachh2002@yahoo.com).

Please pray for the continued growth of our congregation and for its positive impact in the church's surrounding community. Also please pray for the success of our intentions to move our church toward being a church of outreach. God bless you and the missions you are doing in your community!

Pastor Eric Anspach-Hanson & Christie Hanson



Our Language Class with our Fellow J-3 Missionaries!



Touring Tokyo with church members.