

Happy Thanksgiving and Greetings to all of our supporting congregations!



Hello to all of you in the USA! We hope that this email finds you and your various ministries doing well and going strong. I believe the last time you all heard from us was in August, so as the Japanese would say, Ohisashiburi (it's been a long time). As of September, Christie and I completed our first year in Japan and we are still alive, so we can count that as one goal accomplished. Oftentimes we don't remember exactly what we have written to you in the past, so if we repeat ourselves in this letter a little bit, please forgive us! With that said, here is an update on how things are going with us and our mission. Enjoy!

Tokyo Lutheran Church Ministry

Our work at Tokyo Lutheran Church continues to be both satisfying and challenging for us. As we have written in previous letters, we have been working with both the English and Japanese congregations of Tokyo Lutheran Church in order to strengthen the relationship between the congregations so that Tokyo Lutheran can better serve Tokyo as one, united church with one united mission. A seemingly small, yet symbolically quite significant step in that process has been the creation of a new Tokyo Lutheran Church bulletin board! Until recently it was very difficult for the English and Japanese congregations of Tokyo Lutheran to take part in each other's respective ministry and outreach events simply because the communication barrier makes it incredibly difficult for each congregation to share information. In order to combat this problem both congregations got together and created a bulletin board that now serves as a place where both English ministry information and Japanese ministry information can be advertised and displayed. This has really helped us join forces in some of the outreach programs we have going on outside of Tokyo Lutheran, like serving food for the homeless one Saturday a month at Ueno Park, and it has also helped us join forces in organizing fellowship events for each congregation within Tokyo Lutheran church, like this coming Saturday's Thanksgiving party that the English congregation will throw for the whole church.

In addition to this, both of the Japanese Pastors (Sekino Sensei, and Yamanochi Sensei) and myself have been working on developing a new combined worship liturgy that will hopefully be meaningful and spiritually uplifting for both Japanese and English speakers. Our first attempt at this new service will be this Sunday, so we are praying that it is well received by all members! Our hope is that as Tokyo Lutheran begins thinking and serving as ONE church we will be better equipped to begin focusing our attention away from ourselves and onto the needs of our community. As you probably know,

strong relationships take time to build, and along the way there are always setbacks. However, 9 times out of 10, getting through those setbacks TOGETHER actually makes relationships stronger. Please continue to pray that the relationship between the Japanese and English congregations continues to strengthen, and through that strength, that each congregation may begin looking outward to the needs of our community.

Thursday night Bible Study

Our Thursday night Bible Study continues to be one of our favorite pieces of ministry. Recently, we have had an influx of Buddhists coming to our meetings and studying Christianity in depth for the first time. A few nights ago we studied the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew) and one of our new Buddhist members said that his heart was warmed knowing that if he was lost Jesus would come and find him. I thought to myself, "This guy knows the Gospel better than some pastors!!" In order to give you a good idea of the things we talk about with our Bible study members, I have written below a list of questions that seem to constantly pop up in our discussions.

1) *Jesus loves and accepts everyone, why does the church sometimes reject people?* (Many of our Bible study members have experienced certain forms of rejection at other churches in Tokyo, for example, prohibition from communion. Regardless of the reasons behind that prohibition, many people feel rejected when it happens to them, and then after they read parables like the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son, they wonder how that rejection can be in agreement with Christ's teachings).

2) *What is a Christian's spiritual goal?* (Because Buddhism has a specific goal in mind that the adherent reaches for (enlightenment/release from pain and suffering), many of our Bible study members wonder what spiritual goal Christians are reaching for. We teach the very Lutheran idea that Christianity is not all about US reaching for something, it is about trusting that God has reached and is reaching for us).

3) *What does forgiveness of sin mean?* (For people who have grown up in the Church, words like "sin," "forgiveness," "redemption," "salvation," etc. have well-known, unpacked meanings—at last in comparison to those who have not grown up in the Church. However, if you have grown up outside of the church it is oftentimes difficult to know exactly what the Bible means when it talks about such things. During our Bible studies we do a lot of work in taking these meaning-packed Biblical Words and putting them in a context that makes them first understandable for those to whom they are unfamiliar and second applicable for somebody living in Tokyo, Japan in 2008.

Honestly, most of the time we feel like we are learning about Christianity *with* our Bible Study members, rather than simply teaching it *to* them. Because our Bible study members are mostly Japanese, they have experiences, beliefs, and assumptions about life and our world that we do not have. They bring these experiences to their interpretation of the Bible and help us see Jesus' teachings and the Gospel message through different eyes. For this reason, our Thursday night Bible study continues to be one of our biggest joys in ministry here! Please continue to pray that God would keep sending new people to our Bible Study, and that the learning that has taken place for all people involved might continue.

Christie's English teaching ministry

As many of you know, Tokyo is an international city populated by people from all over the globe, especially from different parts of Asia. One of the common challenges that many people from Asian nations face is that their native language is primarily spoken in only one small part of our world. This makes it difficult then for people to find jobs and build lives outside of the sphere that their own language encompasses. For this reason, many parents these days all over Asia are trying to find affordable English lessons for their children so that their children may have employment opportunities when they grow up that their parents never had. As native English speakers, we are incredibly fortunate to have the ability to go almost any place in the world and discover a demand for our language abilities, and for that reason we oftentimes don't notice how being confined to the knowledge of one, little-known language can keep some incredibly gifted people from ever sharing their gifts with a wider audience.

Christie has perceived that ever-increasing need for more and more affordable English education, and has offered her services to one of our Bible study members and to a number of children at Tokyo Lutheran. It is through Christie's English teaching ministry that we have become able to see how serving people's material needs first truly reinforces and supports our church's preaching and teaching of the Gospel. In other words, while the Gospel is a sharing of God's love through words, teaching English is sharing God's love through action.

TNG (The Next Generation) Youth Ministry

Christie and I continue to work with The Japanese Evangelical Church's (JELC) youth ministry branch (TNG) in developing a Camp Mission Manual for the JELC. Many churches in Japan enjoy running 2 or 3 day camps and retreats for their younger members in order to communicate the Gospel message to their youth in a more meaningful and relevant way. We continue to work with TNG in developing a manual that will hopefully give JELC churches guidance in developing their own camp ministries. The coolest thing about our team is that we have two college kids who have participated in TNG camp ministry for a number of years helping out in the process! That way our manual can be a manual made in part *by* youth *for* youth. Please pray that throughout our process of developing this Camp Manual we would keep the needs of our youth in mind so that our Manuel might be a helpful tool in sharing the Gospel with Japan's younger citizens.

This letter has gotten long, so we'd better finish it up! As always, we have only written generally about most of our work at Tokyo Lutheran and with the JELC. We are sure that as churches and as individuals many of you have more specific questions and curiosities regarding our work. If that is the case for you, we invite you to please, please contact us!! Part of the purpose of our missionary work is to be a connection between churches here in Japan and those in the United States. The more information we can give you about our ministry over here the better we can all make that connection, so please as individuals or as an entire church feel free to contact us whenever you like. God bless you and all of your ministries in your mission field, we are praying for you too!

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