

Dear Zumbro Lutheran Congregation,

Christie and I arrived in Japan safe and sound about a month and two days ago to be exact. Our first couple of weeks in Japan were relatively laid back. We had not yet begun language school yet, so Christie and I spent a lot of time trying to learn how the railway system works and basically acting like tourists. We had a chance to visit a couple of shrines in Tokyo as well as go to Nikko national park north of Tokyo and do some hiking.

Living in Tokyo is like nothing we've ever experienced! There are seas of people that we wade through every day on the sidewalk, in the railway stations, in restaurants, in stores, basically everywhere that we go. I think we say "sumimasen," which is Japanese for "I'm sorry, or excuse me" about a hundred times a day! Our current house, however, is located about two miles away from a very large wooded park, so we have a place to go when the congestion gets to be overwhelming. It also helps that the park has a lake stocked with ten pound carp.

About two weeks ago we started language training and I started my work as Tokyo Lutheran's new pastor. It has been quite the adjustment going from Zumbro Lutheran's congregation of 3,000 plus members to Tokyo Lutheran's English congregation of about 20 members. The congregation is small enough for us to all gather for tea together after church on Sundays, and then eat lunch together somewhere in Tokyo. I work directly with one other pastor named Kazuhiro Sekino. He graduated from seminary about a year and a half ago and has a lot of energy and innovative ideas as to how we can grow the English speaking congregation. Since Tokyo Lutheran is located in an area of Tokyo that attracts a lot of foreigners from Korea and the Phillipines, we think that we can do a lot of outreach within the area surrounding the church. Our goal is to get our average Sunday attendance up to fifty members.

It seems that my role in youth ministry over here in Tokyo will be put on hold until after we finish language training. We attend language school for about 4 hours a day ,4 days a week, so there will not be not a whole lot of time to focus on youth ministry in addition to my work at Tokyo Lutheran until language school ends.

Christie has been having trouble finding a nursing job. Apparently nurses in Japan must pass the Japanese licensing examination, which of course is written entirely in Japanese. She may still be able to find work on the Navy Base, and she has committed to helping the Japanese church with some of their youth ministry programs as well. Keep her in your prayers as we continue searching.

We thank you for your prayers as they are quite needed! Tokyo is a large city, and like in many major metropolises in this world faith oftentimes takes a back seat to the latest fashion, movies, entertainment, and the myriad of other distractions that compete for people's time and energy. On average people work about 70 hours or more per week as well, so there is not a lot of extra time in their week for them to devote to their spiritual lives and faith. I personally believe that a life without God is, in the end, hopeless.

Please continue to pray for us that God may use us in order to encourage faith. We miss you all A LOT and think of you often. God bless you very, very much.

Eric and Christie