

Japan Update

Spring 2021 Number 80



Online gathering, Aburayama Shalom Chapel

The good result of online youth group fellowship



Ken Matsuo

*KGK Staff,
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When God completed the creation of the world, he saw all he had made and was pleased, as it was very good (Genesis 1:31). However, in this sinless, very good world, there was one thing God considered not good—that man was alone (Genesis 2:18). From the beginning of creation, God meant for humans to have fellowship. Fellowship means not only relationship between humans and God, but also among humans. Just as God created Eve for Adam, God created humans as beings in need of fellowship with others. God saw fellowship as very good.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deprived us of many face-to-face communication opportunities. Even so, the fact remains that we humans need fellow-

ship. In line with this, in 2020 during the pandemic the youth group at Aburayama Shalom Chapel in Fukuoka City began to meet online. The group consists of both college students and other young adults. Right after the worship service on Sundays, they meet on Zoom for 30 minutes to share with each other what from the Scripture passages inspired them during the service.

This online fellowship involved some awkwardness at first. Over time, however, it has produced good results. The first good result is that some of the students who had not been able to attend face-to-face have joined the weekly online meeting. Meeting online allows busy students to attend from home. Limiting the fellowship to half an hour seems just right. When a person wishes they could have met for a longer period of time, they are eager to come back for more the following week.

The second good result is that the group members have come to a deeper understanding of the Bible. At our church, some attend worship physically, while others watch the livestreamed video. Unlike a face-to-face gathering,

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<http://jeanet.org/>

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Hospitality to foreigners amidst the pandemic: Ministry to international students in Japan

Yasu Kamata, *National Coordinator of International Student Ministries, KGK*

Why Ministry to International Students in Japan?



You probably have heard many times that Japanese people are one of the most unreached people groups in the world. Therefore, for many, I would guess ministry to international students in Japan does not stand out as an immediate priority.

I can certainly relate to that, despite being a firm believer in international student ministry (ISM). Growing up in Japan, I was saved during graduate studies in the United States. In order to fulfill my seminary internship requirement, I served two years with InterVarsity USA as ISM staff. Upon graduation, I returned to Japan and joined KGK (Kirisutosha Gakusei Kai) to develop a ministry to international students. This has been my main responsibility for the last eight years.

Given my story, I was convinced of the necessity of ISM in Japan. Yet as I was confronted by the immense need and the limited amount of resources for ministry to locals, I had to seek God over and over again for deeper conviction.

Here are some things that keep me going:

1. KGK is a ministry to all students, which includes internationals. In 2019, there were 208,901 international students studying in Japanese tertiary institutions.*1 Roughly one student out of every 17 is an international.*2
2. God calls his people to show hospitality to foreigners. I think especially of Deuteronomy 10:18–19 and Hebrews 13:2. In 2019, out of the 1,466 students regularly involved with KGK, 115 were international students.*3 I'm grateful for the welcoming attitude of Japanese students behind these numbers.
3. Internationals can become catalysts. While Kristine, from Guam, was studying in Tokyo, she started two English Bible studies and a morning devotion time for her campus KGK group. Her language ability allowed her to communicate well with the Japanese members, and being a foreigner helped her be bold in ways difficult for locals.*4
4. ISM in Japan is key to reaching the world. The top three student-sending countries are China, Vietnam, and Nepal, countries with restrictions on Christian witness. One Japanese seminary professor said that Japan currently might be the most open country in Asia.*5

COVID-19 and beyond

As you would imagine, COVID-19 has had a profound impact on international students. I've talked

with students who had their study programs cancelled, who couldn't re-enter, who lost their part-time jobs, who were separated from their spouses, and so on. With everything being remote, new students are struggling to develop meaningful relationships. The same is even more true for internationals. In 2020, KGK as a whole saw a 19% decrease in regularly involved students; internationals decreased by 55%.

This pandemic is challenging us to grow in welcoming students into authentic Christ-centered relationships. At KGK's staff conference, we reaffirmed the necessity of small groups and one-to-one meetings. We shared the importance of reaching out consistently and creating places of belonging.

There are glimpses of God's grace. On one campus, internationals and local students used to have separate Bible studies, but thanks to Zoom, they now meet together as one big group. Our Tokyo international group is meeting online, and we are finding that it is serving both current and former students, scattered across Japan and around the globe.

The overall number of international students has declined due to COVID-19. Yet, it is likely they will come back to pre-pandemic levels in a few years.*6 Changes in international politics can alter student destinations. In God's sovereignty, we might see even more international students in Japan, making ISM increase in its strategic significance.*7

To all readers of Japan Update, I praise God for your heart for Japan, and thank you for your continued investment in God's work in Japan. I would ask that you add to your prayers international students in Japan and those ministering to them, for the sake of the Japanese, world mission, and God's global glory.

*1 <https://www.studyinJapan.go.jp/en/statistics/zaiseiki/data/2019.html>. Last accessed February 19, 2021.

*2 https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/chousa01/kihon/kekka/k_detail/1419591_00001.htm. Last accessed: February 19, 2021.

*3 Regularly involved is defined as attending more than three events or attending more than one overnight event.

*4 You can read more about Kristine's story here.

<https://ifesworld.org/en/blog/mission-minded-international-students-in-japan>. Last accessed February 19, 2021.

*5 Professor Masanori Kurasawa of Tokyo Christian University, informal conversation.

*6 This projection was shared at the Lausanne ISM Consultation in November 2020.

*7 Japan was the ninth most popular international student destination in 2019. <https://p.widencdn.net/8wejr7/Project-Atlas-2019-graphics> Retrieved 29 February 2020.

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attending a worship service online at home involves temptations. When a person is in the familiar, comfortable setting of their own room, they can easily get distracted. With nobody around, they might do something else while giving only partial attention to the worship service. When they know, however, there will be an online youth group meeting afterward, they become motivated to focus on God's Word, even if they're alone. If they missed something or did not quite understand some parts of the sermon, they can ask during the meeting, and thus are led to a deeper understanding of Scripture.



The third good result is that meeting once a week has nurtured more friendship among the group members than before. The youth group used to meet monthly. Then, when a person was asked what they had been up to during the last month, they were hard put to remember anything. There had been some trials for sure, but by meeting time they had been long overcome. So the monthly fellowship meetings would often feel forced. Now, when meeting weekly, attendees can share their prayer requests in a more timely manner. Students who do not naturally open up can learn week by week how to share their personal challenges. Little by little, the meeting has become an intimate time of sharing among friends of the same age group. By talking about what may be some undramatic stuff that happened during the past week, the group members have gotten to know each other better. They have grown more appreciative that others are praying for them.

It is true that the online weekly meeting has some drawbacks. If a person misses the fellowship for several weeks in a row, they might feel more guilty as each week passes. They might even feel intimidated about going back to the fellowship. Another challenge is the fact that some are not too excited about online meetings in the first place.

Therefore, it is important for other church members to support youth attendance. Some students just need



an adult member's reminder and encouragement to join the youth group. In addition, regular members of the youth group need to be recognized properly with loving appreciation. Specific guidance must be provided regarding how to lead the online fellowship. In fact, it takes the whole church to keep encouraging the youth so that the greatest possible number of students can stay in the fellowship with its disciplines from Scripture.

Having worked for nine years for KGK, an intervarsity organization in Japan, I have become convinced of one thing—the Scriptures are powerful! I have seen many times simple fellowship rooted in Scripture clearly transforming the lives of students. This is why I am committed to organizing fellowship centered on Scripture.

God created humans as beings to have fellowship, but why? I believe it is for humans to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill this world, which God pronounced to be very good (Genesis 1:28).

During the pandemic, we often keep track of what we are not allowed to do. Our world is now affected by sin. There are, however, many things that we, adults and students, can do for God. Right where we are placed, we can expand, even today, the scope of the world that is pleasing in God's eyes.

We are committed to continuing fellowship so that we never lose the believer's perspective on everyday life. Today, more than ever, we must live by faith in order to share the gospel with people around us.

Translated by Atsuko Tateishi



TCU's 30th anniversary and student ministry in the "new normal"

Shohei Yamato, *Provost, Tokyo Christian University*



Tokyo Christian University (TCU) was established in 1990 with an undergraduate School of Theology consisting of two departments: Theological Studies and International Christian Studies. The school is founded upon historical Protestant evangelical theology with an aim to train Christian men and women as pastors, evangelists, missionaries, and Christian servants. In 2008, TCU added a major in Social Work to the major in International Christian Studies, and the department was renamed International Christian Studies and Social Work. From the Spring 2021 term, TCU will integrate these two majors into a single Theological Studies Department.

This gives me the opportunity to review the 30-year history of Tokyo Christian University. It should be remembered that, at the beginning, the establishment of TCU was delayed for one year. At that time, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology recommended the establishment of an English Language Department in addition to the Theological Studies Department we had planned. But instead of an English Language Department, TCU made plans for an International Christian Studies Department. This revised plan for two departments—Theological Studies and International Christian Studies within a single Undergraduate School of Theology—was approved by the Japanese government the following year. This set the basic direction of TCU's Undergraduate School of Theology. Since its founding, TCU has emphasized in both of these departments a liberal arts education based on a Christian worldview, along with specialized theological education for our new globalized era. This led us to establish the Asian Christian Theological Studies for English Speakers Program (ACTS-ES) in 2001. We have subsequently established partnership agreements with more than a dozen Christian colleges and universities in North America and one school in Hungary. Through the ACTS-ES program and by hosting short-term study abroad programs for our partner schools, TCU has become a global campus with international students consisting of up to one-fourth of our student body.

In the newly restructured Theological Studies Department, our English language degree track

(ACTS-ES) will become deeply integrated with the Japanese language degree track, allowing students to study more freely in both English and Japanese. A special feature of this program is that it will enable students to pursue an individualized course of studies in English and Japanese according to their developing language skills and interests.

Learning about Japan and the world calls for a holistic perspective committed to the welfare of individuals and communities. The 2021 integration of the department of International Christian Studies and Social Work into a single department of Theological Studies within the School of Theology is the fruit, in an important sense, of TCU's aim over the past 30 years—namely, to offer an integrated theological education. In the restructured program, students will declare a major at the beginning of their third year, choosing from among five majors: Church Ministry, Global Studies, Youth Studies, Christian Social Work, and Theological Studies. In this way, TCU will be able to strengthen its role as a School of Theology.

TCU has worked hard to respond to the new coronavirus pandemic throughout the 2020 academic year. Under normal circumstances, we are a fully residential college with three trimesters per year. For the 2020 spring term, however, we decided to offer all classes online. Our faculty and staff were trained to use Zoom video conferencing, and we somehow managed to do so. When we began teaching via Zoom, we found the sense of distance between faculty and students to be far less than expected. We also found that professors as well as students were able to concentrate on their studies. On the downside, however, we found that students tired more easily both physically and mentally due to the long periods of screen time, and that faculty tended to give more assignments than usual. We have made efforts to use breakout sessions more regularly to encourage interaction among students, as well as more active interactions between students and their professors. Through all this, I realized that a university learning community desperately needs live fellowship that includes getting to know one another through casual and what may seem to be meaningless conversations. I was reminded that the way Christ trained his 12 disciples in the course of daily life is essential for education.

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More than just a boarding house

Shion Kobayashi, *Tokyo Tyrannus Hall*

Tokyo Tyrannus Hall (TTH) started in 1959 as a Christian boarding house for male college students in Tokyo. Having become co-ed some 20 years ago, TTH housed three female and two male students at the time of this interview in November 2020, along with one associate supervisor. In addition, one supervising couple lives next door to TTH. Shion Kobayashi, a junior at a private women's college, and the assistant leader of the boarders, shared with Japan Update the challenges and blessings of the life at TTH during the pandemic. Excerpts follow.

Japan Update (JU): What has been the most significant way the coronavirus pandemic has impacted the way of life at TTH?

Shion (S): Life at TTH revolves around four pillars—activities that all boarders must participate in: 1) the in-house communal morning devotions three times a week; 2) what we call “The Layman School,” a study session with an invited lecturer on Wednesday evenings; 3) a week-long mission trip in the summer; and 4) physical exercise—at least two hours a week for men and one hour a week for women.



The Layman School with a lecturer connecting online

We were able to continue numbers 1 and 4, as they did not involve people from outside TTH. As for number 2, in lieu of inviting a lecturer, the boarders and staff members got together for Bible study from April through August 2020. This turned out to be a great blessing, because we got to know each other in many new and meaningful ways as we shared our thoughts.

Regarding number 3, we normally would split into two or three groups, each group going to a different city to help a local church for one week. Last summer, we gave up on traveling. As there were only four boarders at that time, we acted as one group, and helped a local church youth camp remotely. We shared a pre-recorded video that included hymn singing and playing the violin. One of us livestreamed a sermon

and another a testimony. It was not as fulfilling of an experience as we had hoped, but we are thankful we could do what we did.

JU: I assume the college courses went online last spring, at least for a time. How did you and the other boarders cope with the new situation?

S: Naturally, we spent most of our time in our respective rooms. Other than that, however, our way of life does not seem to have been affected so much. Breakfast and dinner are served on weekdays, and we eat in the dining hall during the assigned times. There was no change in this practice, except that a bottle of disinfectant showed up in the dining hall last spring. In many ways, we are like one big family.

JU: What blessings have you received from God during the pandemic?

S: I have come to appreciate the normal things that I used to take for granted. Going to school is one, getting together with friends is another. Some of my friends who live by themselves express their loneliness. Not me. Living at TTH and having Christian friends around all the time, I never feel lonely. I have to be considerate of the others living in close quarters, but that is just a small trade-off for freedom from loneliness.

JU: How about your campus activities?

S: I lead a Christian group on campus. Our group activities went online last spring, which opened the door for alumni to get more involved with us students. Some out-of-town alumni now join our Bible study and Thursday worship services, even during their lunch hour at work. The alumni sometimes give a testimony and deliver a sermon for us. It is a huge blessing to be able to enjoy greater fellowship with the alumni women.

JU: How can we pray for TTH?

S: We have been praying for freshman students who will be coming to TTH in 2021 for the next school year. Please pray that God will guide the ministry of TTH.



Sharing a meal at TTH. Shion at far right

Pastor Eiji Koyama and his recovery from COVID-19



In July 2020, when COVID-19 was spreading from the Tokyo metropolitan area across Japan, Eiji Koyama, pastor of Sakae Shalom Church, Independent Pentecostal Church Fellowship (Tanritsu

Pentecoste Kyōkai Ferōshipu—TPKF—<https://tpkf.org>), in Sakae-ku, Yokohama, was infected with the coronavirus. On July 17, he received a PCR test. It was found to be positive and he was taken to the hospital the same day. At one point during his stay, his condition deteriorated drastically and he was transferred to an ICU. (Both of his lungs were completely white and he could not breathe without a respirator.) He gradually recovered and returned home in August, after 19 days of hospitalization. We interviewed Koyama about his experience during his fight with this disease.

Q. Do you have any idea about the route of infection?

A. No idea. I tried to wear a mask, wash my hands, disinfect with alcohol, avoid the 3 Cs [closed spaces, crowded places, and close contact], move about without using public transportation, and not go into Tokyo.

Q. You felt sick on Friday, July 17.

A. On that day, at a clinic near my place, I got an X-ray. I was taken directly to a hospital for moderate patients by ambulance. Later, when my oxygen concentration suddenly dropped dangerously low, I was sent to the ICU of an emergency hospital for the critically ill.

Q. We heard that the prayers for your recovery helped you a lot. What were you thinking about in your hospital bed?

A. That the medical staff had been working very hard, but that this disease was still unknown and the method of treatment had not yet been established. I wasn't able to think clearly, but I knew my condition was critical. Meanwhile, I saw many people responding to my wife's prayer requests on our Facebook page. Some people sent me emails and some posted the prayer requests for me on their own sites. These prayers surrounded me like waves, and convinced me, "I will be all right." In my lonely ICU bed, hearing the words "I am praying for you" gave me such power.

Q. What did you learn throughout this experience? Do you have any special Bible passages that

supported you?

A. I saw how hard it is for a medical institution to take care of one infected patient. We must thank medical staff, who are always at risk of infection, for their devoted work for patients. It's also important to lift up intercessory prayer for medical institutions. My wife said she had been given the words "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10). She wrote them on all the tissue boxes at my bedside. Whenever I seriously suffered, I was supported by these words. While in the ICU, I personally was given the passage, "Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11). This made me believe that if I endured this pain, I would get Job's blessings. Eugene Peterson explains, "That's because God cares, cares right down to the last detail." God cares even for a person like me. I praise the name of Jesus.

Q. Your experience must concern all of us. Do you have any message to churches as they continue under the threat of COVID-19?

A. Our church did not have a cluster, but we had to close the church building. I appreciate that we have been able to have online worship with the cooperation of many people. No matter how many measures and precautions you take, this new coronavirus may cause infection. However, when we pray for each other and put the love of Jesus into practice, the world will be able to know Jesus Christ. For me, the quarantine was a good time of fellowship with Jesus.

When the number of infections started increasing, my wife started worrying whether we would need to restrain our church activities again. So she asked God, "How long will it last?" Then God clearly answered, "Until people submit to me." I would like to tell everyone not to fight with COVID-19, but just accept God and submit to God. Since God cares for us, I firmly believe that eventually we will have Job's blessings.

Christian Shimbun, August 30, 2020

Translated and summarized by Tomoko Kato

Prayer transcends dismay and helplessness: Seventy Japanese pastors unite to pray for Hong Kong

At a time when the freedom of speech and faith of the people of Hong Kong is under threat, and where there is disconnection and conflict amongst

the citizens, seventy Japanese pastors from various denominations united online to meet and pray for the people of Hong Kong. The event took place on October 31, 2020.

A sermon was delivered by Yōsuke Matsutani, pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan, and chaplain of Kinjō Gakuin University. He went to seminary in Hong Kong, so as someone who had lived there and knew people living there, he was deeply saddened by recent news. (In June 2020, he was invited as a guest speaker for an online prayer meeting organized by KGK and a student group based in Hong Kong. Even though he felt helpless at not being able to be there physically, he realized at that time he could still pray.)

During his sermon, Matsutani said, “Prayer is what gives us hope. It enables us to step forward instead of being immersed in helplessness, dismay, and fear.” He then shared some words from one of his previous sermons. “Japan and Hong Kong may seem near in one way, but also far. Despite the distance, however, we are all warriors in the same faith. We are all members of the Church and live in God’s Kingdom.”

After his June sermon, he had led communion and said “the sharing of the bread that is Christ’s body, and the blood that is the cup of the covenant, is something that transcends language, ethnic groups and bitter legacies—such as the occupation [of Hong Kong] by the Japanese army.” At that time, Matsutani asked for prayer for Japan, and promised to pray for the people of Hong Kong.



At the current event, Matsutani said he “would like to fulfill that promise now.”

Quoting from Romans 1:8–15, he said, “Just as Paul longed to meet the people from the church of Rome, I long to worship together with my brothers and sisters in Hong Kong. I would like to visit Hong Kong and meet face-to-face, not by myself, but with other Japanese people, and say to the people of Hong Kong, ‘We have always kept you in our prayers.’”

In closing, Matsutani said, “Although it is important to raise our voices against various challenges we see around the world, there are certain things only we as followers of Christ can do. Many would say, ‘Sing the national anthem,’ ‘Raise the flag for your nation,’ or ‘the prosperity of our nation must grow and our military must be strengthened,’ but I say we should sing songs of God’s Kingdom, and raise the flag for Christ.”

Christian Shimbun, November 22, 2020
Translated and summarized by Grace Koshino

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From the 2020 fall term, we allowed a small number of students to return to the dorms, and we tested a new hybrid form of teaching in a very small number of classes. In a “hybrid class,” the professor offers in-person instruction for students in the classroom and, at the same time, online instruction for students remaining at home. In the winter term, we allowed a few more students back into the dorms, and we increased the number of hybrid classes. However, things remain unpredictable for 2021 due to the newly declared state of emergency in January.

Though we will begin our new curriculum in April, we still cannot allow all of our students to live in the on-campus dorms. Whereas the singles dormitories typically house two students to a room, we must keep them to one student per room for at least the coming term. But thankfully vaccinations have begun in Japan, so TCU is making preparations in the hope that all our students can return to on-campus living this coming fall term.

Now that all of our faculty members are able to teach online, this past winter term we opened up a few of our hybrid and online classes to non-degree students (both for credit and for non-credit auditors). This means we are able to offer theological education far beyond any geographical limitations. Beginning this 2021 academic year, we are excited to kick off a new online program and offer several courses of study that people can take from anywhere in the world for university credit. We have long wanted to provide online continuing education for pastors, evangelists, and lay people in the field. It took a pandemic to be the catalyst, but we are now ready to make it happen. Wherever a person may be, he or she can enroll in TCU classes offered in Japanese, and soon in English as well. We will all continue to face difficult circumstances due to the coronavirus pandemic. Let us, therefore, continue to walk with trust in God, who works for the good of those who love Him.

Please pray for Japan

1. Christian churches and Japanese society are still affected by the spread of the coronavirus all over Japan and throughout the world. Keep praying that Japanese churches will stand firm in strong faith and that God will protect all the countries affected by the infection.
2. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work through foreigner-friendly ministries in Japan so that Japanese churches and ethnic churches in Japan might be united in the bond of love.
3. Pray that more “Kingdom-minded” collaborations will happen among different ethnic churches in Japan and Japanese churches. There are many opportunities including ministry to children of mixed marriages, etc.
4. Pray for young Christians and pray that God will raise up the next generation of Christ-centered, gospel-driven leaders among young Christians in Japan.

JEA related schedule

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>PLACE</u>
April 12	JEA Denominational Leaders’ Summit	Online
April 15	JEA Women’s Gathering “Katariba”	Online
April 19	JEA Board Meeting	Online
June 7-9	JEA Annual Plenary	Kakegawa
July 23-Aug. 8	Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games and Related Ministries	Tokyo

Editorial

It’s been over a year since the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19). The whole world has been changed. Japanese evangelical churches are still struggling with gathering for worship and prayer. Many churches have shifted from physical gathering to online gathering. We are facing essential theological questions, such as: what is the church, what is worship and holy communion, and so forth. We are also facing many challenges, especially on evangelism and mission. Due to social distancing, it is getting difficult for Christians to share the good news of Jesus face to face. Please keep praying for Japanese churches and Christians.



Takahito Iwagami, Editor in Chief

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