

Japan Update

Spring 2022 Number 82



Beautiful spring tulip garden, a sign of new beginnings

Japanese church in the new normal



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The Research Division of the JEA Mission Commission carried out a survey in 2020 on the state of churches in Japan during the coronavirus pandemic. The survey targeted the 2000 or so member churches of the Japan Evangelical Association and received a 20% response rate.

Information collected from the survey will serve as foundational data for the 7th Japan Congress on Evangelism (JCE7), scheduled for September 2023. When the survey was conducted, using the data for the upcoming Congress was not in the original plan. However, it has become evident that churches in Japan have been greatly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. If the impact of the pandemic as seen in the survey is not taken into account, it will be impossible to consider the future direction of evangelical churches.

One of the things we discovered through

this survey was the rapid digitalization of churches in Japan. Even churches that were not open to the idea of doing online services prior to the pandemic have had to adapt to digitalization. It must be pointed out, however, that this is only a superficial shift. Just as Joel warned in his time, Christian churches today are being challenged to reconsider the essential meaning of our attitudes toward God: in relation to faith, worship, mission, and pastoral ministry (Joel 2:13). If all of this has happened according to his will, then just as Joel wrote regarding the plague in his time (Joel 1:2, 3), we must pass on to our children how God's will was revealed through this current pandemic.

Two years have passed since the pandemic first broke out. The question that has arisen is not whether church services should be held online, but rather our inner attitude toward God—regardless of whether our worship takes place online or in person. As our knowledge about how to use digital tools increases and as the use of them becomes more widespread, the question we need to answer is, “Even as we use digital tools—how is our faith?”

Digitalization has offered us the

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Ballet company goes online

**Yutaka Okawaki, Executive Director, and Natsko Goto, Vice Executive Director,
Minato City Ballet Company**



Yutaka Okawaki



Natsko Goto

The year 2020 saw the spread of the new coronavirus, which forced performing artists like us to be separated from our audiences. When the Tokyo Metropolitan Government declared the state of emergency for the first time in April 2020, nobody knew the right direction to pursue in the middle of the battle with COVID-19.

As the leadership team of a ballet company, we made it our highest priority to protect the health and the lives of our dancers, instructors, staff, and their family members, as well as the people in our local community. With that in mind, we began a frantic search for ways to continue art activities.

First, in order to preserve the ballet school business, one of the major sources of income for our group, we explored ways to offer online ballet lessons. Online lessons have become prevalent now, but in the early days of COVID, no established method had been developed to offer them. We had to start from scratch to figure out what equipment to use, which platform to offer lessons on, and how to collect payment. Moreover, as the demand for live streaming equipment skyrocketed, the prices of such equipment inevitably rose on every electronic commerce site. Some equipment even remained sold out for prolonged periods of time. We struggled daily to find a way to keep our business going with our limited supply of equipment and finite human resources. We did learn one lesson through the pandemic period. We must not stand still, but keep moving forward.

Now we have acquired the skills necessary to offer lessons in a hybrid format. While conducting in-person lessons, we allow some students to participate online. This has also opened a new way to present theatrical productions.

We now offer ballet performances in a hybrid format. We have integrated online streaming and offline theater performance as a way of enjoying theater productions in the new normal. Local governments have welcomed this new style. We, as the Minato City Ballet Company, have performed on stage over 20 times during 2020, all

while the pandemic was raging. This was an exceptional achievement during a time when other ballet companies had to cancel most of their scheduled performances and were forced to pause activities.

The year 2021 also saw us enter the photography business. We were using a mirrorless single-lens reflex camera for our live streaming. We began to use it for still photography, which enabled us to photograph ballet performances. In November 2021, Natsko Goto won second place in the Expression Photography Awards (EPA), an international photo competition in Italy. She was the first Japanese female photographer to win an EPA award. She continues to train herself as a photographer and has won another EPA award.

The photo which won an award in 2021 features the feet of our ballet dancers. Romans 10:15 reads “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news” (NIV). Ballet is an art form which does not involve words. As it is, ballet can touch people’s hearts when mere words cannot. Ballet is also a beautiful visual art form. As beauty is one of the divine characteristics, we believe bringing beauty means bringing the gospel.

The photo on page 3 shows the feet of those who express beauty in ballet. If you look at the photo closely, one foot wears a pointe shoe, while the other is bare. The former is dressed for onstage and dedicated for the audience. The bare foot is a metaphor of the dancer’s natural self. Ballet dancers appear onstage in beautiful costume, and show fantastic dance performances. Their feet, however, are invariably marked with injuries and bruises which they have sustained during years of practice. The photo communicates that ballet is a labor, and that each dancer is proud of their feet as a foundation of such labor. Indeed the feet of these laborers are beautiful. We have come to believe that photography is an excellent tool to capture the beauty of ballet in a concrete form. We plan to loan the award-winning photo to local churches, in the hope that the displayed photo will help attract more people to the church.

We have heavily invested in live streaming and photographing our ballet performances as a result of our moving forward throughout the difficult time of the coronavirus pandemic. We also sense that because of the pandemic, a new way has opened to use ballet for evangelism. One of the things in our pipeline is to create ballet productions based on biblical stories. We are full of thanks, and pray that the Lord will continue to use us for global peace and evangelism.

Translated by Atsuko Tateishi



Japanese church in the new normal (continued from page 1)

opportunity to join the online services of churches both near and far. While this provides occasion for people to reconsider the value of their current church membership, it also breaks down walls between churches and brings about a sense of building up the universal church rather than a church organization. In other words, what may seem negative at first glance becomes an opportunity for God's blessing.

The theme for JCE7 is "Beginning from the End: Working Together in the Mission of the Church" (「おわり」から「はじめる」宣教協力 "Owari" kara "Hajimeru"

Senkyō Kyōryoku). When we consider the changes God has brought about and how we should deal with them, it is important not to bring about reformation through human leadership. Instead we must turn our eyes and our hearts toward the God who goes before us—to end what he wants to end, and to begin what he wants to begin.

Translated by Grace Koshino

I found myself a live streaming pastor!

Taro Osaka, *Yamatecho Church*



“When we think about the future of Taiki Dendōsho (Taiki House Church)—our branch 200 kilometers away from Yamatecho Church—this is just the time to think of starting video streaming of worship services with a

system like YouTube Live . . . We will work hard to figure out how to do it with your prayers.”

This was part of our church policy draft written in February 2020. But to tell the truth, as shown in the final phrase at that time, “We will work hard to figure out how to do it with your prayers”—our commitment was only at the level of “Well, let’s just work out the vision for now.”

However, by the end of that February, the coronavirus had increased its influence and forced us to stop our in-person worship services. We were obliged to figure out how to do online worship. Live streaming of worship shifted from “if we can” to “we must.”

But I was just an ordinary pastor without any special knowledge about sound systems or video technology. So it was impossible for me to distribute quality videos immediately, even with the “necessity” right in front of us.

Then, an episode from the past came up in my mind. It was about the sub-orbital test flight by the U.S. of the Mercury-Red Stone-3 rocket. At that time the U.S. was behind in its space development competition with the U.S.S.R. Although Vostok-1 had already gone around the globe, and Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin had said, “The Earth is blue,” three weeks later the U.S. only accomplished a 15 minute sub-orbital flight.

At that point it was obvious which nation was the winner, but considering the great accomplishment of the U.S. moon landing sometime after that, there was no doubt the trial itself had meaning. Inspired by this fact, I started video distribution of our worship services with my smartphone and found success. This was in April 2020.

On Facebook, live streaming with a smartphone was possible, but for YouTube, more channel subscribers were needed. I shifted to using my PC and a video camera to broadcast the live stream. However, with this method I needed an interface to record sound from the church hall. As I had no idea what product to use, I posted the question on my Facebook account. A few days later, an unknown brother sent me some equipment that he was not using in his office anymore. I felt a sense

of Jehovah-jireh—The Lord Will Provide. At the same time, my longtime hobby of looking around recycle shops and buying good items at low cost worked well. I was able to purchase most of the equipment needed, such as cameras and microphones, at very reasonable prices at second-hand shops.

Time passed and on Christmas Day, 2020, a sister who lives 70 km away was baptized. My wife and I had been visiting her once a month as we wended our way through the COVID-19 pandemic, but after we started livestreaming, she had been able to attend the worship services every week. Her faith grew stronger as a result and brought her to the point of baptism. This was a great surprise to us. Moreover, at the end of August 2021, our first goal was accomplished—interactive video distribution with our 200 km distant branch church. Our vision for two years, to see and listen to a branch church member praying as a representative on our screen, came true as the result of the coronavirus. Hallelujah!

During this time, I had become a member of the Facebook group “Information Exchange Group for Church Service Videostreaming.” This is an interdenominational and goal-oriented gathering set up during the pandemic to provide worship services through the internet. I was thankful that we were able to share our problems and encourage each other by sending messages to each other without regard to denomination, sex, age, or position as pastor or church member. Toward the end of last year, I was browsing through an internet auction site. I happened upon five or six very cheap but high-quality video cameras for sale. I announced my find on our group site, and to my surprise, in only a few weeks several of the churches belonging to the group had replaced their video cameras with those I mentioned.

As I write, I have been busily preparing for an online event at the end of February to talk about the live streaming of worship services. As I was making a flyer to advertise it, my speaking partner said, “Rev. Osaka, please make a catchphrase to introduce yourself.” I wasn’t quite sure what to do. Suddenly, the title of a bestseller book of the 1980s came to mind: *Kigatsukeba Kishu no Nyōbō—I Found Myself the Wife of a Jockey*. So I borrowed the idea and came up with *Kigatsukeba Laibu Haishin Bokushi—I Found Myself a Live Streaming Pastor*. Even during the coronavirus pandemic, I am really grateful I was able to experience the God who gives us dreams and makes them come true. (Philippians 2:13)

Translated by Tomoko Kato

Crowdfunding for the kingdom

Shin Kato and Chiharu Kanno, *KARASHIDANE*



Operating under parent company Top Space Ltd. (有限会社トップ・スペース), KARASHIDANE, meaning mustard seeds, has been serving as a crowdfunding

platform for Christian initiatives since July 2018. You may well have been involved with one or two of their projects already. You also may have been receiving a collection of Christian fliers by post periodically from Hakobunebin, which also operates under Top Space Ltd. Japan Update interviewed Shin Kato, President, and Chiharu Kanno, Executive Assistant, to find out how KARASHIDANE facilitates crowdfunding projects.

Japan Update (JU): Please share the vision of KARASHIDANE.

Shin Kato (SK): KARASHIDANE is a business brand that specializes in crowdfunding for Christian mission. When we started in mid-2018, crowdfunding for religious purposes was somewhat limited. So we launched KARASHIDANE hoping to become a catalytic tool for Christian collaboration.

Chiharu Kanno (CK): It is our corporate vision to energize Christians. We believe that if it is not possible for you to do something alone, you can do it as a group, together with other Christians and organizations. If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, KARASHIDANE will help you share your vision, gather supporters, and reach your goal, while praying alongside you.

JU: How many crowdfunding projects have you been involved with?

SK: As of mid-November 2021, 32 projects ranging from small scale to very large ones.

JU: Any memorable projects among them?

SK: The Bible Project Book by OneHope Japan (OHJ) was a large project. The passion of Hisho Uga, National Director of OHJ, was effectively communicated to attract many supporters. Moreover, this particular project was carried out in a way that KARASHIDANE had always wanted a project to be carried out.

JU: Can you elaborate on that a little?

SK: In short, several organizations were involved with the project, with each complementing the others by playing a different role toward the same goal. KARASHIDANE provided the crowdfunding platform. At the same time, we promoted the project through the Hakobunebin mailing list. OHJ frequently

updated funding progress through YouTube and various social networking services such as Facebook. Other organizations, including Grace & Mercy Foundation Japan and Word of Life Press Ministries, were involved as well.

CK: As for me, I remember well one project initiated by the pastor of a rural church. The church had a small car for ministry purposes. When the car broke down, the pastor launched a crowdfunding project to purchase a replacement car. This pastor was just a faithful worker of the Lord with no particularly strong connections. And yet, the target was reached within a very short period of time. I was thankful that KARASHIDANE was able to make this ministry need known among a wider circle of Christians.

JU: How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced KARASHIDANE in negative and positive ways?

CK: Christian camp sites have certainly been thrown into a very difficult situation. We approached Christian Camping International / Japan and proposed crowdfunding.

SK: The project raised some two million yen to support member sites.

CK: Christian musicians have lost sources of income. We hosted a crowdfunding project for Tohoku Supporters Love East, a relief initiative for Tohoku through music and art, and raised about 1.8 million yen. Financial need is one thing. More importantly, however, it is our joy that KARASHIDANE projects have helped highlight people and ministries in difficulty, so that more prayers were offered and a greater circle of supporters were gathered.

SK: I believe the spectrum of people who have come to make use of crowdfunding has both increased and gotten broader during the pandemic period.

JU: Any advice for people who are contemplating a crowdfunding project?

SK: I am sure a lot of Christians out there are in financial need. Christians will extend financial support to what they sense is significant in Kingdom work.

CK: While there are a number of crowdfunding platforms in Japan, KARASHIDANE is unique in that we are explicitly Christian and can actually inspire prayer. Supporters can continue to follow a project after crowdfunding is completed, to see how the Kingdom work bears fruit. It is important to work hard in advance of a crowdfunding project. Develop a lot of potential supporters. Posting on social networks is critical. It is said that the first three days and the last three days are the key periods of a crowdfunding project.

Translated by Atsuko Tateishi

The 8th Metropolitan Mission Seminar

The 8th Metropolitan Mission Seminar convened online on May 22, 2021. The seminar was hosted by the OCC Association for Metropolitan Mission Promotion and Collaboration. Under the theme “Practical advice for pastors and church members on church administration: learn and be prepared,” Ryuichi Yamazaki, Managing Director of Ochanomizu Christian Center, delivered the keynote address. The breakout sessions featured a number of Christian professionals, including an attorney, an administrative scrivener, a tax accountant, a certified social insurance labor consultant, a real estate transaction specialist, and a financial planner. Some 400 people participated in the seminar from all over Japan.

In his keynote address entitled “Operation of local churches: keeping secularism from sneaking into the church,” Yamazaki shared how he has become interested in church administration. Through his experience of working for Kirisutosha Gakusei Kai (KGK), witnessing the operational challenges of various churches and mission organizations, and studying Japanese Christian history and the Religious Corporations Act in Japan, he has come to sense the need for exploring proper management of Christian churches.

Yamazaki presented two key concepts: 1) thinking of all matters from an ecclesiastical point of view, and 2) maintaining an awareness of the tension we live in. He elaborated on the first concept as examining each matter through a Christian value system and dealing with it in terms of words and thoughts that reflect mature faith. Yamazaki explained the second phrase as performing responsibilities in the reality of a world system that operates differently from the church, while at the same time standing firmly as a Christian church. He encouraged churches and mission organizations to abide by social norms and to comply with the law, in so far as they do not conflict with Christian conscience.

Yamazaki concluded that Christians need wisdom in making decisions as the Church, and in trying to find good points of resolution under governing law.

Christian Shimbun, June 6, 2021

Translated and summarized by Atsuko Tateishi

JEA Mission Forum Fukushima 2021

The year 2021 marked the 10th anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the ensuing Fukushima nuclear meltdown. The annual JEA Mission Forum was streamed online from Fukushima on November 23–24. The Mission Forum Fukushima Steering Committee and the JEA Mission Commission co-hosted the event with

the overall theme of “Fukushima since then and into the future.”

Session 1 featured three presenters, who discussed Fukushima during the past decade since the 2011 triple disaster. Session 2 explored the topic of mission in disaster areas and during a pandemic. Hiwao Yoshimochi, Pastor of Ibaraki Bible Church, delivered a keynote address on what we can learn from Jesus regarding his allocation of time during his life on earth. Yoshimochi proposed focusing on the first 30 years of Jesus’ life in addition to



proclaiming the events of the cross and the resurrection.

Four people then presented their thoughts and stories. Keiji Kida, Pastor of Kōriyama Christ Evangelical Church, looked back on his many years of ministry in Fukushima Prefecture and focused on disaster relief activities since 2011. Yoshiyuki Nishioka, Pastor of Kawagoe Nozomi Church, discussed the relationship between evangelism and social activities. Ken Nishiono, Pastor of Kōriyama Bible Baptist Church, reflected on his years in Fukushima since 2011, first as a relief worker and then as a pastor. He then revisited the meaning of relief work and mission. Emi Nodera, born in Fukushima and currently a pastor at Akabane Bible Church, shared the story of a family who was the fruit of a labor of love 70 years ago.

The participants were then divided into small groups for discussion. The evening was devoted to breakout sessions based on the projects of the Japan Congress on Evangelism.

The second day of the Forum was devoted to integrating the Forum presentations and discussions, and for developing and praying a communal prayer.

Christian Shimbun, November 23, 2021

Translated and summarized by Atsuko Tateishi

The 4th Biblical Environment Symposium

On November 13, 2021, while COP26 was going on in the U.K., the 4th Biblical Environment Symposium took place online under the auspices of the Environmental Consortium Toward a Sustainable Society Living Out the Gospel. Richard Bauckham, noted New Testament

scholar and Professor Emeritus at the University of St Andrews, was the keynote speaker. Bible and Ecology, one of his books, is expected to be translated into Japanese and to be published in the near future.



Bauckham spoke of why the Church should engage in environmental issues. People are suffering from climate change. We cannot love our neighbors without addressing the environmental issues facing them, he said.

Bauckham suggested several practical ways for local churches to be involved in environmental issues.

- Consider human beings as part of the creation.
- Love nature as God loves it.
- Study what has gone wrong in terms of the relationship between humans and nature.
- Conduct an environmental audit of your church by reviewing the energy consumption of the sanctuary, the amount of disposable plastic, and recycling practices.
- Participate in activities for environmental recovery.

With regard to the guilt felt when flying, thereby causing CO2 emission to increase, Bauckham suggested purchasing a carbon offset whenever plane flight is necessary. He also encouraged people to use trains for domestic travel.

As global capitalism imposes a greater environmental burden, Bauckham proposed shopping for local products whenever possible. Moreover, shifting to a green economy will lead to job creation, he argued.

Christian Shimbun, November 21 and 28, 2021
Translated and summarized by Atsuko Tateishi

Asia 2021 Congress Report “Rethinking the concept of Christianity as Western” The impact of Western churches on Asian churches

The Asia 2021 Congress took place online from October 11–14. The event had been postponed a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the second day, Todd Johnson, co-director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity and one of the editors of the World Christian Encyclopedia, shared regarding the characteristics and challenges of churches in various regions of Asia. He reaffirmed that Christianity is fundamentally Asian—true even in AD 325 at the First Council of Nicaea, when the majority of the leaders were from Africa and Asia. Johnson shared five points regarding contributions that Asian Christianity has made to the rest of the world: (1) a flourishing model of Christianity as a minority religion, (2) close interactions with



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people of other religions, (3) evangelism to those who have little access to the gospel, (4) strong indigenous contributions, and (5) migration and church planting movements.

In response, Dr. Steve Moon, founder and CEO of Charis Institute, shared about the realities suffering Christians are facing due to the weakening of democracy and threats to religious freedom. He added, “There has been a certain level of bold contextualization seen in India, but East Asian churches have remained cautious about contextualization over concerns of the potential danger of syncretism.” Going into more detail, he said, “We need to go beyond contextualization and work on globalizing theologies.”

On the fourth day, Rev. Dr. Hwa Yung (Asia 2021/22 Program Chair) shared six challenges and changes [both positive and negative] that Western churches had brought to Asian churches: (1) modernity and secularism, (2) the growth of Majority World churches and the recovery of an acknowledgement of the supernatural, (3) ministry and mission guided by human management approaches versus dependence on the Spirit, (4) shallow discipleship or nominalism, (5) theological education, and (6) confidence in the gospel of Christ.

Following Hwa Yung’s presentation, Dr. Lindsay Brown laid out positive influences Western churches have had on the Majority World, such as practicing their faith through words and deeds when responding to infectious diseases, and how the Reformation has brought about (1) Rediscovery of the essence of the gospel, (2) Reformation of culture, and (3) Recovery of the missionary vision.

One of the attendees, Miho Buchholtz (pastor at Tokyo Life Church), said she hopes “Japan can contribute to the estimated 6% increase of Christians in East and Southeast Asia by 2050,” and that she believed “cooperation and unity were the key.”

Christian Shimbun, October 31, 2021
Translated and summarized by Grace Koshino

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 21	JEA Women’s Forum	Online
April 25	JEA Board Meeting	Tokyo
May 9	Mission Research Forum	Online
June 6-8	JEA General Meeting	Kakegawa
June 9-11	AEA D6 Family Conference	Online

The underlying theme of Japan Update #82 is “moving forward with lessons learnt during the pandemic.” It’s been almost two years since the outbreak of the coronavirus. Japanese Christians and churches have learnt many lessons during these two years. This issue focuses on some of the important ones. We look forward to seeing the outcome of what God is doing among us. At the same time we are now very concerned about the Russian military invasion into Ukraine and are crying to God for peace. It is a time of lament and prayer for those who are suffering. May the God of peace help us to be peacemakers in this world.

Takahito Iwagami, Editor in Chief



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