

# Japan Update

Autumn 2023 Number 85



*A mountain and a pond in autumn colors*

## Twenty years and 14 missionary units



**Yoshiya Hari**  
*Director,  
Asian Access Japan*

the troublesome memories about working with foreign missionaries came back to me—although most of those difficulties happened because of my inexperience.

The blessing of cooperating with missionaries is, of course, that a church can stay on the missional cutting edge. A church can gain centrifugal force and create missional expansion.

In 2014, the Lord guided me to work on getting churches planted in unchurched cities in Japan. During our research we found that the biggest unchurched city in Japan was Sakura Ward [*ed.—pop. nearly 100,000*], one of the ten wards of the Saitama City metropolitan area—only 10 kilometers from our church. So as a congregation, we decided to plant a new church there. Three Christians were found to live in that ward, so we shared our vision with them. Since Sakura Ward is home to a university, we decided to start with outreach to university students.

Around the same time, two missionaries were assigned to our church, so we shared the church planting vision for Sakura Ward with them. We read Luke 10 together over and over and then started outreach by find-

I became a pastor in 2003, and took over a church planted by missionaries. Ever since, I have been blessed to preach the gospel together with missionaries. From 2011 I have served as the National Director of the mission organization アジアン・アクセス・ジャパン (Asian Access Japan). This has allowed me to collaborate with local churches in various places in Japan by sending missionaries to them.

When I was asked to write this article, I made a list of the names of all the medium- to long-term missionaries who have worked directly with our church for longer than one year during the time I have been pastor. I was surprised to realize there have been 14 units (counting a couple as one unit) during the past 20 years. As I remembered their faces, I sincerely thanked God for his grace in giving them to us. At the same time, all of

### Inside

Twenty years and  
14 missionary units 1 & 3

What matters is character 2

Blessings and tips in working  
with international staff  
at KGK 4

Working together: JEMA's  
breakout session at JCE7 5

News and Notes 6 & 7

Prayer/Editorial 8

(continued on page 3)

## What matters is character

### Interview with members of the board at Nerima Church of God

*Originally from Singapore, Pastor Waichan Lam came to Japan with his wife in 2013 to join the pastoral team of the Nerima Church of God, a Japanese-speaking church in a residential area of western Tokyo. Six years later, upon the retirement of Senior Pastor Satoru Kanemoto, he assumed the position of his predecessor.*

*How did this local church work through the leadership transition? With Pastor Lam's gracious agreement, on a Sunday afternoon in May 2023, Japan Update interviewed four members of the church board. Excerpts follow.*

**Japan Update (JU):** I presume it was a major shift when Pastor Lam took the senior leadership of your church. How did the church board feel about the transition? How did you prepare for the change?

**Chiaki Okazawa (CO):** Actually, by the time Pastor Lam became our senior pastor, he had been well integrated into our church. We didn't prepare anything in particular because of the fact he's not Japanese. I suppose a transition can be challenging, whether the pastor is Japanese or not.

**Takane Okazawa (TO):** Over the years, our church has worked with various pastoral team members from overseas. I think we were already somewhat familiar with leadership by foreigners. Pastor Lam was fairly fluent in Japanese upon arrival. He made it a point to preach in Japanese from the early stages of his ministry with us, which I believe helped us get closer to him quickly.

**Yoshinori Morimoto (YM):** I began to attend this church five years ago, when Pastor Lam was our assistant pastor. From the beginning, it was quite easy for me to look to him as a pastoral leader. I readily accepted the idea of his becoming our senior pastor as well.

**Rieko Ando (RA):** In a way, the years leading up to the transition prepared us well. While working with him for six years, we were impressed with his character. We saw that he had a clear sense of calling to work in Japan. Over time, the church developed the desire to continue to walk with him and to support his vision. In particular, the lay leaders of our church were in agreement with following his leadership.

**JU:** It's been four years now since Pastor Lam took the senior leadership. What blessings have you received under a non-Japanese senior pastor?

**CO:** As mentioned, the transition came to pass quite naturally. As the church board came to an agreement to support him as our senior pastor, things were simpler

for the other church members as to which way to go.

**RA:** I like that Pastor Lam is quick to admit his errors and to apologize.

**CO:** Yes, that makes it easier for us to talk to him. Over the years, I have offered him some advice on cultural matters, but I've never felt it necessary to advise him on matters of faith.

**YM:** The COVID-19 pandemic started soon after Pastor Lam was appointed as Senior Pastor. I appreciate that he quickly responded to the situation and began online worship services without delay.

**RA:** He shows us priorities clearly, and doesn't try to micromanage.

**JU:** In the meantime, what challenges have you experienced during these past four years?

**TO:** The pandemic, of course, posed a big challenge for us. Pastor Lam guided our church through each step.

**RA:** Yes, by putting each element of his guidance into plain words.

**TO:** I recall, in the early days of our online worship services, he wrote in the church newsletter about the meaning of worship.

**RA:** For us, Pastor Lam is not a missionary, but a senior pastor who happens to be a foreigner.

**CO:** Perhaps it was good that in his case our church did not have the kind of expectations that a church might have for a foreign missionary.

**JU:** Any advice or suggestions for a Japanese-speaking church in working with a foreign missionary or pastor?

**RA:** Pastor Lam and his wife are strongly committed to living and working in Japanese community. If someone has that sort of strong commitment, it will show, and it will help build a trust relationship with any Japanese church.



Pastor Lam (center) and the board members of Nerima Church of God

(continued on page 3)

### What matters is character (continued from page 2)

**YM:** Pastor and Mrs. Lam are friendly and seem to be relaxed and comfortable about being in Japan, which helps build our friendship.

**RA:** Some of our church members, including me, are ministry workers. Since Pastor Lam took the senior leadership, we have come to be prayed for more intentionally. I feel reassured and have a stronger sense of being sent out from the church.



*Nerima Church of God in Nerima Ward*

### Twenty years and 14 missionary units (continued from page 1)

ing children of peace the Lord prepared among the students. Starting with the service of the two missionaries, core leadership living in Sakura Ward was birthed. Presently, two couples are guiding the group as church planting leaders. The missionaries in the project have changed several times, with a total of eight different units having been involved. They serve as supporting members of the planting team under the leadership of church members.

You may be envious to hear that we have received 14 missionary units. However, I would say, “It’s not easy to serve together with missionaries.” There are not only cultural differences, but differing theological positions, differing sizes of churches each missionary grew up in, differing perspectives toward finances, and so on. These factors are all brought into a setting where missionaries have significant influence because of their perceived status. If pastors and church members are not equipped properly, missionaries will be a source of trouble rather than help.

On the other hand, when such diversity comes into a church, imbalance is introduced into the community, a “chemical reaction” occurs, and the church has the opportunity to grow to the next stage.

Japanese pastors may be willing to accept missionaries to help with their current church activities. However, if the church’s missional vision is not clear, it will be difficult when a mission organization provides missionaries. When talking about “church planting,” some churches think of starting another flock in different location as we did. Others might try to reach a people group they have not touched before. For example, now that we are in a post-COVID-19 era, this



past June our church started Alpha (an introduction to Christianity course) for people in their twenties. Our current missionary has been bringing more than 10 guests to each gathering, so we have had the chance to share the gospel while providing a meal for them. This can be another approach to church planting.

In order to make use of the good gifts of missionaries, we need to share our vision clearly and provide accountability—while at the same time trusting them and giving them a certain amount of freedom. Sometimes, treating them like ordinary church members and micromanaging them makes them feel suffocated. In this post-COVID time, the number of the missionaries who want to commit to Japan seems to be increasing. Actually, each mission organization in Japan has been busy accepting new missionaries and arranging their assignments. This trend is expected to increase. In the meantime, local churches in each region of Japan must take leadership, have a clear mission vision, and cooperate with missionaries. To fill every corner of Japan with the gospel, I dream that churches will continuously be born in cooperation between Japanese churches and churches around the globe.

(Translated by Tomoko Kato)

## Blessings and tips in working with international staff at KGK

*Ryosuke Ikebuchi, Pastor, Student Ministry Director and Kansai Regional Director, KGK*



*Ryosuke Ikebuchi*

KGK started in 1947 as a movement voluntarily initiated by a group of Japanese students. Thus, unlike a number of missional movements in Japan initiated by foreign missionaries, we make it a point to use the Japanese name of the organization. The abbreviation KGK derives from the romanized Japanese name of the organization, which is Kirisutosha Gakusei Kai. I should note, however, that in the early years when the movement was small, missionaries were a constant presence in supporting the mission activities of KGK. Kenneth Roundhill, the first missionary staff of KGK, began to work in 1958 and continued until 1990. He was a member of Worldwide Evangelisation for Christ (WEC). From the early period until today, a number of missionary staff have supported the KGK movement and blessed KGK in many ways.

The first blessing may be the incarnational testimony displayed through the missionaries' character. I believe spiritual matters are communicated and passed on, not only through Scripture, but also by way of the character of a person who speaks of and listens to Scripture with you, and spends time with you. The committed dedication and character of missionaries developed through the course of their lives exudes a vibrant spiritual message. Missionary staff members would initially undergo a period of struggle in learning the Japanese language. Even in the midst of difficulty, they would begin to engage in student ministry and interact with students. The gospel message gets across to students, no matter what level of language proficiency a missionary holds. It is their incarnate testimony that effectively carries the message. As a student, I was strongly impressed with the character of the KGK missionary staff. I believe students today are also being blessed by the same positive impressions from missionaries in the frontlines of student ministry.

The second blessing is that missionaries greatly contributed to the development of the philosophy and culture of KGK as a mission organization. Most KGK missionaries come to Japan after having been involved with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Stu-

dents (IFES). They have helped form a KGK culture based on their experience with IFES. Some of the fruit that remains in the KGK movement until today includes having personal devotions, mutual spiritual and pastoral care, and Bible study and sharing in small groups. Another contribution by some of the first missionary staff is that they emphasized to staff members that life is ministry. This working style has been passed down until today. In a culture where people often work too hard, early KGK missionaries cautioned against a working style that can be described as "ministry is life." Their "life is ministry" working style was based on the idea that it is a witness to display a healthy lifestyle by taking sufficient rest and caring for one's family well. For decades, this spirit has been protecting the families of our staff members. It also has positively influenced the passing down of faith to their children. This has been a healthy guideline in directing the overall lifestyle and way we work at KGK.

Third, missionaries have blessed KGK by providing a broader perspective of mission in Japan in the context of global mission, and by showing what mission means by their very presence. With great sacrifice, they come from overseas to minister in Japan, and serve right in front of our eyes. They show what it really means to engage in mission. When students hear a prayer request regarding global mission, they can associate the request with the KGK missionary staff they personally know as a model of global mission.



*Ikebuchi and his team in the KGK Kansai office*

## Working together: JEMA's breakout session at JCE7

*Simon Pleasants, Vice President, JEMA*

During JCE7, JEMA ran a breakout session on the topic “Missionaries — Asset or Liability?” This provocative title reflects the reality that while many missionaries want to come alongside Japanese leaders and help them, good intentions are not enough to ensure a successful partnership. There are many pitfalls that need to be negotiated on both sides.

In the session, JEMA President Nathan Snow noted that missionaries can enhance ministries in Japanese churches by bringing many positive factors such as enthusiasm, creative thinking, and an ability to attract outsiders. But he also noted that they can be stubborn, require energy and time, and create misunderstandings due to cultural differences and communication difficulties. This was borne out by an on-the-spot survey of the 26 in-person participants, which found that close to 80% of them had had positive experiences of working with missionaries, rating them 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. However, common sticking points were communication problems (77.3%) and cultural differences (72.7%).

Nathan pointed out that the number one reason people in ministry quit is personal relationship problems. But he also noted that big wins are usually birthed out of steadily plugging away at cooperation. He explained that cooperation involves three stages: getting off to a good start; maintaining a good cooperative relationship; and finishing well. His main focus was on the key areas that need to be considered when initiating a cooperative relationship.

He shared that many areas need to be discussed at the outset. Some of them were fairly obvious topics such as faith background, ministry experience, and qualifications, whereas others were more subtle such as things you do and don't enjoy doing.

As in all enterprises, it is critical for both parties to lay out their expectations for the relationship at the beginning. This should extend to quite detailed things such as the form of address used for the missionary, the role of their family, and when and how they will take time off.

A key thing to discuss up front is finances. Since most missionaries are supported by churches in their home countries, they can usually minister without drawing on the finances of the Japanese church. Furthermore, many will tithe their income to the church and even create income through running programs like English classes. While this is a great boon to the Japanese church, it



*Nathan Snow speaking at the JEMA session*

could create a hole when the missionary moves away.

Nathan noted some creative ways in which missionaries and Japanese pastors can work as teams. For example, a Japanese pastor will generally be at a church for the long haul and there is more shame for him if an initiative flops. So Nathan suggested an arrangement where the pastor takes the credit for positive outcomes of joint ventures, while the missionary takes the blame for any failures. This can take the pressure off the pastor and allow them to take risks that they might not usually attempt.

In the last part of the seminar, Nathan presented some thoughts about crisis management. He began by pointing out that the best way to manage a crisis is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Also, after activities prescribed by the Bible such as praying together, loving each other, and forgiving each other, he said the best preventative measure is good communication between parties. It is important to decide before a crisis the best avenues for communication (e.g., SMS, email, telephone, meeting directly, or going through a third party).

In summing up, Nathan said “I believe that the more we serve each other, the more we can serve the flock well together. If not, the sheep will soon find out.” He encouraged missionaries and Japanese leaders to pray for each other, encourage each other, and strengthen each other. He also pondered the mystery of how God uses imperfect people to accomplish his perfect plans.

Nathan closed by expressing JEMA's desire to serve both missionaries and local Japanese churches.

\*A PDF of Nathan's notes is available at <https://jema.org/seminar>

## FCA Japan celebrates 10th anniversary

To celebrate its 10th anniversary, FCA Japan, the Japan chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, hosted FCA Vision Night 2023 (“Vision Night”) on March 30, 2023 in Ginza, Tokyo.

FCA was founded in the US in 1954 as an organization to bring the gospel to (and provide discipleship for) athletes and their coaches. FCA has grown today to be an international ministry engaged in work in 114 countries.

In 2012, when FCA was expanding its sphere of activities to athletes and coaches residing outside of the US, Will Thompson was sent to launch FCA Japan. In addition to baseball clinics with professional players, support activities for the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan, and organizing seminars and camps, FCA Japan has published the Japanese version of Sports Bible, a collection of testimonies by professional Christian athletes. Huddles (small groups for coaches and athletes) are also held regularly in Tokyo.

During Vision Night, Megumi Akiyama of Arise and Shine Gospel Dance Company, and Kentaro Shigeta, a professional boxer, shared their testimonies about how FCA Japan has been impacting their respective careers. Matt Murton, former baseball player with the Hanshin Tigers, provided a video greeting in which he expressed thanks for his connections with FCA both in the US and Japan.

Dan Britton, Chief Field Officer of FCA, greeted the assembly in person. He looked back over the past 10 years in Japan, during which time God has done wonderful things and provided two Japanese staff members.



*Asking for the Lord's blessing on Ōba, the new Board Chair*

Motoki Ōba was introduced as the new Board Chair of FCA Japan. He cast vision for the future, including discipleship for sports instructors, encouraging Christians through huddles so they can be effective

witnesses, and revising the Sports Bible while looking toward 2024. The event was concluded with a prayer for Ōba as the international leaders of FCA laid hands on him.

*Christian Shimbun, April 16, 2023*  
Translated by Atsuko Tateishi

## Face-to-face GRC hosted for the first time in five years



*GRC23 attendees Photo by GRC*

From May 3 to 6, The Global Returnees Conference (GRC), held in hopes of connecting returnee Christians with Japanese churches and encouraging the advancement of evangelism, was held face-to-face for the first time in five years. The 240 attendees were filled with joy as they gathered to glorify the Lord at Hotel Evergreen Fuji in Fujiyoshida City, Yamanashi Prefecture. GRC23's theme was “Celebrate—an invitation from God.” The theme passage was John 2:1–11, with the central focus based on verse 9, “. . . though the servants who had drawn the water knew.” (NIV)

The guest speakers were Tetsuo Benjamin Kagiwada from Asahi Christ Church, Nobuyuki Toyoda from New Life Christ Church, and Takeharu Yamaguchi from New Hope Yokohama. Powerful sermons filled with love and challenge were delivered each day. The attendees were made aware of how they have the privilege to celebrate as God's children through Christ. Testimonies and mission reports were also shared throughout the conference. Various workshops and small group activities encouraged attendees to further mature in their faith. Coming to know Christ is not the end of the story for returnees; many take part in various ministries, some even outside of Japan.

Planning for GRC23 had been tough, with the pandemic situation changing constantly. In John 2, the servants were given orders to bring more wine, and they continued to fill the jars with water just because Jesus told them to do so. Some of the servants may have questioned the reason behind their actions. Some returnee Christians may be in a similar situation, questioning why they have returned to Japan or the reason for what is happening around them. But just like “the servants who had drawn the water knew” after being faithful to what they were told to do, conference attendees, in a way that surpassed their expectations, experienced God’s working and his answer to their desire to celebrate.

*Christian Shimbun* May 24, 2023  
(Original report by Shiori Kisangala,  
GRC23 Committee Leader)

Translated and summarized by Hiromi Terukina



*Professor Okinaga*

### A biblical approach to dealing with fear

On May 13, 2023, Missions Connex in partnership with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) hosted the Suicide Awareness & Prevention Workshop online. Participants in the workshop received free suicide awareness and prevention training with Professor Jonathan Okinaga and Professor Cheryl Bell of SWBTS.

Some practical advice was provided by Professor Okinaga for those who are suffering from fear:

- Refrain from caffeine and drink plenty of water.
- Sleep well.
- When consumed by fear, write down when it started and why.
- Before going to sleep, read one or two online sermons.

- Read Ephesians 6 daily and put on the full armor of God.
- Exercise daily—go for walks, do workouts, etc.
- Eat a healthy diet—low blood sugar can cause anxiety.
- Remember, you are not alone. Someday you can help another person who is also overcome by fear.
- Understand that life isn’t always perfect. It’s normal to experience troubles in life.

The most frequent command in the Bible is “do not fear.” When helping someone overcome fear, use biblical truths. God’s Word is necessary in understanding that fear is a spiritual problem.

Professor Okinaga also gave some practical tips for those helping people who are suicidal. Ask the person suffering from fear whether or not they have felt suicidal. It’s important to ask direct questions rather than be vague or indirect. Since this is a life-or-death matter, we must be courageous with our words and actions.

Does the person have a specific plan for how they will end their life? If they do, it means they are serious about committing the act and therefore we must initiate emergency measures. With your active behavior, the person will be able to feel your sincere love and care for them. It may help in diverting them from taking action.

In urgent cases, the following points are important.

- The suicidal person must not be left alone until all emergency measures have been taken.
- Make the person promise to call you (or someone else) if they feel like putting their plan into action.
- Meet with the person daily until their desire to take their life subsides.

For suicidal people, Jesus is the most important person. When we share with them how Jesus changed our lives, we can help them be freed from bondage

*Christian Shimbun*, October 16, 2022  
Translated by Tomoko Kato

## Please pray for Japan

1. The seventh Japan Congress on Evangelism in Tokai ended with great success. Thank you for your prayer. Keep praying that all the generations in the Japanese church will work together to proclaim the gospel all over Japan.
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, and so on.
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>
Oct. 23-26	AEA 40th Anniversary Conference	Indonesia
Nov. 3	EMNJ Bless Japan Conference	Tokyo
Dec. 1	JEA Religious Liberty Seminar	Online
Dec. 11	JEA Board Meeting	Tokyo
Jan. 20	JEA/AEA D6 One-day Seminar	Tokyo

The seventh Japan Congress on Evangelism (JCE7), held at Nagaragawa Convention Center in Gifu, ended on September 22. About 1,250 Christians, including senior and young church leaders, and lay people gathered together to think over and discuss evangelism in Japan. I have been privileged to be part of the JCE7 steering committee.

One of the important topics of JCE7 is working with foreign missionaries, which is exactly what we focus on in this issue. Of course, it has not been and is not easy for both missionaries and Japanese churches to work together because of language and cultural differences. In fact, we have been facing many challenges. It is certain that many foreign missionaries brought rich blessings to Japanese churches. In this issue we would like to listen to both voices and use this as a new opportunity to work together more and more.

Takahito Iwagami, Editor in Chief

<https://jeanet.org/>

# Japan Update

Autumn 2023 - Number 85

English Newsletter of the  
Japan Evangelical Association (JEA)

Chairman : Isao Mizuguchi  
General Secretary : Takahito Iwagami

Japan Update is published biannually by the JEA. Through Japan Update, the JEA seeks to communicate how God is at work in Japan and to foster prayer and collaborative work for the advancement of God's kingdom in Japan. Views expressed by individual authors do not necessarily reflect official JEA positions. Japanese names appear in Western order (surname last).

Permission to reprint is granted, but please give credit and send one copy of any publication containing reprinted material to the editor.

### Japan Update Staff

Editor in Chief	Takahito Iwagami
Asst. Editor	Atsuko Tateishi
Translation Editor	Gary Bauman
Translation Staff	Tomoko Kato Grace Koshino Hiromi Terukina

### Editorial Office:

c/o JEA, OCC Building 501  
2-1 Kanda Surugadai  
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101-0062, Japan

telephone 03-3295-1765

fax 03-3295-1933

email [admin@jeanet.org](mailto:admin@jeanet.org)

website <https://jeanet.org/>

### Subscription:

If you desire to subscribe to Japan Update in digital format (PDF), please send the request by email to [admin@jeanet.org](mailto:admin@jeanet.org).

