

Japan Update

Autumn 2024 Number 87



Noriko Hamaoka (see page 5) leading a music team at Bible camp

Reaching the teens of Japan Embodying the gospel



**Fumika
Mizunashi**

*Kanto Supervisor,
hi-b.a.*

In the opening of the Gospel of John, we learn that the Word became flesh. Those who come directly into contact with the Word become believers. The Word is Jesus Christ who became flesh—someone who can be touched, can be spoken to, and can be seen. Teenagers tend to understand through touch or experience rather than words. So when sharing the gospel with teenagers, rather than presenting a detailed explanation of the Scriptures, the gospel needs to be presented to them through other believers, the church, and family members, who are the embodiment of Christ.

However, the reality in schools across Japan is that there might be one Christian student in a class, if any. There is little chance for a teenager to meet a

Christian teacher. In these circumstances, how can a teenager in Japan have the opportunity to believe in the gospel?

Hi-b.a. is an evangelical organization that aims to evangelize high-schoolers through high-schoolers. We equip high-schoolers and send them out as Christian witnesses into their schools. We teach them how to share their testimony, and we provide them with opportunities to hold outreach events and camps. It's not always straightforward. This is because Christian high-schoolers are at an age where they go through various struggles and can waver. Even if they feel like sharing the gospel with their friends, they worry about what their friends will think of them. "What if they think I'm strange? What if they dislike me?"

This is especially true in Japan, where if you do something that is considered unconventional, you are looked down upon rather than respected. So this is a big challenge for Japanese teenagers, as it can cause isolation in schools. It would be ideal if the teenager could share their struggles with someone at their church, but in many churches, they are the only

(continued on page 3)

<http://jeanet.org/>

Inside

Reaching the teens of Japan	1
How Crossroad Nishinomiya retained its teens	2
Hints for following up middle and high school students	4
The unchanging truth	5
News and Notes	6&7
Prayer/Editorial	8

How Crossroad Nishinomiya retained its teens

Fumikazu & Michiko Chito, Crossroad Nishinomiya



Fumikazu Chito

When you go to Crossroad Nishinomiya for the first time, you notice two things. One is the joyous time of singing led by worship leaders ranging from their teens to their late 50s.

The other is the exit of a large number of kids and teens after the announcements. Many of the worship leaders and kids' leaders were themselves kids and teens who have grown up in the church.

At a time when many Japanese churches are struggling with very few children, Crossroad shows that it is possible to keep teenagers coming to church and to help their faith grow into a vibrant relationship with the Lord Jesus. That in turn leads to the formation of young leaders.

Pastor Fumikazu Chito (Fumi) and his wife Michiko Chito (Miko) led a team to plant Crossroad almost 20 years ago. They emphasize that they are not especially focused on ministering to teenagers over other age groups. Rather, they have sought to minister in such a way that church is a place where kids of all ages feel welcome and loved.

“We want to disciple them from when they are babies,” says Miko, as she’s known by everyone at church. “We want to help them become someone who is dedicated to Jesus Christ.”

“We’re not doing anything special” with the teens, Fumi adds. Yet, he estimates that about 70 percent of

the kids at Crossroad continue coming as teenagers.

When Crossroad started in 2004, Miko herself had no experience of being a child or teen at church. She knew she wanted her own kids to hear the gospel from a young age, so she looked around at those who had grown up in Japanese churches, and also at some American churches to see if there might be a model for children’s ministry.

What she saw of younger Christians who had gone through other Japanese church schools didn’t reassure her. It seemed to Miko that many Japanese churches were seeking to shape kids by teaching them the behavior that was expected at church.

“The kids come to church and are given a Christian uniform to wear,” she said. “They can take it off when they reach junior high.”

That is exactly what happens at many churches. Kids reach upper primary school or junior high school and get new commitments, like after-school sports and tutoring, and then stop coming to church.

As for overseas examples, Miko went to see what they did in churches in the US, but very quickly realized they had access to resources, church spaces, and camp sites that simply aren’t available in Japan.

As they sought to build a children’s ministry at Crossroad, just teaching kids a whole lot of Bible stories and how a Christian was expected to behave seemed like legalism to Fumi and Miko. Rather, they wanted the children in the church to come to love the Lord Jesus and willingly follow his ways. Miko did this by putting a lot of effort into making church a fun place that was safe, particularly from being judged.

Fumi adds that it has been important to teach the adults of the church the importance of ministering to the kids and teens.

This is in contrast to many churches where the children’s ministry is not a priority and is left to those who may not be that willing or equipped to do it.

Miko acknowledges that children’s ministry is hard. It has required both Fumi and Miko to cast a vision for how they want the kids at Crossroad to grow and for Miko to be completely focused on it.

(continued on page 3)

How Crossroad Nishinomiya retained its teens (continued from page 2)



Michiko teaching (Kids' faces blurred)

“Someone needed to be focused on it all the way through,” she said.

Miko says that it’s important to meet the kids where they are, knowing their lives as they are and what they are interested in now. Miko has worked on making the language easy to understand and making sure that kids don’t feel judged or stupid because they don’t know something.

“If someone says, ‘I don’t know’, then I say, ‘yes, that’s something I don’t really know either. I wonder what it means,’” Miko said.

That’s not to say they don’t want the kids to learn things, or that the kids can do anything they want. Miko describes how she responded to one of the kids who had bad language at church. She didn’t compromise on the behavior, but gently spoke to him in a way that showed she cared for him as she talked about how he should speak.

Fumi and Miko wonder whether a possible way for Christians in places like the US and Australia to support children’s ministry in Japan would be to partner with individual churches financially. That could help fund the kids’ ministry or sponsor part of the minister’s salary so they can focus on church ministry, including that for the kids and teens.

Either way, Fumi and Miko will continue to prioritize ministry to kids and young people.

“We need to invest in the next generation,” Miko said.

Interviewed by David McIntyre

Reaching the teens of Japan (continued from page 1)

teenager, which also causes isolation. They are unable to share what is on their heart with anyone. I call this “The two isolations of faith.” At school, they feel isolated as a Christian, and at church, they feel isolated as a teenager.

What’s crucial when evangelizing Japanese teenagers is to protect Christian teenagers from isolation and to support them. It is essential to have churches that embody the Word, and at times, for teenage Christians to have fellowship with other Christians of similar age in other churches and denominations. In addition, we need believers that will walk alongside them, encourage them, and support them. Just as the Holy Spirit is

right by our side, teenagers are seeking adults that will stand by their side.

Sharing the gospel in a visible way seems less common these days, but if we can embody the gospel as we reflect the glory of God, I believe it will reach Christian teenagers and then spread to teenagers who have not yet heard the gospel.

Translated by Grace Koshino

Hints for following up with middle and high school students who are engaged in sports

Motoki Ōba, *Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) Japan*



Motoki Ōba

When I introduce myself at church as someone involved in sports ministry, people always ask me about “bukatsu to shinko”—club activities and faith. Once young people join sports clubs, they cannot attend worship services and they stop coming to church gatherings.

This means not only a decrease in the number of youth at church, but a reduction in the vibrancy of the entire youth program because there are fewer energetic young people. Many churches seem to struggle with this problem. I am now going to focus on this issue and introduce some hints and ideas which churches can use to follow up on their middle and high school students who are engaged in sports.

They find their joy in sports, and 1 Thessalonians 5:16 says “Rejoice always.” For teenagers who love sports, experiencing the joy of moving their bodies is one aspect of growing up through which they can experience God’s blessings. First children play alone and joyfully develop their imaginations. When they grow older, they make rules to create games, play together with their friends, and widen their possibilities. Sports are systematized games. Sports additionally include the aspects of competition and winners and losers. These are the result of changes in mindset during the process of growing up, as well as the expansion of their imaginations. In this sense, feeling joy through physical movement provides opportunity to touch the greatness of God. Therefore, we should avoid making negative comments about sports, which is one source of their joy.

One of the reasons teens do not come to church after starting sports is relationships. If they have not deeply experienced God, their relationship with God might be weak. Then they will tend to stay with their friends with whom they have stronger relationships. We are, for good and bad, easily influenced by other people. If in our daily life or in church we fail to share our joys with our teenagers and only relate to them through Sunday school, their experience of God will be limited. If that’s the case, developing a

relationship with them will be very difficult. So, it is important to understand their interests. Let’s start just by getting close to their interests and sharing in their joys. Sometimes their joys may seem immature and confined to sports. However, like the growing up process I mentioned earlier, sharing simple joys with them could eventually develop into sharing the wonderful grace of God. Let’s start with understanding and sharing in their joys.

Now I will introduce the main activities we have been involved in to support them. I would be delighted if you can find something you can use to follow up with your young students.

Spend time with them

As I mentioned at the beginning, when students start involvement in sports they are hindered from coming to Sunday services. In that case, we try to provide individual learning times or prayer times to keep them from taking their eyes off of God and offer mental counseling as a part of support for their athletic activities. But the most important thing is to go to their competitions and practices to understand their current situation, and to try to consciously be with them all the time.

As we are with them, we build trusting relationships and teach them the importance of faith. At the same time we work with them to improve their competition skills. This approach is not yet widely recognized in Japan.



Ōba instructing students

Organize sports camps

At FCA, we provide spiritual support for Christian coaches and work with professionals like them to organize sports camps. In these camps, participants are not only serious about sports, they also learn about God in small groups (huddles) and study sessions focused on specific themes. These camps are either directly sponsored by FCA, or held in cooperation with churches or mission organizations who work with FCA. So far we have had camps for soccer, cheerleading, baseball, Frisbee, and we are planning to have a multi-sports camp this summer. One-day

(continued on page 7)

The unchanging truth

Noriko Hamaoka, *Ōmi Evangelical Free Church*



Hamaoka (right side of the tree)
with youth group

Almost without knowing it, I have been ministering to junior and senior high school students for 46 years. Times have certainly changed. In the past, school students used to come to church every day, say “I’m home” and spend time together as if it were their own house. They were fired up for evangelism because of the joy of being saved. Then came the age of

second-generation Christians, students who had a less defined faith, went to church with their parents, and hung around because they thought it was fun. Now, I think there are those who have a firm faith as they think through their doubts, and there are those who have their own clear ideas and so leave the church. Both show that there are more and more young people who are resisting pressure from above and saying what they think.

One thing that has not changed in these changeable times is what people think. “I want to be loved. I am lonely. What is the purpose of life? I need to face God someday.” Another important thing that has not changed is that “the Word” (Jesus Christ) is the one who saves, heals, and transforms them!

One time many years ago, a high school student asked me, “Why do people die?” I was worried about what to say, but as soon as I said, “The Bible says the wages of sin is death,” he replied, “Oh, I get it...” I said, “What? Is that all you need to know?” He said, “Yes! I understand.” That was a time when I witnessed the power of the Word of God.

The following is a recent story having to do with a pair of sisters. I was doing baptism preparation with the older sister. I said, “Try reading John 10:27–29 with your name in the place where it says ‘they’.” When she had finished reading it that way, her sister, who was lying next to her and listening but had no intention of being baptized, got up with a start and said, “I get it! I want to be baptized too!” That was the

moment when the Word of God changed her.

At a Bible camp, we conducted a survey on love and marriage among high school students. The results showed that 85% wanted to get married, 35% did not want to have a wedding (just present the marriage certificate), and 42% did not care if their partner was a Christian or not. I also had a chance to talk to a high school student who had a boyfriend, and when I told her that she shouldn’t have physical relations before marriage, she said, “Really? No one told me that. I’ll tell him when I get back (from the camp) and we’ll stop!” This experience really reminded me that I have to keep sharing God’s word again and again! But, no matter how loudly we speak out, temptation still comes, and many people end up in serious trouble because of physical relationships they have before marriage.

We people fail, not only in relation to sex, but in all things. And when we fail, despair and guilt make us miserable. But it is at such times that we should look up to the Lord and repent. If we are able to triumph over those things, it is precisely at those times that we must be careful not to be arrogant or judge others.

When we try to look like “successful Christians,” “blessed churches,” and “happy families,” we then fall into the reality that we are not, and we are disappointed that we are failures and not good enough. But remember the characters in the Bible. They fail, they doubt, and they cry out, “Why, Lord?” The important thing when we ask why, is whether we will be one of those who say “There is no God” (Psalm 10:4) or one of those who keep looking up to God as we declare, “You have been watching. You were watching all the time.” (Psalm 10:14).

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2–4) I myself have been shown the way out of difficult situations, comforted, taught, and guided by the Word of God many times. Only Jesus can save people! This is the unchanging truth for all time and for everyone.

Translated by David McIntyre

Christian Today court decision

The court decision for the lawsuit filed by Takahiro Yada, CEO of Christian Today Co., Ltd., was announced on April 22. The plaintiff had sued Shōichi Konda, *Christian Shimbun* editorial advisor, for “unlawful acts that defame

d [Yada’s] character” and demanded 1,100,000 yen along with interest as compensation. Tokyo District Court ordered the defendant to pay 500,000 yen along with interest but dismissed the rest.

In 2019, Konda shared on his personal Facebook page and Twitter account five articles that had been published on a blog site for an organization set up to oppose Pastor David Jang and the community of his followers. Yada claimed this had defamed his character.

The original blog had numerous posts about the community of people who claim David Jang is “Christ come again.” This community included Christian Today. The plaintiff (Yada) had filed a defamation lawsuit against the blog author in 2021. At that time, to settle the suit in mediation, the blog author wrote an apology about the content of the blog and the expressions he used.

However, in the current case it was recognized that the blog author had been emotionally exhausted and sought a quick mediation. The content of the blog was also compared with witness statements from former followers of David Jang. The court concluded that the presence of an apology does not deny the truthfulness of the blog as a whole.

Yada presented ten details from the five articles as defaming. Five of them related to Christian Today’s employment situation, which the court upheld as defaming because it did not reflect the reality of the organization at the time the blog was published, only the situation well before the date of the blog. However, even as the court upheld the plaintiff’s claim, it also upheld the truthfulness of the blog in relation to the company’s negligence concerning the Labor Relations Act during the years 2003 through 2007 and how it relied on Jang’s followers’ contributions and voluntary service.

The court dismissed the other five claims of the plaintiff by admitting the truth of illegal entry into Japan by the Jang Community’s missionaries in 2007, and that Community members, including the plaintiff, hid their beliefs and attended Yodobashi Church in order to gain the trust of Pastor Tatsuhiro Mineno.

Christian Shimbun Online, April 24, 2024

Translated and summarized by Hiromi Terukina

Towards the restoration of Japan-Korea evangelical missionary cooperation



On April 10–12, 2024, the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA) visited the Korean Evangelical Fellowship (KEF) for the first official Japan–Korea visit between national evangelical organizations in 10 years. The delegation consisted of Isao Mizuguchi, Board of Directors Chair (Tokyo Free Methodist Church), Toshinori Ishida, former Board of Directors Chair (Zion Christ Church), Yoshimi Inoue, former Board of Directors member (Jesus Christ Church in Japan), and Takahito Iwagami, General Secretary (Immanuel General Mission). Pastor Cho Yongsang, JEA International Affairs (Ishinomaki Oasis Church), and his wife accompanied them as interpreters.

This official visit was prompted by a meeting between JEA and KEF at the 7th Japan Congress on Evangelism (JCE7). JEA had invited the General Secretary of the World Evangelical Association (WEA) and four leaders from KEF to the conference where they were welcomed and had a time of fellowship.

Subsequently, KEF extended an invitation to JEA leaders to visit Korea, leading to this official visit. It should be noted that KEF is not a coalition of denominations or churches, but a fellowship of evangelical pastors representing Korea in the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA).

JEA exchanged a memorandum of mission cooperation with the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) in 2009 and used to have a friendly relationship with the CCK. Due to concerns about the David Jang group [see Christian Today Court Decision on this page], the CCK split and the CCIK (the Communion of Churches in Korea) formed, making it difficult to distinguish heretical cult groups. Consequently, JEA decided to terminate the relationship with CCK in 2013. Although some Japanese denominations and churches still had good relations with Korean churches in Japan, JEA judged it difficult to interact with Korean evangelicals and put the relationship on hold. For more than ten years, JEA had no exchanges with Korea. However,

JCE7 provided the opportunity to interact with KEF leaders who were linked through AEA.

During this visit, the focus was on getting to know KEF leaders personally and understanding them more deeply as the two groups shared meals, coffee, and times of prayer. They also talked about the present state of evangelism in Japan and Korea.

On April 12, a KEF morning prayer meeting was held in Seoul, and more than 100 pastors gathered. Current JEA Chair Isao Mizuguchi delivered the message and former Chair Toshinori Ishida spoke on Future Japan–Korea Cooperation. JEA and KEF said they would establish a good foundation for mission cooperation between Japan and Korea, and the importance of sharing information about cult groups in Korea was reaffirmed. KEF also requested prayer and cooperation in a statement regarding the release of a Korean pastor detained in North Korea.

Christian Shimbun, May 26, 2024

Translated and summarized by Tomoko Kato

The poet and artist of flowers: the passing of Tomohiro Hoshino



Photo by Kei Kobayashi

On April 28, 2024, poet and artist Tomohiro Hoshino passed away because of heart failure at Keiaidō Hospital in Gunma Prefecture. He was 78 years old.

Hoshino was born in Azuma village in Gunma Prefecture in 1946. He graduated from the Department of Health and Physical Education of the Faculty of Education at Gunma University in 1970. As a junior high school teacher, he damaged his cervical spinal cord during school club activities and was left paralyzed from the

neck down. While he was hospitalized, around 1972 he started painting and writing with a brush held in his mouth. In 1974, he was baptized.

His first art exhibition was held in Maebashi City in 1979, and he was discharged from the hospital that same year. In 1981 he got married, and around this time his artwork and poems started being featured in magazines and newspapers.

Hoshino's "Poetry and Art of Flowers Exhibition" was first held in 1982 in Takasaki City, and has since been held nationwide, touching the hearts of many. Exhibitions were also held globally in locations such as New York, Honolulu, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Warsaw. In 1991, the Tomihiro Art Museum opened its doors in his hometown of Azuma.

Hoshino became an honorary citizen of Gunma Prefecture in 2006, and in 2011 he received Gunma University's very first Special Honor Award. In 2021, which marked the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Tomihiro Art Museum, the museum reached a total of 7 million visitors.

In 2018, he was awarded the 24th Distinguished Service Award for the Evangelism of Japan (Nihon Fukuin Shinkōkai). Hoshino shared his thoughts on receiving the award. "I had felt that there was nothing left I could do, but God gave me the most wonderful gift. He also provided me with friends who pray for me and enable me to do these things. If people can feel God even a little through my artwork, there is no greater joy than that."

His writings include *Love, From the Depths* (Gakken Plus), *The Unlimited Kindness of Flowers*, *Road of The Tinkling Bell* (Kaisei-Sha), *Silvery Trace (A Conversation with Ayako Miura)*, *Because We Only Have One Life (A Conversation with Shigeaki Hinohara)*, *The Thing More Precious Than Life*, and *From That Time the Sky Changed* (Word of Life Press Ministries).

His funeral took place at a church in Maebashi on May 3, 2024.

Christian Shimbun, May 3, 2024

Translated and summarized by Grace Koshino

Hints for following up with middle and high school students (continued from page 4)

camps have been held occasionally at "regional hub" churches.

Meet with small groups of athletes

Meetings of small groups of athletes, where they gather, pray, and encourage each other, are held regularly. At the moment, they are held once or twice a month and are only for university students or working young people in Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka.

During these meetings, we focus on coaching and discipleship training. So far, no small groups have been started for junior and high school students, but we are considering gatherings for young student-athletes in cooperation with youth evangelism groups.

For more information about sports ministry or to discuss ministry opportunities, please address inquiries to fcajapan.sport@gmail.com (Ōba).

Please pray for Japan

1. Pray for young Christians, especially for Christian teenagers and pray that God will raise up the next generation of Christ-centered, gospel-driven leaders among young Christians in Japan. Pray for layleaders and pastors who serve young Christians as they encourage teenagers to be faithful to Christ.
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.
4. Pray for the JEA Board members and JEA administration office so that they continue to serve the Lord and Japanese evangelical churches.

JEA related schedule

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>PLACE</u>
Sep. 22-29	The Fourth Lausanne Congress	Incheon/Seoul
Oct. 14-15	Mission Forum Mie 2024	Yokkaichi
Oct. 29-31	JEA Youth Leaders' Conferenc	Kakegawa
Nov. 4	Bless Japan Conference	Tokyo
Nov. 12	JEA Women's Katariba	Online

I would like to thank God for Mr. David McIntyre and welcome him as he joined the Japan Update editorial team as the new assistant editor. He is a missionary to Japan who was born in Japan and is fluent both in English and Japanese. This is his first time editing our newsletter. He did a great job, as you all will see when you read this issue.



I also express my deep gratitude to Ms. Atsuko Tateishi, the former assistant editor. She has been faithfully serving Japan Update over 20 years. Japan Update owes her very much. It is sad for us to release her from our editorial team. I believe it is God's timing. Words cannot express our deep gratitude to her.

Takahito Iwagami, Editor in Chief

<http://jeanet.org/>

Japan Update

Autumn 2024 - Number 87

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 : David McIntyre
Translation Editor : Gary Bauman
Translation Staff : Tomoko Kato
Grace Koshino
Hiromi Terukina

Editorial Office:

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

telephone 03-3295-1765

fax 03-3295-1933

email 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.

