

日本

Hikari! from Kevin & Kaori

Hikari means "light"

Church Planting with the Lavermans in Japan

Light up the Darkness! September 2011 Japan Partner Newsletter



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The cross still stands! The three of us at the site of a church washed away by the 311 tsunami.

Cross in the tragedy

"Standing on the swaying ground, still the cross is brightly shining!"

(1923 hymn after 143,000 die in Tokyo quake)

Six months after the triple tragedy, the ground still shakes in Tokyo, calling us back to prayer with its 5 and 6-magnitude aftershocks. As devastating to the spirit of Japan as the 311 quake, tsunami and nuclear crisis was and is, seven times the amount of life was lost in the 1923 Great Tokyo Quake. Afterwards, a missionary penned a Japanese hymn that restored hope to believers. The chorus above captures the essence of the Christian's hope in times of great despair: the love and power displayed on the cross show that God is at work still.

Recently, a Japanese pastor complimented me on the "spirit of bravery" missionaries exhibited after 311: "While most foreigners fled south or left Japan," he said, "missionaries grabbed shovels and supplies and headed north." That may have been the case, but I assured him that it was not out of bravery. Our knees were shaking more than the ground! It was a simple desire to be with and help those hurting people we have served; to bring the cross and love of Christ into a wounded area.

The 311 Network

As for me, I am proud of our church plant, Denen Grace Chapel. In late July, six of us drove up from Kawasaki to northern Taro, a 12-hour trip. There is no church here, nor any church in most of these fishing towns along the coast. But a church in Morioka, 70 miles inland, has established the "311 Network" to coordinate

Christian relief and help share the hope of the cross in devastated coastal areas.

The suicide rate there has escalated dramatically post 311. So our focus was heart care: talking with residents, delivering food items, offering to pray, doing light cleaning, asking about their needs, and



Our church volunteer team at the Morioka church before leaving for Taro.

playing with children. Kevin even did some kids English (which may or may not have been relief to them). The tsunami survivors were amazingly open, breaking cultural norms to open their home, welcome us in, chat and receive the food items we brought. Many were near tears and struggling with survivor's guilt. Hundreds of their friends (*see back*)

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Prayer Focus:

The soul of Japan has been flung open with the 311 tragedies, allowing great opportunity for the gospel to be shared. Please pray that God would use us in the days ahead to comfort, heal and bear witness for Him. Pray for new churches in the stricken north. Pray that many Japanese will receive the gospel with joy.

Thru-the-Week Prayer:

Monday: Returnee Ministry

Pray for Pastor Kondo's and Kevin's leadership of "Returnees in Kanagawa," born out of a burden to see brand new Japanese Christians returning from overseas fully connect with a local church.

Tuesday: Pastor Transition

A church plant's transition from missionary leadership to national pastor leadership is always difficult. Pray for Denen Grace Chapel to continue to adjust and flourish under Pastor Kondo's new leadership. Pray for our good cooperation and teamwork with them.

Wednesday: Stronger Dollar

The dollar has fallen 33% against the yen since 2008. This is a great challenge to us and many other missionaries. Pray that God would continue to raise up a support network to stand in the gap.

Thursday: Salvation Decisions

We have several new non-Christians attending Denen Grace Chapel these days. Please pray they will respond to Christ. Pray for baptism of three others.

Friday: Physical/Emotional Health

Post-311 Japan can be a stressful place. Pray for physical (particularly Kaori with hepatitis B) and emotional wellbeing.



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"The [Japanese] people walking in DARKNESS have seen a great LIGHT." Isaiah 9:2

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Other Relief Work in Stricken Tohoku

As large as the tsunami wave was, the post-tsunami wave of relief work is even larger. Christian relief organizations, churches, missions and Tohoku Christians have come together in historic ways. Here's a few more recent bits we've helped with:

■ ■ "Noodle" Relief

Anyone from Japan will tell you the favorite food here is not rice or sushi, but noodles. Our church ladies purchased a vanload which we took with to Taro. Chilled wheat noodles are a sort of comfort food in the hot summer. These were distributed with fruits and vegetables.



(from front) and neighbors were washed away. They only survived because their homes were built slightly higher up.

The "Jesus People" of Japan

After six months of Christian relief activity, there are early signs of God's work in Taro's healing. There has been no high-pressure evangelism, just steady care and intentional serving of local residents. Many are taking interest in the motivation for these volunteers. Some eagerly take Bibles and Christian literature put out at a outdoor cafe a volunteer team has set up.

The 311 Network has a blog of activity in English at: www.311.ichurch.jp

Others have begun calling these Christian volunteers "Kirisutosha" or "the Jesus people," a term of admiration that echoes what Antioch called early believers they couldn't make sense of. The cross is shining brightly even in churchless Taro!

The harvest is ripe, but the workers are few. Would you pray for more volunteers for the many towns like Taro? ■

■ ■ "Play Ball" Once Again



Together with other Japan missionaries, Kevin delivered donated baseball gear to Onagawa little league teams that lost most of their

equipment in the tsunami waters. Later, a Christian major league player shared his testimony and helped coach two baseball camps sponsored by our mission.



■ ■ Concerts of Healing

Our church pastor, Izumi Kondo, a gifted pianist, has been busy using his music talent for the post-traumatic healing of Japan. In July, we put together a charity concert at which a significant amount of money was raised. In August, he performed at a well-deserved retreat for weary pastors from the tsunami area.



■ ■ School Backpack Project



It started with one backpack, and a great idea. Students up north needed items to return to school and normal life again, particularly

backpacks specially made to Japan school specs and quite expensive to replace. We spread the word through church members and PTAs for lightly-used backpacks. The response was overwhelming. We delivered two vanloads stuffed from floor to roof.

The Laverman Blog Spot Two Trees of Hope

posted on June 25, 2011

www.lavernansinjapan.blogspot.com



Even as life in the Tokyo area returns to a new kind of "normal," the challenges and sorrows continue in northern Miyagi and Iwate. Traveling through the area, it's easy to be so overwhelmed by the destruction and sadness of the area and miss the symbols of hope...

A solitary pine tree remains standing on a destroyed beachfront. It alone withstood the tsunami that obliterated everything around it. The tree has been at the center of an intense rescue effort to preserve its life. Saltwater poisoning in the soil threatens to do it in, and so team of specialists dig around the tree, replace soil, and monitor its health. DNA is extracted to replant the area with bits of this symbol of hope.

Not far away another tree stands. A cross rises up above the site of a destroyed church building. Although once a symbol of death, the cross is a great symbol of life. No effort needs to be made to preserve the cross. Rather the cross offers to preserve the lives of all around from sin that has poisoned the "soil" of this world, and threatens to do us all in. The vision and prayer of Christians from this church is to replant the area with the love of Christ, the DNA of the cross. A sign nearby proclaims: "We believe in the revival of this land! Special hope is found here." Hope for an uncertain future is certainly secured by our Savior's resurrection. As Scripture says: **"He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 1:3**

