日本

Hikari! from Kevin & Kaori

Hikari means "light"

Church Planting with the Lavermans in Japan

Light up the Darkness! December 2011 Japan Partner Newsletter

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What does this group have in common? Time overseas. The "Returnees in Kanagawa" group at their second meeting.

Welcomed back?

Question: Where do most Japanese become Christians?
Answer: Anywhere but Japan.

Hitomi and her family live overseas. Away from her Japanese culture and its entanglements, Hitomi begins to consider the Christian faith of her host culture. She finds friendship and meaning in attending a local church. Over time Christ draws Hitomi to faith in himself.

A half million Japanese like Hitomi live abroad. Thousands become believers each year. The difficulty comes when they return home. "Returnees" find it difficult to blend back into church life in Japan. Their experiences are not completely understood. Reverse culture shock, and renewed family and work pressures overwhelm their new faith. Many fade away from church altogether. What a great loss to God's Kingdom in Japan!

To help reverse the above trend, we've launched *RIK (Returnees in Kanagawa)*. RIK is a group of Christian returnees whose desire it is to welcome back and strengthen returnees of all ages, and help them connect with a local church in our Kanagawa area. We and our church plant here are particularly burdened for this ministry because of the large number of returnees that compose our church core.

RIK just had its second event for returnees. Singing, message and small groups were a great blessing to the 40 returnees in attendance. We plan more such gatherings, in addition to casual recreational activities together. We're not completely sure where God will take this group of people, but we expect Him to work among us as we come together.

RIK small groups share and pray for each other's readjustment back home.

The church in Japan would be many times its 0.3% size if it were to hold the harvest that returns each year.

AND, we expect the need for RIK will grow. With the current record high yen will come the increasing globalization of Japan's workforce. The Japanese diaspora will grow, and so will the need for returnee ministry. Would you pray God's blessing on this new work? Involved with returnees? Friend RIK on Facebook!

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Prayer Focus:

Christmas in Japan is devoid of any religious association. It is a completely secular celebration. And yet yearend is a time when Japanese are particularly open spiritually. Pray for our church's outreach this Christmas season in Japan. Pray that many seekers would come to know the Christ of Christmas this year.

Thru-the-Week Prayer:

Monday: Pastor Transition
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.

Tuesday: Returnee Ministry
Pray that God would use RIK (see right) to encourage returnees, regardless of whether they have yet to make a decision for Christ, so that a great harvest will result and the church in Japan will grow strong.

Wednesday: Stronger Dollar
Pray that the dollar would recover a bit from its 30% fall against the yen since 2007. Pray that God would continue to raise up a support network to stand in the gap.

Thursday: Salvation Decisions
Pray that five seekers in the church will respond to Christ. Pray for the baptism preparation of three others.

Friday: Relief/Recovery Work
Pray for the 311 network with whom we have partnered in our survivor care work in Tohoku: www.311.ichurch.jp

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Bits and pieces of ministry

We've had a lot going on this fall for such a small church. In addition to our regular ministry, some of the fall highlights included:

Phil Waters Visit

Phil Waters of Mission Door visited in November. Returnees from Phil's former work in LA became the initial core of our church plant here. Phil led a team of volunteers for tsunami relief work in Morioka & Taro.

Clay Fall Retreat

Clay is one of several small groups in our church plant that we currently lead. Clay is made up of young professionals. Five joined us for a fall retreat out of the city and into God's creation near Mt. Fuji.

Kids Puppet Show Outreach

A team from Tokyo Christian University shared their puppetry talent with us in October. We gathered 20 kids, several of non-Christian parents. Kids and parents learned about Daniel, lions, and the one, true God of the Bible.

Fall Outdoor Service

The church service best attended by seekers (and dogs) is the one we do outside of church walls. In addition to a short service, we have a picnic lunch and time of games. Seekers say they'd like this every week.

Look What's Cooking

Our ladies small groups came together for a cooking class in November. This has always been a great way to reach unbelievers. This time they got to hear a Christian's testimony and also learned a new way to prepare chicken.

The Laverman Blog Spot

posted on December 5, 2011
www.lavermansinjapan.blogspot.com

The Humbled Tsunami

Nakano Elementary School after the tsunami

When the tsunami warning sirens went off, residents in a south Sendai neighborhood fled to the local school. Together with panicked children still in class they climbed to the rooftop. Some 600 altogether watched as the great tsunami of 311 surged ashore and crushed everything in its path, including a church several hundred feet away between themselves and the shoreline. The raging wave came to the very brink of the school roof, but rose no further. Aerial footage that day showed the group of traumatized survivors huddled together and completely surrounded by water. The tsunami had wiped out everything else.

The school roof had saved them. Or had it? Some residents had a different story: *"When the tsunami came near that church, it fell to the ground. That was how Nakano Elementary school was saved. If the tsunami had flooded in as it was, all 600 people would have been swept away."* The Seaside Bible Chapel took the worst of the blow, shielding the school just enough from the full force of the water. The school roof refugees were spared. A resident commented: *"God sacrificed His own temple to save the children."*

God sacrificing his own to save many. The story has a familiar gospel ring to it. Hasn't God done the same for us, his children? He's held back the full punishment headed our way and let it crush down instead upon His beloved Son. That's real salvation!

In front of Seaside Bible Chapel after the tsunami

What's more, He now humbles personal tsunamis in our lives daily. Most of the schooltop survivors probably overlooked a destroyed church as God's way of holding back the full force of the waters so it would not overcome them. How easy it is for us, though, to miss God's work. The storm obeys him. Waters are permitted only so far in our lives and no further: *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not flow over you." Isa 43:2*

The end? No, God still has good things for the seaside church. The cross was found among wreckage and placed atop a beam (photo above). There it speaks powerfully to the many people that pass by. In the last 8 months the church has seen more visitors coming to pray in that location than in all its years of existence. The church itself, the members, are meeting in a coffee house. The video clip here [see blog] tells a little about the effective outreach God has given them already. God has his "Easter Sunday" good purposes in every "Good Friday" disaster!

Merry Christmas!

"Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. " Isaiah 60:3

Thank you for partnering with us to reach Japanese for Christ in 2011!