

REACHING THE OTHER 99

church planting with you to reach the 99% in Japan

NOVEMBER 2012 NEWS

Kevin & Kaori Laverman CHURCH-PLANTING IN KAWASAKI, JAPAN



Fishing boats in Taro, Japan

www.lavermansinjapan.org



➔ No nets needed in north

“We don’t need nets to catch the “fish” anymore. The fish have come up on the land to us!” (Japanese pastor on the response in northern Japan)



With residents of temporary housing in Taro

There’s no doubt that seaside fishing towns like Taro, Yamada and Miyako in northern Japan have historically been the hardest to evangelize in a country that’s been dubbed the “missionary graveyard.” But there’s *also* no doubt that the 311 tragedy has changed all that. Church work has been reset with a brand new context. One church leader said, “Everything we hoped to accomplish in 50 years, has been happening overnight.” The greatest need right now is more workers, more “fishers of men” to pick up the fish lying on shore.

Last month I (Kevin) visited Miyako, Taro and Yamada again with a team from our church plant in Kawasaki. As in the past, our focus was on visitation in the temporary housing areas where hundreds of residents live in cramped apartments. There are over 60 temporary housing areas in the Miyako area alone (some 900 areas altogether). It’s impossible for the few Christian volunteers here to even begin to get around to them all. So it is of great help to have fresh workers coming and fresh ears willing to listen to the

residents who have lost family, homes, livelihood and, most tragically, real hope.

When we arrived, residents were still reeling over recent news from local officials that they should expect to stay put at least another five years. The return “home” for them is very uncertain. We volunteers did our best to provide comfort and encouragement by organizing “mobile cafés.” We’d set up a light meal and coffee or tea in a common room, then go door-to-door to chat and invite residents to come. We provided listening ears for their many sorrows, and sometimes a sing-along, craft, or game.



Singing with Taro residents in a mobile cafe, and accompanied by harp

Residents have taken notice that Christian volunteers continue to come this long after 311. They particularly enjoy singing together to accompaniment. We mix some well-known hymns and Japanese folk songs. The top request is always *Furusato* (My Home). Tears come easily for residents as the bittersweet song of places and memories concludes with a

➔ continued on back

We’d like to keep you updated!

But we need your email address! If you haven’t received an email update in 2012 (sent every 2 months), please register or update your email address here:

www.lavermansinjapan.org/signup

PRAY with us thru the week

SUN Pray that the baptism of a man in church this month would be a celebration for us, and encouragement for 5 others needing to make similar decisions. Pray that his non-Christian family will also attend.

MON Pray that Christmas events coming up would bring many visitors to our church who will hear the gospel. Pray that 7 seekers in the church will make a spiritual decision.

TUE Pray for Kevin’s stamina as he finishes all seminary studies by yearend. Pray that he would be able to manage time well and integrate his studies effectively in ministry here.

WED Pray for the 311 Network with whom we have partnered in our survivor care work in northern Japan. Website: www.311.church.jp

THUR Pray for faith in the financial challenges of our church plant as this year we fully underwrite the salary of our new Japanese pastor.

FRI Pray that young ladies in our church considering marriage will make God-centered choices. Pray for others struggling with emotional challenges in a high-pressure society.

➡ continued from front

tinge of hope: "Perhaps I will return home. Someday I will return home."

What a beautiful conversation starter for introducing the hope of eternity that Christians have! Our Savior is preparing a place safe from all destructive forces (no tsunami fears), and free of all sorrows and death that such destruction brings. It will be a place we can truly call home. This is the hope that Japanese need right now in northern Japan. Thank you for standing with us as we carry that message of hope to a people precious to our God. 📧

Pray for more Christian workers for northern Japan. Now is the time when Japan is ready to change in a big way for eternity, but a witness is needed!

Website Renewal

We've given our website a major overhaul. There's a lot of new things to help you feel connected with us. Please take a look and SHARE or LIKE us online. www.lavermansinjapan.org

➡ **Starting life anew at 85**



Mrs. M is 85 years old, but bustles about her temporary unit, serving us coffee and snacks with a youthful vigor. She settles down to talk. "Pastor, I am so glad to see you. I've had such a hard week," she says, detailing her problems with neighbors. They know that Mrs. M has made a recent decision for Christ and now gossip about and harass her openly. "Persecution is just a reminder that you belong to God and are his child now," Pastor I assures her. Mrs. M nods and says, "Yes, you told me to expect it." Regardless of the pressure,

Mrs. M has resolved to be baptized soon. I read Matthew 6 and pray with her, then the pastor and I leave.

For group-conscious Japanese, it's hard being a Christian among the eyes of a rural town. A temporary housing area where people have little to do makes the gossiping that much more intense. But Mrs. M isn't alone. Pastor I tells me of several more who have made a resolute decision for Christ in recent months.

Driving back through Taro, Pastor I stops near an open field. "Do you see that land over there," he says, pointing to a large overgrown lot. Mrs. M's house in Taro was here. On 311, it was washed away along with hundreds of others. It's in the middle of what was once the town, a highly visible spot. Pastor I continues, "She's given it to us for a prefab church building." While others wonder if they'll ever come home to Taro, Mrs. M already realizes that her true home is heaven, and is stewarding her life accordingly. 📧

from the BLOG

Looking at Japan's "Jesus Rock"



Hundreds of people in Aomori, Japan are boarding boats to get a closer look at Jesus...in a rock formation, unfortunately.

It seems that a recently discovered rock in a hidden alcove

along Lake Towada roughly resembles the silhouette of Jesus. The name of the lake begins with a Japanese letter that looks like a cross (十和田湖). That bolsters the idea in the minds of some Japanese that this rock is religiously significant. Some have even suggested that this may have been a worship site for hidden Christians during the 16th century persecutions.

Frankly, I'm not impressed when people discover religious shapes in moldy bread, mildew stains, or the like. My faith is neither built upon, nor deepened by, such nonsense. While I'm underwhelmed at the "discovery," however, what does impress me is that Japanese people would think to make a connection

with Jesus. Remember that Japan has the least number of Christians (0.5% of population) of any developed country. One could understand if Japanese were to see the shape of a goblin from their folklore, or a demonic gargoyle like in their many shrines and temples. But Jesus?

Japanese making such connections with Christianity lead me to an optimistic outlook for missions in this country. Yes, it is regrettable that superstitions and syncretistic beliefs muddy the Gospel water so badly, but I am encouraged that:

- 1) Regardless of the odd context, at least the conversation on Christ has begun. This is a starting point.
- 2) Regardless of the poor response to Christianity, at least someone has left a witness that led to this connection.
- 3) Regardless of the wrong place they are looking, at least they are looking for Christ earnestly.

Naturally, I pray that such oddball sightings will lead a Japanese to seek out solid truth from a Christian, church or Bible. Perhaps God chooses to work this way to get a heart headed the right direction. Perhaps these odd "discoveries" are small ways that God cracks open the hardened Japanese heart just enough to, as the tourists look at the rock, gently whisper, "You will look for me and find me when you look with all your heart" (Jer.29:13).

May God lead many Japanese to the Rock of our Salvation.

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