

M.E.C. News #005
December, 2005
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Tokyo, Japan

CHURCH FUTURE

Government Recognition

Please continue to pray for our church to be recognized by the Japanese government. At this point, our biggest obstacle is a lack of sufficient funds to buy land (1/12 of an acre, more or less) and a building (seating for 150-250). We hope, with your prayers and God's special grace and provision, to be able to raise enough (about one million US dollars) within the next two years to get started.

Shakespeare Lecture Project

This is a project to help us raise funds for our building. The first course of ten lectures, now undergoing revision and being re-recorded, offers a general discussion of Scripture references in Shakespeare's plays, followed by specific treatment of the Merchant of Venice, Macbeth, Henry V, and Romeo and Juliet. There will also be a manual to go along with the lectures. The whole process is rather time-consuming. Pray that God would graciously assist me in this project and that it may bring blessing to those who study the course, as well as help to our ministry here.

GOD'S SPECIAL GRACE

Salvation of the Elderly

At the Presbytery Meeting for the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) in Oregon City, Oregon, last October (12-14), I had the opportunity to give public thanksgiving to God for His goodness to our church in saving elderly parents of our members. The very next week (17-19), while I was in Moscow, Idaho, attending the Christ Church Ministerial Conference, I received news of two more baptisms. One of our elders, Mr. Sakai, baptized his elderly mother, Mitsuko (84), who was dying of cancer, and, beside her hospital bed, his 30-year old daughter, Mika, who was influenced by her grandmother's faith.

About a month later, on November 20, Mr. Jukichi Kitase (84), the elderly father of another church member was baptized. Ever since his wife'

baptism early last summer, he has been attending church. His baptismal testimony was simple but beautiful. He had already gotten rid of his Butsudan (a Buddhist altar for ancestor worship), and he made it clear he was not going to participate in any Buddhist or Shinto rituals. In the Japanese cultural context, this is perhaps the biggest single step in a clear confession of faith in Christ alone.

Our church members are almost all first-generation Christians and have been faithful in bearing Christian testimony to their parents over a long period of years, as many as 10 or 20. And now in God's good time, we believe we are beginning to see the fruit of their perseverance. To rehearse God's special grace in saving the elderly, here is the list in chronological order:

Tamiko Yagashiro (82) baptized December 29, 2002

Michiko Kanno (68) died suddenly February 20, 2004, before being baptized

Fumiko Toshiro (78) baptized May 30, 2004

Hisako Kitase (79) baptized June 6, 2005, died June 11, 2005

Seiki Yagashiro (82) baptized August 18, 2005

Mitsuko Sakai (84) baptized October 19, 2005, died October 28, 2005

Jukichi Kitase (84) baptized November 20, 2005

Atsushi Saito (72), who had suffered a long time with cancer and was in awful pain, died October 26, 2005. His son, Mr. Kazuyuki Saito (36), faithfully witnessed to him for over 15 years and believes that his father professed faith in his last days. He asks our prayers for his mother and his continuing testimony to her. The Yagashiros mentioned above are the parents of Kazuyuki Saito's wife.

WITH CHRIST

On October 28 at about 3:00 A.M., 29 hours after my return from the States, Miss Mieko Matsuoka (56) died. She was the first member of our local body, in our 24 year ministry, to be called home with Christ. Her struggle with cancer lasted almost exactly four months after the diagnosis.

Sylvia and I are thankful that we were able to be with Miss Matsuoka at her bedside during her last hours.

A few hours later at about 9:30 A.M., just as we were taking Miss Matsuoka's body from the hospice, we received a phone call informing us that Mr. Sakai's mother had just died.

The next week, we had two funerals. It was a time of special blessing to celebrate the triumph of these two women who had gone to be with Christ. At Miss Matsuoka's funeral, the Gospel went forth to over 50 non-Christians who attended. Please pray for the testimony of the funeral. Mitsuko Sakai's funeral was small, with only church members and immediate family.

Our first church burial service was held on November 19. In Japan, cremation is required by law, so we bury the ashes of the dead. Years ago, our church bought a tomb in an exclusively Christian cemetery. We buried five people on the same day: Sylvia's oldest brother Benjamin who died 36 years ago at age 24 was transferred to our site; Mrs. Kou's brother Kenneth who died 2 years ago; Mr. Kanno's mother Michiko who died last year; Mr. Sakai's mother Mitsuko; and Miss Matsuoka. Most of the church members took the over two-hour trip to join us for the burial service. It was a time of solemn joy. Surrounded by gravestones quoting the Scriptures and confessing faith in the resurrection, we were all greatly encouraged to be able to visit this distinctly Christian cemetery, the only one of its kind in Japan.

EVANGELISM

We just had our annual evangelistic meeting on December 23, a Japanese national holiday to celebrate the birthday of the emperor. The commercialized Christmas has nowadays become a part of Japanese culture -- with Christmas trees and presents and drinking parties, but without Christ. And at this time of the year people are more willing to visit church for a special Christmas service.

We rent a conference room at a nearby building and hold our Christmas celebration, inviting as many non-Christians as we can. This year, there were over 220 people altogether, about half of whom were non-Christians. Many of those who came had been to our Christmas meeting before. We had a short sermon and a few songs, then singing and recitations by Sunday School children and adults, followed by a time for refreshments. The sermon was blessed, and during the time of refreshments, we were able to talk with non-Christian guests at length. This is a very special opportunity to witness. Pray for the conversion of the lost here.

FAMILY NEWS

Emeth is back in Tokyo, keeping busy with a pet blog at emethhesed.com and three jobs (translation and editing, creating web sites, and teaching

church children). She hopes to go to graduate school and covets prayer as she prepares applications.

Ben Zedek is still studying in Moscow, Idaho. He plans to come back to Japan at the end of April, 2006 to attend our church camp and work with us for the summer. He will go back to Moscow in the fall of 2006 to finish up his Greyfriar studies. Pray for Ben's growth in Christ and for God's work in preparing him for the ministry.

Berek is working on his Whitefield studies, and praying and thinking about graduate school. We are not sure yet where Berek will be going, but he hopes to study philosophy and theology. He is teaching English to save money for his tuition.

Sylvia is as busy as ever, working with me in our local church ministry, teaching the ladies and children, taking care of details for the church and research center, helping with evangelism, and taking care of our home. With Berek's persuasion, she has also begun to exercise at a nearby gym. Next month, she and Berek will begin practice to sing in the chorus for Mozart's Mass in C minor.

The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief corner stone.
This is the LORD'S doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day which the LORD has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
O LORD, do save, we beseech You;
O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD;
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.
The LORD is God, and He has given us light;
Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.
You are my God, and I give thanks to You;
You are my God, I extol You.
Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting. (Psa. 118:22-29)