

Aoyagis in Tokyo

Dear friends and supporters,

It has been almost a year since last newsletter I wrote. I am sorry for infrequent update. It is not because there are not much to report, but rather it was because of too many things happening. Some are exciting, and some are challenging, but all are under the grace.

Growing Sunday Worship

Last April, we celebrated our one year anniversary since we started weekly worship service in April 2015. While church is not all about the Sunday service, it is such a blessing that we have been able to hold the public worship service every week since then. As of now, we have about 60 adults and 30 kids attending the service, slowly but steadily growing. It is humbled to see so many have gathered together to praise the name of the Lord with one voice where there weren't any church before.

--Lalaport Shopping Mall that we use as the worship place--

Baptisms

Yoko

It is such a joy to see that we had/have a few baptism this year. Yoko first came to Juilliard concert, our first community event on 2012, as a non-Christian. Since then, she became the regular attendants to our events, and even to show up to our vision meeting for the church. As her friendship with missionaries, like Pfeils, Radkes and Drews, grew, her interest in the gospel also grew large. After 2 years of hanging around

with us, she confessed her faith and became a Christian, yet what she faced was her husband's opposition. Because of this, she waited patiently for his approval for another 2 years, and in the last summer, he finally said OK for his wife to get baptized. To our joy was that he even came to her baptism service. This all shows how faithfully yet slowly God draws people close to him. What we need is a patience.

Mr. Suzuki

Mr. Suzuki, whom I baptized last Sunday, is 62 years old, and was the owner of a local pub, who loves sports and manage a local baseball team. He spend his life without having any interaction with Christianity until he met a sports missionary from States. Through years of friendship with him, his interest in Christianity grew large, and last winter, he told me that he wants to become a Christian, which lead him to start weekly bible study with me. As he and I have been doing a class for last ten months, he brought many questions each time, such as "Who is Jesus?" "Was Jesus God?" "Who created God?" "What happen when people die?" And each time, as he is faced with important Christian doctrine, he understand its weight, and accept it one by one. It is like water sank in the sand. I remember one day, as he was struck by the truth that his life is now new in Christ, and old has passed because of the Jesus' cross, he said that he wants to

invite all of his friends and announce that his new life in Christ by having "good-bye to my old life, and happy birthday to new-self party." So, last Sunday, after the baptism, he invited his non-Christian friends and our church friends to his new birthday party.

Ongoing Outreach

In summer, we welcome many summer missions team. As our church planting needs ways to get connected to non-Christians, these summer teams are very important. When we are caught up with daily ministry, the summer team could do more to cultivate new relationships and host big events through which we can show our presence in the community. Without their help, our touch in this 99% non-Christian country could be faded away.

Hawaiian BBQ

A team from Harbor Church in Hawaii came and hosted a Hawaiian BBQ, with pineapple hamburger, kalua pork, spam musubi. We had about 120 people who came!!

College Ministry

A team from Redeemer San Diego did a wonderful work reaching out to college students. Since they came the last year, the team has opened and maintained and keep cultivating the reachout to college students.



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Kids English Camp

Kids English Camp was as always a big hit. Covenant Life Church in DC and college students from Korean LA

Basketball Outreach

Columbia Presbyterian Church in Columbia MA sent a basket ball ministry team again this year, and this helped us to get connected to many non-Christians other wise we would not be connected.

Seima in PTA

One big thing for me this year is that to my surprise I was elected as the chair for PTA in kids' local elementary school. As PTA chair in Japan is seen as a public figure, this gains my credibility, expands web of network with local leaders, government people, and school parents. And since people know that I am a pastor, many people came to know about Grace Harbor Church through me. I am excited to see how God is going to use this to further expand His influence in this local community.

Challenges

As there are a lot of good things happening, there was one big challenge that we went through this year.

Team ReForming:

Three missionary families which is a half of the missionaries left our team this year. The reasons can be vary, but as a summary, it was in general disillusionment on the church planting facing language difficulty, cultural difference, messy-ness in the young church, uncertainty in the direction, confusion of the ministry model, ambiguity in leadership, etc.. It was challenging for me personally and I am still in the process of recovering from the pain, as well as repenting my sin and weakness. But at the same time, I see God's hands carrying our church through this. As a result, I see our church became more united, has more clarified goal to become Japanese indigenous church, and see some lay leaders stepping up forward. Please pray as we are still in the midst of a big change from missionary-heavy-church to a Japanese church.

Health: Thank you for praying for my ears. It was a shock when I started to have a problem in my right ear. But as

two months passed, I feel that it is getting better. At times, I sense a ringing sound in my right ear, but it happens less often and I am in the process of recovering.

Pastor Fukuda:

As many of you know from my prayer chain mail, it was a shock for us to hear that pastor Fukuda, our church planting movement leader, had a stroke when he was having a minor Catheter operation. At first, he was serious condition having trouble in recognition and speech. But God answered to our prayer and he showed a miraculous recovery, and he is able to leave the hospital in two weeks. This again reminded that God is sovereign and he is able to care his church..

Family

Senri: Each year, God moves our family to the next season of life. Senri graduated CCSI (a wonderful school that MTW started decades ago initially to teach MKs but now open to Japanese as well) last June, and started his college life at Covenant College in Chattanooga, this summer. It is sad that he is not at home anymore, but we are grateful that God is faithfully leading him to his next chapter.

Towa: This November marked one year since Towa came back home after 6 months in the hospital. I am so thankful to see that even with a cane, he is now able to walk and do his life on his own. But it has been hard for him lately to see his recovery curve was slowed down and he is not able to run or jump. I pray that this challenge helps to grow his faith, trust and patience. Here is Towa's words that he wrote in August:

"Thank you so much for all of your prayers and support for my recovery. Though it has already been over a year since my accident, I cannot yet say that I sense God's goodness throughout all of this. However, this past year and a half has brought me many joys, angers, hopes, and anxieties that otherwise I would not have felt, and for that I am grateful. It's only been a bit over a year since my accident, so I still intend on getting better, even if

it's a little at a time. Thank you for your encouragements."

Satoki: Satoki joined the school basketball team and enjoys it a lot. Though his connection and my PTA relationship, we were able to bring the basketball ministry into the school.

Akari: Akari moved up from preschool to elementary school. She enjoys her new school, friends, and the teacher.

Naoko: Naoko was at the first meeting of Parakaleo Japan (if you call it so). As the churches in the network grows, wives feels that there is a need for care network among wives in ministry. Naoko enjoys the meeting, and would like to see how this could be developed.

Please Pray

- For Towa's continuous recovery through daily activity and rehab visit.
- That our family be dependent on the Lord more and more.
- For Grace Harbor Church as we are in the process of reformatting our small groups.
- For new contacts through outreach events that we keep friendship and be able to introduce Jesus to them.
- For our new church that we not only grow in number but also into the maturity as followers of Christ. Pray that we help their growth through community groups and discipleship meetings.
- For me as a pastor that I can lead in a humble, godly manner.
- Pray for unity and focus in the leadership team.
- For more church planting happening in Tokyo, the world largest city yet with only 0.2% Christians !!

Yours, Seima & Naoko

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