

Being His Hands

Mission Report & Prayer Requests: Mito, Japan

Joel & Kristin Osborne and Hiroaki & Megumi Akahoshi



(Above) Megumi, Natsumi, Gaku & Kentaro with many of the children who participated in this year's celebration outside.

EASTER 2024: Resurrection Community Growth

- Using Mark 16:1-18, followers & seekers alike were invited to receive & respond to the good news -

The week before Easter, Joel got hit badly with the flu but our gracious God heard the prayers of many poured out on his behalf, and he was able to worship and celebrate with everyone. One of the most exciting things was the way so many Mito church members came together to serve with joy on the day itself as well as beforehand - especially given the timing this year (*April 1 is the new fiscal year in Japan, and is filled with changes for everyone who works*). Peppared with a little humor, we told the powerful story of Jesus' resurrection in a creative way and everyone was asked to let the resurrection become a part of their story too.

Last Easter, we began having a picnic, egg hunt, and games following worship, and we

did it across the street in a grassy area. The momentum of repetition was good for gathering people - some, who enjoyed last year so much, came again and then we were able to invite, meet, and welcome several new people this year. Lots of families in the city use that space on weekends for recreation and it's also beside the Ibaraki Prefectural Library. Again this year, others were curious about our group and wanted to join in the fun. Pictured above is the 25 kids that stayed until the end, but the children's ministry leaders who planned and led (**Megumi, Natsumi, Gaku & Kentaro**) said we had **more than 35 kids** this year (*10 kids from Mito church*). So...guess what's happening April 20, 2025 (Easter)?!

Building & Deepening Connections

- Much of the month of February seemed to be done around a table & with coworkers -

During the month, our messages focused on the theme, **'Your Kingdom Come: To Our Finances & Belongings.'** We were blessed to have some support (online/remotely) from **Winston & Hong Ngee Chong** in Singapore (*Moulmein Church of Christ*) who are not only professionals in the area of finance, but also people of deep faith and goodness. Though finances, giving, and how we think about 'all that we have' can be a challenging topic to tackle, the response of our church family was very enthusiastic, and we heard multiple times that it was very practical and helpful.

As a church, our outreach event for the quarter was a **Soup & Games Night**. Interestingly, it required the least amount of planning and was perhaps the most successful in involving church members' active participation and connecting with the church their family, friends, and coworkers who came. Members brought games for all ages from their homes, and around sixty were in attendance. Held on a Saturday afternoon/evening, we had homemade soups from Japan, Korea, China, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and America, as well as hot coffee and homemade apple cider.

The following day, the **Matsudo Church of Christ** members traveled northeastward to Mito from Matsudo city in Chiba. We enjoyed a combined worship, followed by a lunch prepared for us by Grace Huan who has begun a Chinese 'bento' (box lunch) delivery service. The day was so blessed! The Osbornes hosted **Manraj Sunar** for a meal. He is originally from Nepal, the youngest of seven siblings in a Christian family. His brother became a follower of Jesus first, and slowly he and his parents the rest of his siblings also became followers. Living in Japan the last two years and worshipping with the Hitachi Church while attending language school, he recently moved to Mito to enroll in an elder care/special needs care program for the next two years, and then he hopes to find employment here to keep helping his family in Nepal. They also hosted Kristin's coworker, **Kumazaki sensei and his wife**. Kumazaki sensei, who will retire at the end of



*Above: Worship & lunch with Matsudo Church members;
Middle & Below: Meals shared with Kristin's coworkers*



March, and his wife are Christians. His wife is a granddaughter of one of the earliest Japanese ministers for Churches of Christ.

The Osbornes and Seika also celebrated Lunar (Chinese) New Year with the **Huan family**, and as always, joy overflowed.

The Akahoshis invited Joel, Kentaro & Misaki to go to **Keisen Kindergarten** where Megumi and Ayaka work, and all three Akahoshi kids attend, to see the **annual art presentation**. It is a BIG event for families to come and see the artwork their children have done throughout the year. Each age group/room has a different theme for the year. Manaka's class theme was Winnie the Pooh, and Rei & Kigen's class theme was Mickey & Minnie Mouse. It was a lot of fun to see the kids' creativity, and it was another chance to meet kids' teachers, other families and Megumi's coworkers.

A Mix Of Endings & New Possibilities

- March has been a somewhat emotional month for us as we both celebrate & feel impending loss -

We are wrapping up our series for this fiscal year, **'Your Kingdom Come'** with messages and one last testimony based on **'Your Kingdom Come: To The Rich, The Poor & The Margins.'** We also had another **Mission Sunday** for Cambodia where **218,138 yen** (approx US\$1500) was given. Thanks be to God!

Some of the greatest news this month was that **Takumi Ogawa** and **Ami Hoshino** got engaged, and will marry in June this year. Joel and Hiro will begin premarital counseling with them in April. We also celebrated with our newest member, **Ifunanya Chiezie**, who traveled back to Nigeria at the end of March to marry **Joseph Ndinefo** on April 4. Unfortunately she must return two days after the wedding to begin a new job here in Japan, so they will be separated for a while while she begins applying for a visa so that he can join her here.

We also celebrated with **Jacob, Hikari & Asa Shuart** in the birth of their daughter/baby sister, **Suzu Rae**. The meaning of Suzu is 'pearl' and we can't help but think of the pearl of great price.

Many visitors - some students and families from Ibaraki Christian, some coworkers and neighbors, and others who found us online - joined us throughout the month. It seems that God is sending another wave of new people our way, many of whom are at different levels of seeking Jesus, and even a few Christians who have

been hurt by others but desire to worship, serve, and grow with a church family. We want to respond faithfully and hospitably, and pray they can grow in Jesus together with us.

Two former missionaries and beloved friends - **Judith Alexander** and **Crimsen (Ruhnke) Hanson**, as well as **Crimsen's family** - visited us as well and shared in heartwarming conversations. Time with them was sacred.

Thanks to fellow Canadian, Ashley Hibbard, Joel had the opportunity to serve as the respondent in an **online Lent Book Club** with the **Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence** (Bristol Baptist College) for the book **'Forbidden Fruit & Fig Leaves: Reading the Bible with the Shamed.'** A very different crowd than usual in an academic setting, it was a great learning and growing experience.

Most of the teachers in Kristin's grade level at **ICHS (11th grade)**, about 12 in total, came for a **year end party** at the Osbornes house catered by our favourite neighborhood Italian restaurant and chef. Not at all common in Japan, the excitement and interest was high, and it was also a good testimony of the trust Kristin has built with them. (Unfortunately Joel had the flu, the week before Easter, so he had to 'hide out' upstairs and miss the fun.)

Mito Church had a **potluck farewell party** for **Matt Miller** who will return to the states in April after 7 years in Japan (pictured below). We're sad to see him go but thankful for his impact here.



(Above) Akahoshis, Akatsus, Huans, Seika, Natsumi & Taiga welcome the Hanson family to Mito, Japan



Join Us In Prayer

- * **Entrance into Osaka Bible Seminary** – pray for **Hiro, Seika, and Shuhei** (Seika's brother-in-law, another member at Mito church) who will travel, together with Joel, to Osaka to attend their entrance ceremony into seminary on April 9. We are mindful of God's great blessing to have 3 of our church family enroll in theological study and training. Give thanks to God for the generous scholarship they are receiving, and pray that these studies with form and deepen their faith and their love for Jesus and for the church.
- * **Manaka's Final Year** - now five, **Manaka** begins her final year of kindergarten at Keisen. Please pray for her, as well as for **Rei & Kigen**, and for all of the children in our church family so that they will grow stronger and be rooted in Jesus' love for them.
- * **IC Campus Ministry: Restart** – after a 4 year hiatus begun during the pandemic, **Joel** will return to the campus ministry office every week on Wednesday. It is a complete start over since all previous students have graduated, but some of Kristin and Matt's former students, and younger siblings of Mito church members are currently enrolled. Please pray for this new beginning.
- * **Summer Interns** - we'll receive 3 interns (2 from Harding, 1 from ACU) for 6 weeks in May/June. Pray for **Braden, Anna & Aden**.
- * **Upcoming Weddings** - cover **Mizuki & Tomomi** and **Takumi & Ami** in prayer as they prepare for a life of marriage. Pray, too, for Joel & Hiro as they guide them in counseling and help lead the ceremony.



Above: Praying for Takumi & Ami; Center Left: with Manraj; Center Right: Seminarians; Bottom Left: Suzu; Bottom Right: Lunar New Year Celebration with the Huans & Seika



FAMILY NEWS: FURLOUGH 2024 UPDATE

Thanks be to God, we were able to find, reserve and purchase our airline tickets for our furlough this summer. Airfare for seven (!) is considerably higher in cost than our previous furlough in 2019, which everyone is feeling the pinch in different areas of life. Yet we are thankful to have this settled, as well as our vehicle while we are in Oklahoma & the area.

Next, we must rent vehicles and car seats for our time in Chicago and Ontario. Please pray with us to be led judiciously as we look for rentals. While some expenses have been graciously offset, still the costs that come with traveling and reporting about our mission work are a necessary part of what we do. We do welcome and appreciate any help we can receive beforehand or while we are 'on the road.'

We also are just beginning the process of setting up our schedule in more detail. We will be in the **Chicago** area from **Aug 2-12**, in **Ontario** from **Aug 13-26**, and in **Oklahoma** and a few surrounding states from **Aug 27-Sept 15**. Both Kristin's and Joel's moms' health have been such that we will need to stick a little closer to home than the past, but we do hope to see and connect with as many of you as possible, and ask people to help us this time by joining gatherings (TBA) in the area.

We long to share & to celebrate about God's Kingdom growing here in Asia, to pray and mutually encourage one another, and to renew contact and to find new partners. If you would help as an ambassador on our behalf, please contact Hiro and I. Thank you!

Your Partnership & Participation

Financial support can be sent to, or given online through:

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We can communicate via **Facetime** and **Zoom** as well.

Check out our homepage at <http://wp.mitochurch.org>