

Songs of Salvation

“Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.”

Psalm 105:2

Music is a medium of expression, and how true this is of the songs we sing in praise to the Lord! Furthermore, some genres of Christian music appeal even to those who are not yet Christians as a form of entertainment and thus grant us perfect opportunities to “tell of his wonderful acts”. This is especially true of gospel music, enjoyed by thousands worldwide, Japan included. Tokyo-based JCL network partner Heidi Skipper shares of her experiences seizing this opportunity to lead lovers of gospel music to the Lord who gave us the gospel of love.

Joe Townsend,
JCL Communications Editor

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Japanese encountering God through black gospel music

I was amazed – I could not believe the sound this group of petite middle-aged Japanese women were producing. They were singing their hearts out, they were singing in English and they were singing black gospel music, an American musical genre. Although all but possibly one of them were not yet Christians, the passion they sang with was amazing! The following year my family and I moved to Tokyo and I got stuck into the work of extending God’s love and kingdom in Japan through gospel music. What is happening through gospel choirs is truly wonderful. God is working in people’s hearts and lives are being changed.

We often hear about the difficulty of spreading the gospel in Japan, and this is truly a struggle. Japan may be an open country but the Japanese are a very closed people group. Their long history is packed with traditions. Japan is a group society: there are strict social norms and certain ways of doing things. Culturally the Japanese are in some ways homogenous, suspicious of new things, excelling in what they do and moving as one. However, it is exciting to see that there are pockets of transformation happening, areas where the truth of Jesus is setting people free. One area is within music and the arts.



Choirs from across the network unite for Hallelujah Gospel Fellowship’s annual summer concert

I have the honour to work with Ken Taylor, an American WorldVenture ‘musicianary’ (a musician doing missions). Ken, with his wife Bola (who passed away in 2015), have been key in helping Japanese churches latch on to the phenomenon of black gospel music. Most of the content in this article is based on Ken’s vast experience.¹

In 2000 the Taylors started their first gospel choir, and a network and movement called ‘Hallelujah Gospel Family’ (HGF) was born. Ken’s work has been crucial in encouraging and equipping churches to use gospel choirs intentionally to share the gospel message: the good news about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. His strategic thinking is a blessing and a gift not only to the

gospel choir movement, but to the church as a whole in Japan. The three core values of HGF (Community, Relationship and Celebration; more on these below) underpin everything HGF are about and Ken has articulated them in general terms so that churches can use these not only for gospel choir outreach, but as a wider model.

But how did this all start? In 1993 the film *Sister Act 2* starring Whoopi Goldberg was released and this is widely seen as



¹ Rev. Ken Taylor: *Breaking the Code: Effective Evangelism in Japan Innovation and Contextualization*



Ken Taylor, founder of the Hallelujah Gospel Family

the start of Japanese catching onto black gospel music. The song 'Oh, Happy Day' is a particular favourite.

Japan is a nation of fads, and Japanese businesses in particular are always on the lookout for new trends. Black gospel music was no different. Choirs started popping up all over Japan and most of them were led by those who weren't Christians. Music schools and community centres offered classes and there was a huge interest among the Japanese to sing black gospel music, but the church was not taking advantage of this amazing phenomenon.

"What is happening through gospel choirs is truly wonderful. God is working in people's hearts and lives are being changed"

During this initial gospel music boom the Taylors began developing an evangelism and church planting strategy based on a belief that effective evangelism needs to be culturally relevant and contextual. This has led to HGF partnering with churches so that they can start new communities of not-yet Christians who join a choir community launched by a local church. The outcome is groups of non-Christians and Christians meeting together regularly. What started in the 1990s is still going on and the love for black gospel music has not disappeared anywhere.

Four important points to remember

Ken makes four points that are important to understand regarding black gospel music in Japan:

Firstly, it is **distinctively Japanese**. It is an indigenous Holy Spirit Movement. They are singing black gospel music, but it is the Japanese singing it and no-one is forcing Japanese non-Christians to sing and join choirs. It is clear that God is working through this. Many non-Christian choir members say things like, "I'm so moved and don't even know why" or "it instantly relieves my stress". The roots of black gospel music go back to the Negro spirituals, the musical moans and groans of the African-American slaves back in the 1800s. Ken asks whether it could be that all the stress and hopelessness that many Japanese experience is a form of modern day slavery.

It is no wonder that the message in each and every black gospel song about the hope, love, joy, peace and everlasting life found in Jesus resonates with the Japanese!

Secondly, Japanese society operates in **circles**. You are either in or out of a circle. Each Japanese person has many circles (work, family, hobby etc.) but these circles rarely interconnect. We need to have ministry forms that take the circle phenomenon into account. The outcome is that our activity is one that deepens relationships within existing circles.

Thirdly, we need to offer **quality programmes** taught by skilled teachers to gain respect from the Japanese. The teacher (sensei) is a very respected person in Japanese culture. In the HGF gospel choir movement this is done by having ongoing training programmes to keep the instructors equipped as well as producing quality resources. We also have frequent visits from Ray Sidney, a professional black gospel singer from the US who is committed to doing workshops with the choirs year after year.

"It is exciting to see that there are pockets of transformation happening, areas where the truth of Jesus is setting people free."

The fourth point is interesting as it is something that is deeply ingrained in the Japanese way of thinking: **obligatory gift-giving**. In practical terms, offering something for free can be mistaken as a gift that obligates the receiver to reciprocate. This can become a never-ending cycle. Many churches offer outreach programmes for free, but the Japanese actually become suspicious and also feel pressured by the gift-giving custom. In the choir movement, Taylor has found that charging a reasonable price keeps everyone happy and there is also a higher commitment level. In turn, churches find that their finances are not stretched by putting on an activity, and that in fact there is a little bit of extra income.

Partnering with churches

HGF has been going for over 18 years and now totals over 1500 members, of whom around 80% are not yet Christians. Something to bear in mind is that a church does not join HGF, but rather HGF strategically partners with local churches to resource, equip and serve them. To date HGF is partnering with 50 churches from different denominations. Whatever form the church takes, whether it is a well-established church, a church plant or a house church, they all have a new community that they are investing in, caring for and shepherding.

"To date HGF is partnering with 50 churches from different denominations."

HGF produces the material and resources, but the church is responsible for the practical aspects and has the pastoral responsibility. In fact HGF does not start a choir community if the pastor or a committed church member is not a choir member. There are no binding contracts. What unites the choirs is the desire to share Jesus through gospel music and the commitment to the HGF core values that bind everyone together. I personally feel excited to be part of a network with core values that make total sense and work in a Japanese context. Let's take a look at these core values.



Heidi leading a choir of children in a song of praise.



A kids' choir rehearsal.

The three core values

Community is the first core value. The goal is not actually to have a choir per se, but to start a new community. It is about the church not only having seekers come to Sunday services, but going out and investing time and energy and resources into a new community that gathers regularly. It is not about the director controlling the choir, but the pastor and other Christians engaging with the non-Christians. It is also important to remember that building community is not about starting with big numbers that soon dwindle, but rather starting with a small number of participants that develop into core members. The community then multiplies because of strong relationships.

“The goal is not actually to have a choir per se, but to start a new community.”

This brings us to the second core value: **Relationship**. The goal is not to have concerts (although of course there are plenty of these!), but to build and deepen relationships in the choir. When the focus is on events then the follow-up percentage is often low. Investing in intentional pre-event relationship-building is important as there will then naturally be more post-event follow up taking place.

“God’s word is being not only sung but also read and explained to people who are mainly not Christians.”

The third core value within the HGF network is **Celebration**. The various choirs are not in competition with each other, but we celebrate unity in diversity. It is like a family; everyone has different personalities, strengths and weaknesses. The various choirs are encouraged to perform locally. Around Christmas time there are lots of concerts happening, and every summer there is a combined concert, a celebration where the different choirs get together. This annual concert is indeed a ‘Holy Ghost party’, as the saying goes within black gospel music circles.

Heidi’s roles

My role within HGF is to coach some of the adult choirs, as well as being in charge of the kids’ choirs. I choose songs for the kids’ choirs, write the scores for the directors, produce resources and train directors. I am part of the team which produces the HGF textbook that comes out twice a year. This is a textbook that all choirs use which means we are all singing the same songs at the same time in various locations and can therefore easily join together too. The textbook has the English

song lyrics with Japanese translation, so everyone understands what they are singing. Each song has a short introduction linking it to a relevant Bible passage. For me this is very exciting as God’s word is being not only sung but also read and explained to people who are mainly not Christians. The textbook also contains articles from pastors, specific gospel word meanings and pronunciation tips, as well as testimonies from members who have recently come to faith.

Heidi and Dave Skipper are ‘musicianaries’ in the Innovative Ministries Team under Japan Baptist Fellowship and have been in Tokyo since 2010. For more information on HGF please visit <https://www.hgfjapan.com/home>

We also produce the music scores for the directors and demos of the songs being sung so that parts can be memorised. The choir members learn everything by ear; they never see a score. A karaoke CD is also produced in order for each choir to be able to perform anywhere without having to access a band.

“The lyrics are deeply rooted in Scripture so we are singing God’s word.”

It is fun to be part of all the various stages: to prepare for a new term, to work with choirs during the term and then also to see how the concerts strengthen the choirs and give them an extra boost. I find it powerful that many who aren’t Christians are experiencing church in a unique way during the rehearsals. In terms of the kids’ choirs there are also many parents who sit in during the sessions and are hearing the gospel message. I was very encouraged to hear about a mum connected to a kids’ choir who came to faith through this connection.

During the workshops there is obviously a lot of singing going on and the lyrics are deeply rooted in Scripture so we are singing God’s word. During the session a Christian also gives a short message and prays. When it comes to the concerts, isn’t it fascinating that God is using people who mostly aren’t Christians to spread the good news about Jesus to their own non-Christian friends and family in the various local areas?! The annual concert gathers around 400 members who in turn invite their friends and family so that the audience consists of about 1000 people. In a country where it is difficult to invite people to church this is an amazing opportunity for people to encounter God in a powerful way.

Heidi Skipper, JCL Network Partner

Hope from the Edge

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Japan.

“He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power!”

Psalm 147:3-5

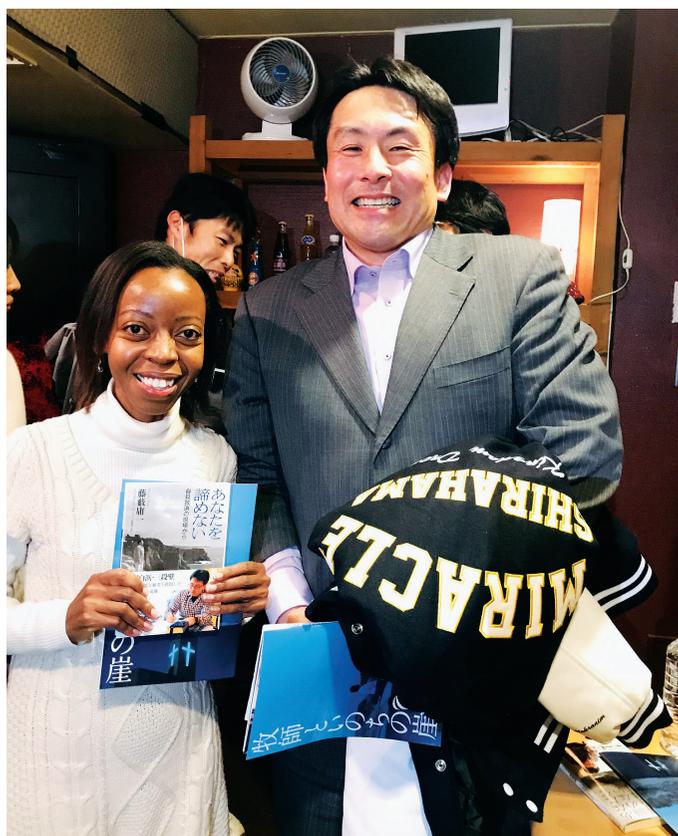
JCL Network Partner Emba Allison works as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in local schools in Saitama, Japan. In addition to witnessing to the people she encounters daily through this work, Emba has been given a heart to support those in Japan who suffer from mental health problems. In our next article, Emba shares about her calling to this high priority area:

“Japan has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. One Japanese person attempts suicide every 15 minutes. There are 230,000 people in hospital with mental health-related illness. Many on the edge of despair in Japan paradoxically seek out beautiful places to end their lives, such as the stunning Sandanbeki cliffs along the magnificent coastline of Shirahama town, Wakayama Prefecture in the Kansai region of Japan.”

I first heard these shocking details at a Reaching Japanese for Christ (RJC) conference in Seattle, USA in February 2013. Pastor Yoichi Fujiyabu was the keynote speaker at the conference, which had the theme of ‘Hope for the Japanese Community.’ Pastor Fujiyabu was pastoring the small Shirahama Baptist Church, a short drive from the beautiful Sandanbeki Cliffs where he felt God prompting him to help those who came to jump from the cliffs so near to his church.

“Presence is so important”

Some of the people that Pastor Fujiyabu approached on the cliffs were willing to talk to him. Others had nothing to say, so he would sit with them on the cliffs’ edge, sometimes for hours. At the conference, he said that “Presence is so important”. Some of



Emba With Pastor Fujiyabu, at the Tokyo screening of ‘A Step Forward’

those in despair had not spoken to anyone for a long time. They were deeply lonely, overwhelmed by lives that had unravelled in debt or broken relationships. Many had travelled far from home to come to these cliffs, at the end of hope, where the raging waters below seemed like the only solace from despair.

As Pastor Fujiyabu shared this desperate and dramatic picture of mental health in Japan, God moved my heart deeply. I had no idea of this side of life in Japan. Having close friends who had struggled with depression, and having gone through it myself, I could only imagine the anguish many Japanese experienced.

Seeking God’s Guidance

In 2011, at the end of a ministry apprenticeship year at All Souls Church, Langham Place, London (the same church where I became a Christian), God had convicted my heart to serve in Japan. However, I had never been there and had no interest in going. But when I attended that RJC conference in 2013 to seek God’s guidance, he spoke to me clearly through Pastor Fujiyabu’s message: “This is how you can be useful for me in Japan”. I did not exactly know how I could be useful, but it was evident that God’s heart broke for the thousands of Japanese who committed suicide every year. In December of that same year, I flew to Japan on a vision trip to seek out Pastor Fujiyabu in Shirahama and see firsthand how God was using him in his community and along the Sandanbeki Cliffs.

Busy cooking a meal for the children’s Christmas Eve party in the Shirahama Baptist Church kitchen were some of the people that God had rescued through Pastor Fujiyabu’s ministry. Several of them who lived in community at the church were now followers of Christ. Meeting them, full of life and joy, was sweet beyond words.



HIGH Cards developed by Mark and Jenn Bello (see opposite)



Emba with the mental health policy team from the government's National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

How to be Helpful?

One question I wanted to ask Pastor Fujiyabu was how someone like me, a foreigner (originally from Kenya), could be useful in serving those struggling with depression in Japan. His answer was surprising: "It is because you are a foreigner that Japanese people would be willing to share their struggles with you" he said. Japanese relationships are governed by harmony, not making trouble for others. Some of my Japanese friends have told me that sharing your troubles with others, even sometimes with family and friends, is viewed as troubling them. However, non-Japanese are not under the same rules and so there is more freedom to share and less fear of being judged.

"Suicide prevention is for everyone"

In January 2019, it was wonderful to meet Pastor Fujiyabu again, this time in Tokyo, at a screening of the newly released documentary movie, 'A Step Forward', about his work in Shirahama. Through efforts by non-profit organizations such as Pastor Fujiyabu's 'Shirahama Rescue Network', as well as the Japanese government, members of whom I have made connections with, the suicide rate in Japan has decreased somewhat in recent years. However, mental health in Japan remains a top concern for the government and according to recent statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO), suicide among Japanese children (elementary to high school age) is the highest in the world, and suicide is the leading cause of death for young people aged 15-29.

Through my job as an Assistant Language Teacher over the last three years, I have encountered teachers struggling with mental health issues (often due to the pressures of the job) as well as students (often due to bullying, or a difficult home life). Lifting up these people in prayer to the God who is able to heal and deliver is one way of bringing hope. Ministering to Japanese colleagues, students and friends through listening as they share their struggles is another simple but important way to help.

Expressing Emotions

Mrs. Matsumoto², a junior high school teacher that I got to know well, recently shared with me about her teenage daughter's battle with depression. Her daughter stopped going to school and barely left her room. Both mother and daughter struggled with understanding depression, articulating emotions (hard for many Japanese to do) and finding help. Mrs. Matsumoto and I were able to meet and talk several times about how to help her daughter, and I introduced her to 'How I Got Here' (HIGH) cards: conversation cards designed to help articulate emotions.

"Suicide among Japanese children (elementary to high school age) is the highest in the world, and suicide is the leading cause of death for young people aged 15-29"

The HIGH cards were developed by Mark and Jenn Bello, a Californian couple, who have served in Japan for six years following God's call for them to help lower Japan's high suicide rate. In August 2018, the Bellos and I met with Dr. Motohashi, the director of the government's 'Japan Support Center for Suicide Countermeasures (JSSC)', to present the HIGH cards for the government's consideration in their suicide prevention initiatives. Dr. Motohashi's motto is; "suicide prevention is for everyone" (i.e. not only professionals). We can all play a part, and the HIGH cards, in English and Japanese, are a simple tool that anyone can use with a person who needs help. They are available in several ways: as a free downloadable app, on Amazon Japan, and as free packs that I can give to anyone who is interested (please contact JCL if you wish to be put in touch).

Emmanuel, the God who came to save the lost and heal the broken-hearted, is at work in Japan. Pray with us that he would work powerfully through his Church in Japan to bring hope and light for those on the edge of hope.

Emba Allison, JCL Network Partner

² Not her real name

Links and resources on mental health in Japan:

<https://www.bokushitogake.com/> – 'A Step Forward': A documentary on Pastor Fujiyabu suicide prevention work.
<http://highcards.jp/> – 'How I Got Here' cards

<https://youtu.be/oo0SHLxc2d0> – 'Saving 10,000' documentary
<https://jssc.ncnp.go.jp/en/index.php> – Japan Support Center for Suicide Countermeasures (JSSC)

The Student Scene?

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

1 Peter 3:15

Ian MacLennan, JCL's Director of Operations, is part of a small group of Christians which witnesses to international students studying near his home. Ian shares his motivation for getting involved and underlines the importance of this work:

The UK is host to many international students, including around 3,000 Japanese students attending UK universities. Significantly more than this come on short-term visits with schools, colleges and to language schools. Students are typically young and curious, many being very keen to get to know British people and try out their English on native speakers. More than this, they are interested in getting to know British culture, customs and thinking. As they are away from Japan, they are keen to listen to new ideas and concepts. These factors mean that interacting with students visiting the UK is a fantastic opportunity to share with them the reason for the hope which is in us.

Students will frequently be happy to accept invitations to social gatherings or to meet over a cup of tea, coffee or for a meal. Home stay students (living with a UK family) will often speak of their home stay mother, father, brother or sister, and they can form strong bonds as they rely heavily on locals to help them navigate the complexities of modern life in the UK.

A Word From Nagi

A number of Japanese students study at colleges and universities near my home and a small team of Christians has got together to seek to befriend the international students, many of whom are Japanese. One of the students I met from the university is called Nagi. Here is her story:

"I really enjoyed going to church as the people there were so kind, friendly and helpful."

"Hi, I'm Nagi. After graduating from the International School in Japan, I came to the UK to study at university. I used to live with a host family but now I'm living with British friends. Living with a host family was a very valuable opportunity for me to improve my English and to get to know English culture. My host mother is a Christian and on Sundays she invited me to come to church with her. I was happy

to go along as I wanted to meet more English people and practice speaking to them, so that I can improve my English.

I really enjoyed going to church as the people there were so kind, friendly and helpful. They welcomed me so warmly, which I found very surprising! At first it was really tough for me to understand what was being said at the services and what people were doing. After a while my host mother suggested that I do an Alpha course to find out a bit more about who Jesus is and what the message of the gospel is about. The lady with whom I did the course was very friendly and she even arranged for me to have a Bible in Japanese which allowed me to look up difficult words and helped me to understand Christianity better.

"The more I read about how Jesus behaved, the more I am attracted to his example. His behaviour was truly beautiful!"

I am not a Christian and my family are not Christians but I want to learn more about Jesus and what is written in the Bible. I think that the Bible's teaching is good and I particularly enjoy celebrating Christmas. The more I read about how Jesus behaved, the more I am attracted to his example. His behaviour was truly beautiful!

I am planning to continue to read the Bible, but I am getting busier and busier. I am studying Romanticism as part of my course, and it is interesting to read about Jesus in the spare time around my studies.

I would like to find a church to go to near my home in Japan and I have asked my friends at the chaplaincy team to see if they can help. I am also planning to explain Christianity to my friends. I have found that a lot of English culture is based on Christianity and so it is really valuable to know about Jesus and his message. I plan to keep studying and get to know Jesus better!"

Please join us as we pray for Nagi in her journey to get to know the Lord of heaven and earth.



Nagi with two friends from the Chaplaincy Team



Taka and Aki outside college

Getting involved

"Nice story, but what does it have to do with me?" I hear you ask. Much in every way! Have you ever thought about volunteering to help welcome and befriend foreign students near you? Could you speak English to them and maybe share the gospel with them? Would you be willing or able to offer to read the Bible with a student one on one or as part of a group?

The team working with the students near me holds parties at which we play games, chat and just chill out together. English is tough to learn, so the students are very keen to practice on us.

Japanese students usually have no reluctance to come to a Bible study. As it is all new to them it is important to explain the context thoroughly, literally everything will be new! What a privilege to explain the glorious truth of the good news of Jesus to young people who have never heard it before. When those light bulbs switch on in their minds and hearts you know that you have been instrumental in a life-changing part of their education.

Next steps? Why not contact Friends International to find out if you could help at a group near you: <https://friendsinternational.uk> Please contact JCL if you need help in getting started. Thank you for considering serving in this important way!

Ian MacLennan, JCL Director of Operations

Japan Weekend Conferences

The **next Japan Weekend Conference** is scheduled for **19th-21st July 2019** at All Nations Christian College (just north of London), where Pastor Akira Sato of Fukushima First Baptist Church will be our main speaker. The church endured a lengthy period of displacement following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami and the radiation problems they caused at the nearby Fukushima nuclear reactor. The church family has an amazing story of how God led them from place to place as refugees, provided for their needs and brought them to a deeper understanding of what it means to be brothers and sisters in Christ in Christian community.



Pray for Pastor Akira as he prepares for the conference; for the JCL team organising this weekend; and for others who will serve through leading workshops, playing music, sharing, etc. Please also **pray** for many interested in Japan to participate. *If you'd like to be sure of receiving more details when available, be sure to **contact us!** You can also check our website where details will be posted in due course.*

Please also **pray** for a cosy weekend **retreat for Japanese 'returnees'** (those who'll eventually be returning to Japan) during **21st-23rd June 2019** in the beautiful Staffordshire countryside.

This is being organised by Hiromi Soma and Alison Orr (of OMF) and will be suitable for both believers and other Japanese who are interested in studying the Bible but who may not yet have professed faith. Is this just the right thing for someone you know? *Please see our website for the flyer with more information.*

People News

Please continue praying for Mission Partners **Tim & Ai Williams**, as they consult, pray and prepare for beginning a new community of believers in Tokyo following their return to Japan in 2020. Ask the Lord to draw together a good team to work with Tim & Ai in this, and in particular for a vision weekend they are planning to be held in Japan during July 2019 for those potentially interested in being part of this team, both Japanese and others from outside Japan. They are also looking to the Lord for wisdom over the particular area of Tokyo on which to focus. Please join with them in prayer over this new venture.

Praise the Lord for a new baby daughter Emi Hope for Network Partners **Paul & Ruth Cooper**, and a little sister for Megumi and Hannah. Please continue praying for the family as they settle back into UK life and for Paul as he settles back into work at the London branch of his Japanese firm, where his job was based before moving to Japan 5 years ago.



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Thank you also for praying for Mission Partners **Richard & Yuko Brash** and thank the Lord that plans have now become clearer for them to move, Lord willing, to Nagoya in late 2020, where Richard will teach theology at Christ Bible Seminary to students preparing for pastoral and evangelistic ministries across Japan. Please **pray** for wisdom over plans for their children's education and over other outstanding matters.

Other Points

Japan plays host both to the **2019 Rugby World Cup** this autumn and to the **2020 Summer Olympics**. Ask the Lord to bring glory to himself through opportunities during these periods for both Japanese nationals and overseas visitors to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

JCL – Who are we?

Japan remains one of the world's least-reached nations, but we want to help change that. We were founded as the Japan Evangelistic Band (JEB) in 1903.

Since then, through God's grace, JEB's work has led to the establishment of over 150 churches and the Kansai Bible College in Japan. In 1999 the mission evolved into its current form, adopting the new name of Japan Christian Link. JEB work in Japan is now directed independently by our Japanese colleagues, supported by JCL missionaries as required, and we have partners elsewhere in Japan too.

JCL equips, mentors and encourages individual Christians in this country and in others to reach Japanese around them. Our partners and volunteers also share the gospel with Japanese through full-time church work, "tent-making" mission work or informally with friends and colleagues.

We are Interdenominational, with many of the main Christian traditions represented, and we are International, with workers from several different countries. We are also Inclusive, seeking to work with other organisations too. Our aim is to see a significant difference in the progress of the gospel among the Japanese people over the first half of this century. Find out more about JCL from our website at www.jclglobal.org

A Wonderful New Life

In our previous issue, we heard from JCL Mission Partner Katsutoshi Shimizu about the church he and others began in Sutton, south London. Praise the Lord that since then Junpei Morimoto has been the first convert at South London Japanese Church. Junpei has kindly contributed his testimony which he shared at his recent baptism.

I was born in Himeji in Hyogo prefecture. As is common in Japan, I grew up in a non-Christian family. Because both of my parents were busy working as teachers, my grandparents often took care of me when I was small. I remember my grandmother praying to a 'god' in front of a small Shinto altar in our home. Of course this was different from the true God in whom I now believe, but growing up in this environment helped me to accept the concepts of 'God' and 'prayer'.

When I was an elementary school student, I sometimes went to the Sunday service of a mission school which happened to be in front of my house. However, the only reasons I went were because my friends also went and because I wanted to enjoy the food! But when I eventually moved from that house, I drifted away from God.

I later spent six years at a Catholic boys' high school where I was taught by a Belgian priest and prayed the Lord's prayer every morning and night. I stopped praying when I graduated from high school, but seven years later when my company sent me to Belgium for a training programme, I was able to meet again with that same priest. I strongly felt that it was the work of God.



Mr. Morimoto with his Japanese Bible

However after the training was complete and I returned to Japan, I forgot about God yet again because I was so busy with my work as a currency trader in the midst of an economic bubble.

"Even now I feel everyday that I am experiencing a process of being changed and becoming new."

Twenty years have passed since then, and two and half years ago my company sent me to work here in London. Half a year before coming here, I visited a Protestant church in Ibaraki prefecture to attend the funeral of a very close senior colleague. As I attended the ceremony, I was very impressed by the way his family and the pastor were all singing hymns in a high-spirited manner even though they should have been in a great sorrow.

When I came to London, I met Naoko-san, who graduated at the same university and was working at same office. In September, I went to a Christian gathering called 'VIP Club' that she invited me to, and one of the members gave me a Bible issued by Gideon International. I thought I had seen it before, so when I got back home I looked at my bookshelf and found the same dark red Bible! I had hardly ever opened it since high school, and yet for some reason, I had brought it with me to London! I strongly felt that God was leading me and working in me.

Since then, I have been joining the Bible study, Sunday service and Alpha course led by Pastor Shimizu. During this time, one Sunday night in October, I felt a strong compulsion to pray because I was experiencing difficulty with human relations.

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."

Jeremiah 33:3



Mr. Morimoto being baptised by Katsutoshi Shimizu.

I felt a clear sense of relief from the pressure of my heart when I knelt down before God, confessed all of my sins, and promised to repent. It was a moment when I decided to live a new life by following God's lead.

I think my life has been completely transformed over these past three months. Even now I feel everyday that I am being changed and becoming new. For example, I am now trying to avoid alcohol, which I used to love and drink in excess. I found myself saying "thank you" more to my colleagues. I now always pray to God before going to bed... and so on. These changes may be small, but my close friends have noticed and told me that I am different from what I used to be, which makes me feel very happy. I know I have been committing countless sins and I firmly believe that we must repent of all these sins and live our lives in a holy way, because Jesus died on the cross for us, to redeem us from all of our sins. I have just recently finished the Alpha course and I know I still have many flaws even though I am a follower of Christ. However, along with the important step of getting baptised, I want to take the opportunity to renew my commitment to live a wonderful new life in step with the Holy Spirit.

Junpei Morimoto

"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

John 3:3

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