

Making a Joyful Noise to the Lord . . . and Sharing the Gospel

Dave and Heidi Skipper moved to Tokyo as JCL Network Partners back in September 2010. Both are musicians - Heidi a classical musician and Dave - well let's let him tell us more . . .

Heidi is a classically-trained violinist and music teacher from Finland, while I am an electronic/noise/rock musician with a degree in theoretical physics and a work background in finance. So how did we end up in Japan together?! We have both long had a passion to use our varied music gifts for God's glory, and Heidi also had a desire to work in overseas mission in some way. Through much thought, prayer, conversations and meeting the right people, God opened the way for us very clearly to come to Japan as music-missionaries. Our skills and desires make sense in Japan where music and the arts are very deeply valued, and where it is traditionally very hard for churches to connect to people in much of the culture around them. Our role is basically to explore the possibilities of being musicians here, forming relationships and friendships alongside Japanese where God opens those doors to us. At the same

time we are linking in with a number of Japanese churches so we can be a bridge between them and the music communities we are becoming part of.

Looking back: the first months

We arrived in Tokyo in September 2010, and during our first few months our priorities were settling in, language study, choosing our 'base' church, meeting various pastors to share our vision and starting to make other relevant connections. Our mission here (Japan Baptist Fellowship) were very supportive and helped our transition period to be very smooth.

The big earthquake came at a time when we had not long finished our language classes and were starting to get going with exploring music ministry ideas. It was a very strange few weeks immediately following the earthquake, with a very subdued and anxious atmosphere in Tokyo. We were then each able to join a trip north on music concert trips.

What does Heidi do?

Heidi has been actively involved in the Hallelujah Gospel Family, a network of over fifty gospel choirs which are connected to local churches in Tokyo and beyond. Most of the choir members who are part of the HGF network are not Christians - it's an incredible doorway for them to find community and hear the Gospel explained to them and sing about it, just because they enjoy the music and love to sing! Heidi has been leading both adult and kids' choirs; the latter she has been especially keen to develop. She recently heard that two women from one of her choirs started

continued overleaf



We had to stop advertising the mums and toddlers sing-along because it grew so rapidly

In this edition of JCL News

From two people to possibly Japan's largest Christian ministry in 6 months: CRASH Japan . . . 3

Survivors' stories: life after the tsunami . . . 4-5

From Exeter to Japan and back: Network Partner Joe Townsend's story . . . 6 & 8

attending the church Bible study, a great encouragement.

Heidi has also started a local mums & toddlers sing-along class which had to stop advertising because it grew so rapidly to over fifteen mums! They sing a mixture of English nursery songs and Christian children's songs, and have a short English story-time which is sometimes a Bible story. Great news is that some women from our church here (Tokorozawa Vineyard Christian Fellowship) have just committed to helping Heidi out with this, which is wonderful as Heidi has wanted to link the group more explicitly to church.

Aside from these activities Heidi also has ad hoc opportunities to use her music in such things as singing lessons, church music and worship, mini-concerts and so on. She is kept very busy the rest of the time looking after Kira, meeting up with Japanese friends (both Christian and non-Christian) to befriend and encourage them, and general everyday life, which currently includes being pregnant!

Family

Family-wise, Kira turned two in the summer and is in Japanese nursery 2-3 days a week, which she loves. She is full of joy and loves to sing and dance, and is doing very well with three languages on the go (Swedish from Heidi, English from me, Japanese at nursery). She is now also waiting for a little sibling, due next April. We are privileged to be able to see each other a lot as a family, and Heidi and I share childcare depending on each other's schedules, which vary from week to week.

What does Dave do?

As for me, my focus is connecting with Japanese musicians in the Tokyo underground (no, not the subway trains!). I am typically out three nights a week at various gig venues (in addition to meeting up with musicians at other times). One particular venue I go to every week. God has been very gracious in opening the right doors very easily for me to get to know a number of key musicians and venue staff involved in the Tokyo underground music scene. Experimental electronic music, noise music and avant-garde jazz: not your normal church musician territory! It has been great to be building friendships in this world that is untouched by the church, and to be



having some deeper conversations on such things as philosophy of music and noise, what the future holds for Japan, what visa I am on (Religious Activities!), children and divorce, and the interplay of music, healing and meditation.

Since coming to Japan I have been able to complete some CD studio recordings of my own original music, and giving these out has been a great way to connect with others. I am currently in the process of organising some music events/concerts at one of the top small underground venues (the one I go to every week), and my favourite musicians that I have met in Tokyo have agreed to perform at these. So I am greatly encouraged at

how God has enabled me to find and get stuck into my niche here.

I want to make an impact and see hearts transformed; however, it's not about my reputation but about being a friend and a servant, having time to spend with individuals and acting with generosity and integrity. May God bring his kingdom into these subcultures.

Looking ahead: our second year in Japan

The coming months consist of continuing to develop the above activities, navigating pregnancy and birth in a foreign country and seeking God's guidance for what we do next. Our current commitment is for two years here but we know we can do little more than lay foundations and scratch the surface in that time, so we are praying and are open to extending our time here.

Whether that will end up being for one more year or twenty we have no idea yet. We are also looking forward to visiting the UK and Finland sometime to spend time reconnecting with family, friends, church and supporters.

We certainly don't feel we are doing anything special or extraordinary here. We are just trying to follow the calling and gifts God has given to us, and it just so happens that he wants us to be using them on the other side of the world! God is in the business of liberating his whole creation from bondage to decay (Romans 8:21), so we are praying that through our music and relationships here he will demonstrate something of his grace and kingship and hope of new life to those who don't yet know him.

Dave Skipper

JCL Network Partner, Tokyo

Most of the choir members are not Christians - it's an incredible doorway for them to hear the gospel



Dave in action

Before the March earthquake and tsunami CRASH Japan (Christian Relief, Assistance, Support and Hope) consisted of a couple of people offering training in disaster response to Japanese churches. Now it is possibly the largest Christian ministry in Japan that is not a church. How did God raise up this unique ministry and equip it to respond when disaster struck on an unprecedented scale earlier this year? We interviewed CRASH founder and President Jonathan Wilson.

Jonathan , what brought you from the US to Japan?

Since the age of sixteen I wanted to be a missionary in Japan. Why Japan? - well I took seriously Paul's resolve not to build on someone else's foundation and wanted to take the gospel to somewhere people hadn't heard of Jesus. When I heard that less than 1% of Japanese were Christians that seemed to fit the bill! I came to Japan in 1989 when I was twenty two and started out working for a Japanese church. By 2001 my Japanese wife Rie and I had planted three churches in the Tokyo area and moved to Ome where we now serve at Grace Christian Fellowship. It was in 2005 that I started CRASH.



Jonathan Wilson

Photograph: Levi Valasco

the Holiness denomination, with whom we first worked in Niigata when one of their churches was damaged, has sent a steady stream of volunteer teams through CRASH to work with survivors.

Have there been particular challenges or encouragements in responding to this year's Tohoku disaster?

An obvious challenge has been the vast scope of this disaster and the need to be there for the entire region. Churches in Tohoku were overwhelmed, everyone was affected, and, as so many Christians went to help, churches then had to deal with the helpers. Some churches have responded readily to the invitation to active community relief work, others less so. Iwate prefecture has been a particular challenge since there are so few churches there - but this is also a great opportunity for the Church as we have seen many Christians come into the area. There is potential for new church plants in the future. The biggest challenge now is providing hope for all those facing a long, harsh Tohoku winter with so much uncertainty about their future. At

How did that come about?

It all started with an earthquake in Niigata prefecture. I felt the church should be responding to needs there but I saw few Christians actually doing anything. There seemed to be three main reasons for this - 1. A lack of information on where to go, what to do and whether it was safe. 2. A lack of training. When Japanese people do something they want to do it well. They feel that if they try to help but don't know how they may just get in the way, hence people would respond "but I don't want to be a nuisance" when I asked if they could help. That is why CRASH started to offer disaster response training for churches, specialising in emotional care. 3. A lack of leadership able to coordinate work on the ground. Other issues included the fact that churches in Japan tend to be small and often have an elderly congregation who see disaster response work as something for younger people. After an earthquake I would call Christians in the area and their response typically would be "thanks, we're fine" - that is, they either wanted me to go help other people whose need was greater than theirs, or simply had never thought about the opportunity for them to help others. I found it difficult to get churches to engage when they were not directly impacted such as by damage to the church building or church members.

The biggest challenge is providing hope for those facing uncertainty about their future

CRASH we want to send many more Christian volunteers there, and with them the hope of Christ. I see a real openness to the gospel now, it is easier to build

relationships and to move more quickly to talk about spiritual matters. The simple fact too of so many Christians volunteering to help others has been a great witness to their own communities. And for myself, receiving so much support from my fellow missionaries and from all over the world and having so many wonderful people volunteer their time to CRASH has been a great encouragement. Without this CRASH couldn't have done what it has - grown from a couple of people offering training to what is possibly now the largest Christian ministry in Japan.

What can we pray for?

Pray for God to continue to raise workers for us and for him to give strength to those who are weary or carrying heavy burdens - the needs are great. Thank you for lifting us up in prayer and for supporting your brothers and sisters in Christ in Japan.

Read more, volunteer or donate to CRASH's work at www.crashjapan.com



On 11 March Japan's strongest recorded earthquake literally rocked the nation, but it was the tsunami that followed that caused massive and widespread destruction - including to the Fukushima nuclear reactor situated on the coast. Millions watched their televisions helplessly as massive waves crashed in, taking lives and livelihoods with them. We have seen so many pictures of the destruction - destroyed homes, changed landscapes, deserted



Loss and Openness

“On the surface people seem OK, they are hanging in there. But inside there is stress, fear and uncertainty about the future. They are worried - about the nuclear reactor, their children, for elderly parents, over lost jobs and the struggling economy. Many were fishermen and lost their boats and livelihoods in the tsunami. Yes, they get supplies and can live, but thinking about the future is difficult. The problem at the nuclear reactor is still not solved and people in Fukushima don't know where they will live or whether they can go back. Their children can't play outside, they have to check radiation levels in the food and water and they don't trust the government. Everyday is just so tough.

One elderly man, when I asked him about the future, started to cry. “I never imagined this” he said. He had been a farmer all his life and it was all gone in one day. One of our volunteers was visiting survivors in a refuge and asked if he could take a picture of a family there. They were so appreciative of the result - they had lost their house, their furniture, computer and all of their family photographs - this was the only family photograph they now had. When people say they have lost everything it is hard for us to really understand what that means.

Japanese people do not normally share their innermost needs and feelings, but in Tohoku they are definitely more open and more willing to talk since the disaster. You don't hear them ask “why did God allow this?”. They may say “why did this happen to us” or “I never thought this would happen”, but God is not on their minds. But one local pastor told me that before the earthquake when he told people that he was a pastor they didn't want to know. However, since then he has been distributing relief supplies and he now says people want to listen and are open to his message. Another went to a refuge and shared the gospel with a man there - and he wanted to be baptised on the spot, so the pastor used a bottle of mineral water to baptise him! It is really unusual to get such an instant response, but I have heard several similar stories, like the pastor who talked to a survivor and asked how he was doing. They got chatting and the survivor asked him what he did. He explained that he was a pastor and this led to him sharing his testimony. After about two hours the person accepted Christ.

In Japan people are normally so busy day to day, but this disaster has taken their eyes away from everyday things and led them to think about life more. And for me personally, it has demonstrated the power of the community of believers. Fukushima First Baptist Church was near the nuclear reactor that was damaged and the community had to be evacuated. The pastor, Mr Sato, kept his church members together and led them as a group to a new temporary home in Tokyo so they had friends and community around them as they moved to the new area. They had each other, and plan eventually to move back to Fukushima together. When I see that, that's the power of the Church, the family of God, stronger than any other family - it's an awesome thing.”

Mitsuna (Matt) Nishioka, Navigators Japan, currently on loan to CRASH and a former volunteer in Tohoku

People are definitely more open and more willing to talk since the disaster

towns - and it is heartbreaking. And so much of the damage is unseen – to hearts and emotions. But did we, did any of us, imagine in those first hours as we watched the pictures that, because of this tragedy, thousands of Christians would travel to Tohoku, that Japanese churches would come together on an unprecedented scale, that millions would pray for Japan as never before? God knew. He even prepared people to go. Here are three of their stories.

The power of a hug

While volunteering in Ofunato, a hard-hit coastal city in Iwate prefecture, I had the privilege of working with a group at an evacuee shelter. After finishing, we sat and listened to some older women share their stories.

One woman spoke about running from the tsunami. Her voice quavered as she recalled the events. She said that Japan is an orderly society and that from early childhood all are taught to act as a group and wait for instructions. The one exception is the tsunami warning. When you hear the warning blasts, drop everything and run. Just run to the highest reachable ground. This woman did just that. She ran as far upwards as she could; only a few others had run as high as she. Most - her friends, family, and neighbors - stopped at the “safe centre” halfway up the mountain. She heard the ocean rumble and felt the winds become much stronger. She looked back to see the “great hand” of the tsunami pull the “safe centre” down into the waves.

We were hugging, laughing and crying - the cultural rules were thrown out of the window

Needless to say, all of us were crying with her. Across Japan, many are just now beginning to share their stories and

feelings. As we gathered our supplies and prepared to leave, the women started bowing. Somehow this seemed too formal. I felt the Holy Spirit nudge me into action: I took her in my arms and hugged her. Before I knew it, the whole room - all of us - were hugging and laughing and crying. These women had known each other for over fifty years, and this was the first time they had ever hugged their friends. The cultural rules were thrown out the window! I believe this is only the beginning.

A CRASH volunteer

You don't need to go to Tohoku

We asked Ramona Garnett of CRASH Tokyo HQ to tell us how she came to work at CRASH, but - “Can I tell you about this morning instead? I got on a train to come to CRASH around lunchtime and saw a Japanese woman who seemed to be looking at me strangely. I sat next to her anyway, and then suddenly wondered if I was on the right train so I asked her in Japanese “Does this train go to Higashi Kurume?” She replied “I don't know, I'm not from around here.” It turned out she was from Miyagi prefecture in Tohoku and had come to Tokyo because she had lost everything in the tsunami. Her house had been near the sea. She started weeping on the train and telling me about it all and how lonely she was in Tokyo, not knowing anyone there. That put things back in perspective for me. It reminded me why I'm doing this and that our daily gripes are not so important after all, and that you don't need to go to Tohoku to meet needy people.”

● *So keep praying for Japan, for the churches in Tohoku, for the many Christian volunteers serving there - including from JCL's sister organisation, the JEB, who have a long-term representative in Fukushima and have sent many volunteers to work there - and that many, many Japanese will come to faith this year and next.*



Joe Townsend, JCL's newest Network Partner

What led a PhD computing student in Exeter to a commitment to Japan and the Japanese, and how is God using him to raise up others to pray for and reach out to the Japanese?

Why Japan?

Greetings! My name is Joe Townsend. I am a 2nd year PhD student in Computing at the University of Exeter. My interest in Japan developed when I took modules in Japanese at University. In 2006 I attended a JCL conference and learned that Japan was a country with great spiritual needs and that, as a Christian with an interest in Japan, I had a responsibility to do something about these needs. This led me to work with JCL Network Partner Morien James at his English teaching school called 'Hello English' in Ibaraki prefecture in Japan for eight months in 2010. As a result of that experience my love for Japan and my understanding of its needs grew even further. When I left Japan, God put two goals on my heart. The first was to share my faith with Japanese people I meet whether in England, Japan, or elsewhere. The second was to raise awareness of Japan's spiritual needs among Christians in the UK.

Japanese in Exeter

My studies in Exeter provide me with many opportunities to meet and witness to Japanese students. Most of these come through the University's Japanese Society and through Friends International events. The number of Japanese attendees in each case is quite small, due partially to a relatively small number of Japanese students at the University, but there are other reasons too. The Japanese Society is largely attended by English students with an interest in all aspects of Japanese culture and this imbalance can be off-putting to potential Japanese members. I recently became the society's secretary and I hope to use my new position on the committee to make

as a Christian with an interest in Japan I had a responsibility to do something about Japan's spiritual needs

the society more appealing to Japanese students, so please pray that I am successful in this. The Friends International events are open to all

but are mostly attended by Chinese students. As wonderful as it is to be sharing our time and our faith with Chinese friends, the lack of balance can leave students from other countries feeling outnumbered. There are normally only a few Japanese attendees, if any. Please join me in praying that the number of Japanese attendees at Friends International and at the Japanese Society will grow and



Morien (far left), Joe (second left) and the short-term team

that I can meet new people to witness to outside of these events also.

Despite these small numbers, God never fails to introduce me to new Japanese students and I have been able to form close friendships with them. Occasionally I am able to bring some of these friends to evangelistic events and have some good conversations with them about the Gospel, but I always feel I could be making more effort in doing so. Pray that I would have more courage in my evangelism and that my evangelism would be fruitful!

Raising interest in mission

My other goal is to raise awareness of Japan's needs among fellow Christians in the UK by sharing my experiences with them, particularly with my fellow students. This may lead people to pray for Japan more, it may lead them to provide financial support to mission efforts or it may lead them to short or long term mission.

continued on back page

What's new?

Congratulations to JCL Mission Partner **Tim Williams** and to **Ai** (now Mrs Williams!) who were married in Tokyo in September. Several of us in the UK enjoyed seeing them together when they celebrated their engagement earlier in the year in London. Please pray for a great start to their new life together in Hiratsuka.



Also in September, a **short-term mission team** of five young students from Britain, led by JCL Network Partner Joe Townsend, spent three weeks in Japan with Network Partner Morien James, who runs a small Christian English language school in Ibaraki prefecture. Emma, George, Joanna, Joe and Tim were able to make a great contribution there through helping teach, doing impromptu concerts and making new connections (see page 6). Pray for Morien and fellow teacher Carel in Ibaraki as they follow up on these new relationships, that the Lord will use them in drawing some of these contacts into his kingdom.

Do you live or work in central London? If so why not join us at a monthly lunchtime prayer meeting at St Helen's Bishopsgate to support outreach to Japanese in London - details are posted on the JCL website at www.jclglobal.org - or at one of the VIP social events held every other month or so, normally near Piccadilly - again see the JCL website for details of forthcoming events.

Japan Weekend Conference 2012 - We plan to hold JCL's next Japan weekend conference from 7 -9 September



2012 at Cliff College, in Derbyshire. If you have not been to one of our conferences before, perhaps because the south seemed far away, this is your chance! It will be a great opportunity to hear what God is doing among Japanese today and to meet others interested in Japan or involved in ministry among Japanese. Cliff College is situated in the beautiful Peak District National Park, and has glorious views of the Derwent Valley, Curbar Gap and Baslow Edge. More details will follow in due course but meanwhile, please put these dates in your diary now!

Next year's **European Japanese Youth Retreat** is planned for 12-15th April 2012 in Milan. It is open to Japanese Christians aged up to around 40, as well as those who don't yet believe but are interested in Jesus - so spread the word to anyone you think may benefit! The Retreat language is Japanese and one of this time's aims is to help develop future leaders. Further details are available from JCL.

Earthquake response - We hope you find it helpful to read the various articles in this issue relating to the earthquake and tsunami in Japan last March. Thank you especially if you prayed for and supported our editor Sarah to go to Japan to help with CRASH Japan's relief efforts. The generous response meant she could be there for almost five months with all costs covered and with a sizeable surplus that we will be passing on to CRASH to support their continuing relief work. Thank you.

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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

Joe Townsend, JCL's newest Network Partner (continued from page 6)

Whatever people feel called to do, each one of these outcomes would be a valuable contribution to making Christ known in Japan.

A large part of achieving this goal was taking a small team of student volunteers with me back to Hello English School for three weeks this summer to help Morien and his other teacher, Carel. I was joined by four students for the three week period: George, Emma, Tim and Joanna in addition to Katie who was helping at the school for a longer period over the summer. As well as teaching, Tim, George and Joanna also spent three days in a fishing village called Kessenuma helping the Christian charity 'Samaritan's Purse' with tsunami relief efforts.

Our work provided us with many chances to share why we were in Japan and talk about the God who motivated us to be there. However, we found ourselves glorifying God not only through conversations but also through song! Shortly before we left for Japan, Morien decided to plan a concert to raise money for victims of the Tohoku earthquake and also to provide a chance to proclaim the gospel. Katie sang one song in Japanese, giving the audience a chance to witness praise in a language they could understand. What was even more exciting was a huge demand for repeat performances of concert pieces at kindergartens, at a party at Morien's house and again at church! The concert and its numerous repeat performances were an unexpected blessing which meant that many people could hear praises sung to God in both languages.



The concert was an unexpected blessing with huge demand for repeat performances!

Please join me in praying that the listeners will reflect on the words they heard spoken and sung, and find God through these reflections.

Furthermore, from talking to the team members it was very clear that my goal of helping them to understand Japan's needs and allowing God to plant a love for the country in their hearts was successful. George writes:

"Going to serve God in Japan for the first time was a very exciting experience for me. I had always wanted to go to Japan, but to be going also with a focus of telling the

Japanese people about Jesus made it even more exciting. The lack of interest and indifference to Christianity from the Japanese people was most evident. It was clear that the Evil One has been at work in this country for a long time with all the superstitions and rituals that are so prevalent. This surprised me in such a technologically advanced place.



However I was greatly encouraged by meeting some of the few Japanese Christians, especially at Koga Church. I was particularly encouraged by the warm fellowship I experienced there and by their optimism in their evangelism.

The tsunami relief work in Kessenuma was quite an experience. Although we were only there for three days, this was one of the most meaningful parts of my stay in Japan because it led people to think about why we were helping them, which provided a good opportunity for gospel chats with those who could speak English."

Where the team go with what they have experienced I leave for them to work out with God, but it was wonderful to see their understanding and love for Japan grow over the three weeks we spent there. Please pray that God will show them what to do with their experiences, and with the many other blessings he gave them on this trip.

Where to from here

For the time being I want to devote more time to my PhD and also to my Japanese outreach in Exeter. I will continue to share my love for Japan with other Christians, hoping to find supporters in our goal to glorify God's name among Japanese. I also plan to spend more time thinking and praying carefully about where God will take me in the long-term. My return to Japan has inspired me to consider working long-term as an English teacher in Japan after my PhD, so please pray that God will give me clarity on this matter.

Thank you so much to those of you who have prayed for my work so far. Please pray that by God's strength my aims will be met and will result in the building of God's church among Japanese people.

*Joe Townsend
JCL Network Partner, Exeter*