

Miracles of Grace

Reaching Japanese men is one of the greatest challenges for the Church in Japan. Many Christian women are married to non-Christian husbands who are devoted to their jobs and have time for little else. So how do you reach the men? Fortunately nothing is impossible for God, as one woman's story shows . . .

My name is Kazue Kuda. I'd like to tell you about how my husband Chosho became a Christian. Chosho is an expert in shipping instruments. He set up his own business and his skill is even in demand overseas. He has had much worldly success and has always been confident and proud of himself.

At the beginning of 2008 I was feeling a failure as a Christian, aware of my many faults and repeated sins. Chosho and I had been married for 31 years, but he

“I prayed for courage to talk to him about God” showed no interest in Christianity. Then one day in October I read Isaiah 43:18-19 where God says not to dwell on the past but he will

do something wonderful and new. I believed this was God's message to me. Then on 9 November the miracle began . . .

That day Chosho came to church for the first time in five years for the dedication of the Child Link building [see



Chosho and Kazue Kuda

article on page 2]. In the past Chosho had said he had faith in God but wasn't baptised and had not followed Jesus. He was happy with his life as it was. That day though, he stayed until late talking with the church members and on the way home said he'd felt very relaxed.

The following day Chosho was suddenly taken ill. He spent a week in hospital while they tried to diagnose his illness. Previously full of self confidence, he looked pale and his voice was hoarse. I resolved to pray hard for his salvation. I also prayed for courage and an opportunity to talk to him about God. The following day I told him I had something important to say and told him that he needed to turn to God. I said it didn't matter to me or the children if he were to leave us without money or possessions. All we really wanted was his salvation. He had to choose between heaven or hell.

Chosho's baptism



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The next day when I went to see him Chosho said he wanted to be baptised! He had been praying - "I thought God didn't exist but when I realised he did I was afraid" he said. Seeing my husband tearfully confessing how his

"Then the miracle began ..."

pride had kept him from God was so moving. He was baptised in hospital the next day and I can't explain it, but

we felt God's presence with us.

The change in the following days amazed me. Chosho, who had happily glossed over anything Christian before, started saying how wonderful Christianity was, started to pray and to read his Bible. The day he became a Christian he told the hospital nurse about it. Then, his face shining, he started telling his friends and neighbours. I was amazed at the change. The day he was discharged from hospital he

invited his work colleagues to dinner and told them that from now on he wanted to work to serve God and be a different person because he was a Christian. One colleague was so surprised he nearly choked on his tea!

Now my husband is a different person. He prays and reads his Bible each day. God never gave up on him. These days instead of me catching the bus to church alone each Sunday my husband drives the whole family there. Praise the Lord!

*Kazue Kuda,
Okinawa*

Mrs Kuda's testimony, in Japanese, is available in full on our website at www.jclglobal.org If you know Japanese women in similar situations, why not encourage them to read it and be inspired by what God can do?

The Kudas attend Nago Chapel, led by JCL Mission Partners Shuko and Michiko Tano. You may remember reading about Café Link - a coffee shop they set up in the church to help connect them with the local community. Now the Tanos are embarking on two more ground-breaking projects - Child Link and Silver Link. Michiko tells us more:

It's nearly seven years since we planted the church and started evangelism here in Nago. In that time we've seen how hard it is for adults to recognise themselves as sinners and change their lives, even once they become Christians. We've really felt the need to reach people at an early age, even as babies, feeding them with the word of God and immersing them in prayer and worship. We believe God is calling us to provide such a place where young children can be surrounded by an environment of praise and prayer. The result is the Child Link nursery project!

To give you a bit of background, Japan's birth rate is very low and the government is trying to make it easier for women to combine a career with having children by funding more nurseries. Okinawa has a higher birth rate

than the mainland, but the lowest per capita income in Japan, so both husband and wife often work and lots of children are waiting for nursery places. So we plan to open the Child Link nursery. We already have the building ready and are applying for official recognition to



Shuko and Michiko Tano outside their church

qualify for tax concessions. I have passed the exams to qualify as a nursery nurse. The pass rate is low - only around ten percent pass, so that was a miracle in itself! Three other people at church also hold nursery qualifications so we have a staff ready. We'll use the building as a nursery during the week and for Sunday school at weekends.

Meanwhile, we are starting to work on Silver Link. Our vision here is for a place near the church where old and young people will be able to gather and meet, brought together by the love of Jesus. We already have the land for this and hope it will be a visible witness to the community. Please pray for these projects, that through them the church will become part of the community and the community be drawn to Jesus.

*Michiko Tano
JCL Mission Partner, Okinawa*



Child Link building, the vision starts to take shape

Japan's recession, the real cost . . . and gain?

Japan's exports drop 46% (BBC)

Toyota in 11-day factory shutdown (The Guardian)

Japan Trade Deficit worst on record (Japan Times)

Japan is in recession - you can't miss it. We look at how recession impacts in Japan, whether there is any good news amidst the gloom and hear from people who are affected.



Closed gates at the Toyota factory

Japanese companies often employ a mix of permanent and temporary workers. The former enjoy job security, good salaries and other benefits. They are often sheltered from recession. What is striking about this downturn though is that even many of these workers are being affected. Salaries are being cut and some white collar workers fear for their jobs. Some companies have put employees on three day weekends. Even Toyota, a star of the Japanese economy over recent years, has been closing domestic factories for days at a time.

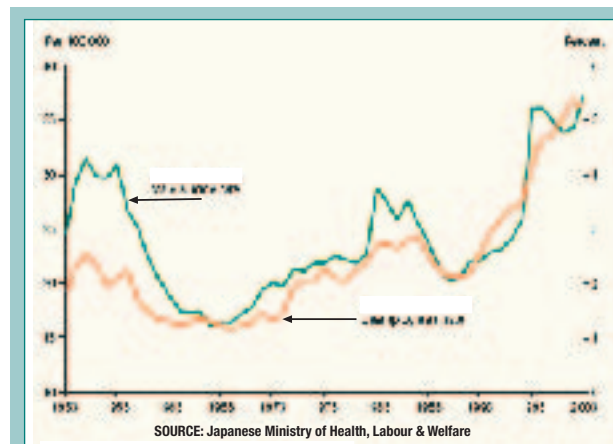
The real victims though are the temporary workers. Employers often let these go first, protecting their permanent workers - Toyota is laying off 3,000. Tragically these are the very people who depend most on their jobs for survival. They include construction and other casual workers who are taken on for as little as a day at a time. While they are in work their employer may provide dormitory accommodation, but if the job goes the accommodation goes with it and they can find themselves sleeping on the streets very quickly. Hiroshi (name changed) is in this situation. His life alternates between stays in the dormitory and sleeping on the streets. Like many others, he lacks a family home to return to due

either to bad relationships, distance or simply having few relatives.

The huge psychological impact of recession on ordinary Japanese is illustrated all too clearly by the male suicide rate which closely mirrors the unemployment rate (see diagram). The suicide rate will probably rise sharply, and Japan's rate is already distressingly high.

Churches are responding with food handouts in big cities, a quiet witness to the homeless that is overlooked

by many Japanese who do not expect religious organisations to give material help. Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines are normally seen as places where donations are made rather than received, and churches as places for ceremonies like weddings. But the fact that the Church is there and is open to people who feel rejected by society has a big impact. *"The people we meet who are in these dire straits are often at their lowest ebb, and so are all ears to the*



Male suicide and Unemployment rates

good news of Jesus that we bring" says Mission Partner Dawn Bolton, who works at the Mission Hall in Kobe.

Even those not in such dire straits seem to be more open to the gospel these days. Yuki (name changed), whose husband works for an automotive company, says he has started to listen to her when she talks about faith now that things are hard at work.

So there are opportunities, but there are also challenges for the Church. Personal concerns could cause Christians to become inward-looking just when the Church needs to be reaching out. Also, although desperate people may welcome the gospel, helping them work out faith in their lives is challenging. *"It's tough when they are still living in the same environment, subject to the same temptations - and don't see instant deliverance from the things that made them miserable... A lot of prayer is needed!"* says Dawn.



A homeless man with his possessions in Nagoya

So please pray for Japan. Pray for open hearts, compassionate Christians and new life for people in despair.

JCL Network Partners - Who are

Lecturing on transportation networks, planting churches and fostering church growth are among the varied activities of the JCL Network Partners featured in this final article of our series on Network Partners. First we hear from Jan-Dirk Schmöcker. He and his wife Ayako live in Tokyo:

Could you introduce yourself and what you are doing in Japan?

I work as a Visiting Associate Professor in Civil Engineering on transportation network research at Tokyo Institute of Technology. I am German, my wife Ayako is Japanese and we have a baby daughter Yuriko.

Have you noticed any differences between life in the academic worlds in Europe and Japan?

Two things are strikingly different: firstly, the love of meetings on every issue. Whereas in London we would rarely have staff meetings, here almost everything is discussed with all faculty members. For a European this feels like a waste of time as the majority of issues only concern a few of those present. For example, last week students presented their final theses and all staff had to hear all sixty-four presentations, regardless of whether or not they were in their area of expertise. I start to understand why people work such long hours here! My personal interpretation of all these meetings is a desire that responsibility be shared by everyone.

Secondly, students show greater respect for their teachers and hierarchy in general. Whilst this is nice, it also makes it difficult to establish close relationships. Some of the senior students are only a few years younger than me but address me as "Professor Schmöcker" rather than by my first name. There are positive aspects though. Senior professors are seen as "fathers" and fellow students as brothers and sisters whom one must help, bringing a spirit of cooperation which is sometimes missing in British universities.

Is there a difference in how people perceive Christianity in Japan compared with Europe? How does this affect sharing the gospel with them?



Jan-Dirk, Ayako and their daughter Yuriko

Ayako and I discuss this quite often. We think Japanese see Christianity as a cosy, joyful religion with nice church buildings. So saying you go to church regularly does not make people look down on you. The difficulty lies in explaining that it is not just a tradition but a personal faith. The concept of personal faith is difficult to explain. Often Japanese follow social norms and authority rather than personal desires. There have been bad experiences with

Japanese cults and Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Moonies are also very active here, so there is a fear of "non-traditional" churches. There is a sign on the door of the room we use for our university Bible study - "No sects"!

Is there anything that strikes you as different or interesting about church life in Japan?

"The concept of personal faith is hard to explain. Japanese follow social norms rather than personal desires"

As in university life, there is an enormous respect for the minister and little open discussion. People can be unwilling to question the pastor. I think this helps explain how sects form here: if the

leadership goes wrong it is difficult for members to oppose and correct it. We are impressed by people's commitment to church activities though.

How can people support you in prayer?

Pray that we don't become too critical or even arrogant in our thinking about authority and social pressures but that we keep a "child-like" aspect to our faith. I strongly believe that this is exactly the mystery of being a Christian - personal belief consisting of logical thinking and child-like faith. Please pray also that we become more effective in our outreach to friends and Ayako's family, for the monthly evangelistic English Bible study in Shizuoka I help with, and for us to find the right role in our church.

they and what do they do?

Akio and Noriko Kawamura spent fifteen years in the UK and Germany as JCL Mission Partners. They returned to Japan in 2006 and have been leading Shonandai Christ Church in Fujisawa since then. Their experience there is typical of some of the challenges faced by churches in Japan.

Could you tell us about the church in Fujisawa?

The church has been here, near the train station, for 35 years. Before our arrival, the church had been without a pastor for six years, and the accommodation was cramped. The congregation comprised five women aged over sixty, one of whom could not manage the stairs up to the church. We believe God sent us here to give the church a fresh start. We decided we needed a meeting place with a small community centre attached that anyone could use so we moved to a bigger building. In future, we'd like to move away from the station area, where there are already other churches, to an area where there are no churches in order to sow the gospel there.

What do you think are the challenges setting up a church in Japan compared with Europe?

In Europe we had no problem finding suitable premises. We were able to use church buildings free of charge. In Japan there are far fewer churches or suitable buildings available - you have to start from scratch.



The Kawamuras and American missionaries Mr and Mrs Carlson

What would you like people to pray for?

Our church group has agreed that we sell our current premises over the next two years. Please pray that we'll be led to the right new premises. Land prices are falling but it's still not cheap. Noriko has qualified as a pastor and will become lead pastor at the church from April, supported by Akio and two American missionaries. Pray this would work well and that many people would come to faith.

Jim and Kayo Davies are planting a new church in Kobe. Getting the message out is challenging, especially when Jehovah's Witnesses are also active . . .

Could you introduce yourselves?

We are Jim, Kayo and Max Davies. Kayo is Japanese, Jim is from the UK and Max was made in Japan! We live in the western suburbs of Kobe where we started a Sunday School in 2005 after a couple of years getting acquainted with people. We also run a small English school and are pioneering a church group, the only one in the district. We were sent here as missionaries by the Elim church.

I understand the church celebrated its first baptism last year. Could you tell us about that?



Kiyomi became a Christian in April and was baptised in October. She had been in contact with a group of Japanese believers for some time before becoming one of our English students. She attended worship for about a year before making a commitment to Christ after watching the 'Jesus' video. She is definitely growing as a Christian and seeking fullness of life in the Spirit.

What advice would you give to others involved in ministry to Japanese?

That's a tough one as people's circumstances vary greatly, but I would say avoid taking money from non-Christian Japanese in order to be markedly different from what the cults might be doing, and don't get too hung up on 'cultural barriers' to the gospel - God's Spirit penetrates all.

Are there any challenges you would like people to pray for?

We would like everyone living within ten minutes of our home to know about our activities. Jehovah's Witnesses do excessive 'door to door' work here. People are used to being visited and have developed ways of dealing with it, but it muddies the water for us. We have set up a website and started advertising in a local directory - pray that God would direct people's attention to these. Pray for Max and his spiritual life and for us to have wisdom in raising him.

Reaching Families in Finchley - an Update from Rebekah

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). Last year was a difficult one - notably grappling with the Home Office over the immigration status of our young son Michael, adopted in Korea. But God has used these difficulties in our lives and continues to bless our ministry among Japanese in north London.



Japanese men's Bible Study

Many Japanese families live here. One of the most exciting and challenging developments has been the start

of Japanese men's Bible studies at our house on Saturday evenings. We started small with my husband Mark and our friend Rob meeting with just one Japanese, Mr Ueno. Engaging with Japanese men is tough and we had a difficult time persuading others to join in. However, our prayers were answered in July when a couple of others joined and we now have two small groups meeting! Please pray for these men, especially for Takeshi, who is really beginning to open his heart to God.

As well as Bible studies for Japanese women, I support English classes for them. One woman, Ayako, has joined my Bible study group and now comes to church each week. Japanese outreach can seem hard work and it takes a long time for people to respond, but we were so encouraged when, in spite of incessant rain, about one hundred people came to our Japanese Christmas party and heard about Jesus.

Please continue to pray for our ministry here to be fruitful and also for a settled year for our family after all the challenges of last year.

*Rebekah Hwang
JCL Mission Partner, Finchley*

Taking up the baton: building on foundations laid by missionaries in Japan - in Brussels

It's often noted that it takes a long time for Japanese to understand and be convinced by Christianity. Olwen Gosden can testify to that. Olwen is related by marriage to former JEB missionaries Eric and Ray Gosden and lives in Brussels, where she has run English Bible studies for non-Christian Japanese women for the last few years - as she tells us here.

I meet with Japanese women in my house once a week. Often we sing Bible verses, which we've set to well-known tunes, and some of the women say the songs stay in their minds throughout the week. We might pray, or share answered prayer. Then we split into three study groups according to language ability. At the moment these groups are small because last year some ladies returned to Japan. Please pray for newcomers to find us.

Some of the women attended English lessons and Bible studies given by missionaries in Japan when they were teenagers. This was such a positive experience that they jumped at our offer. They still aren't Christians, but each conversation, each question, brings them a step closer. It's part of the process.

We've discovered it works well to have a social day each month. We'll meet in a café for conversation, have a speaker and question time, or do a seasonal craft activity. This February we had a study about Shrove Tuesday, then ate pancakes together.

In March we're trying something completely different. 3 March is the Hina Matsuri girls' festival in Japan. We've asked the women to bring photos of their daughters and decorative Japanese Hina dolls. We'll talk about these. I'll pass round a few lines of prayer taken from scripture. We'll pray this aloud for our daughters. Then, because we ourselves are daughters, we'll pray the same prayers for ourselves so the ladies will hear the same prayers two or

three times. If this works, we can do the same thing on the boys' festival on 5 May!

God has provided good leaders and we trust him to send us Japanese ladies that he is calling to himself. I am constantly aware of JEB missionaries who went out to Japan, prayed selflessly and sometimes saw little result



Olwen meets regularly with Japanese women in Brussels

from their labours. I pray that the seeds they sowed will bear fruit in this generation. One day we will rejoice together, as promised in the Bible!

*Olwen Gosden,
Brussels*

News in Brief

JCL Weekend Conference, 17-19 July 2009 A great chance to meet those involved in ministry to Japanese here in the UK as well as in Japan, and to hear what God is doing among Japanese people today. Learn more about sharing your faith with your own Japanese friends and contacts. If you are interested in Japan or in outreach to Japanese people, then this conference is for you! Around a quarter of those who attend are Japanese and some sessions will be available in Japanese. For more details please contact us at info@jclglobal.org or telephone 01732 455453. This year's conference is at Redcliffe College in the beautiful cathedral city of Gloucester and is easily accessible by public transport. Registration takes place in May.



Calling all Japanophiles - could you help enthuse others in your church about

Japan? We are looking for more volunteers to speak about Japan and JCL at their home church, or even at other churches nearby. If you have the enthusiasm and desire to see other people mobilised to pray and support outreach to the Japanese we will support you with training and materials. This would not be an onerous task and would involve as much or as little work as you wanted. Contact us at info@jclglobal.org or telephone 01732 455453 to find out more. We'd love to hear from you!

Give 28% more to JCL without paying a penny If you are a UK tax payer, simply signing a gift aid declaration, like the one at the end of the enclosed form, means we can reclaim tax you have already paid at no cost to you, increasing the value of your gift by 28%. For example, if you donated £100 to JCL, we would receive £128. If you have not already signed a gift aid declaration, why not do so now, using the enclosed form and envelope - and make your giving achieve more. Even if you are not currently giving to JCL but have done in the past, we can reclaim tax on your past gifts going back 6 years. So don't miss the chance to give the government the privilege of contributing to God's work among Japanese!

"Reaching East Asians in the UK - Capture your Greatest Mission Opportunity"

JCL will be taking part in the above one-day forum at Redcliffe College, Gloucester on 10 June looking at how we can reach East Asians in the UK and focussing particularly on Japanese, Chinese and Koreans. Participants will consider how we can reach these specific people groups and how mission organisations, local churches and individuals can work together to see East Asians come to Christ. If you are interested in attending please contact us at info@jclglobal.org or telephone 01732 455453.

Thank you if you were one of those who responded to the need presented in our autumn magazine for people to partner with us financially to help bring the gospel to more Japanese. Your response was an encouraging start toward meeting that need. We continue to look to the Lord for provision, in particular for more people who can commit to giving regularly.

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JCL - Who are we?

We were founded as the Japan Evangelistic Band (or 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 caught a renewed vision and evolved into its current shape, adopting the new name of Japan Christian Link. The work in Japan is now directed independently by our Japanese colleagues, supported by JCL missionaries as required. From the UK we are both supporting the work in Japan and building our outreach to overseas Japanese. We are **interdenominational**, with many of the main Christian traditions represented, and we are also **inclusive**, seeking to work with other missions as well as working on our own. Our work is carried out by a mixture of full-time missionaries and part-time volunteers. *We want to help make a significant difference in the progress of the gospel among the Japanese people over the first half of this century.* We will seek to do this through educating, encouraging and equipping the Body of Christ, through a network of relationships so that, more and more, the good news of Jesus Christ will be proclaimed clearly, and disciples of Jesus Christ multiplied among the Japanese people, for His glory. (Matthew 28: 19-20)

Prison Chaplain to Japan's Mafia

Hugh Brown never dreamed he would become a prison chaplain, much less one in Japan. But he now serves the 1,800 inmates and the staff of Kobe prison - a rare foreign, and Christian, presence in a Japanese prison.

I was a twenty-year old prisoner in Northern Ireland's Maze prison when I became a Christian and never imagined I would become a prison chaplain. But when, after my release, God led me to Japan as a missionary, I found prisons, remand centres and juvenile reform schools all over Japan asking me to come and talk to them. The Ministry of Justice even ordered that a TV



Hugh talks with a prisoner Prisoners going to their meal programme featuring my testimony as an ex-prisoner should be shown in every correctional institution throughout Japan!

So I am now a chaplain at Kobe prison. All Japanese prisons have chaplains, but the vast majority of them are Buddhist. Kobe is one of the strictest prisons in Japan. All those sent here have either been convicted of multiple offences or are members of the Yakuza (the Japanese mafia). "These men will never change so don't expect any results" was the prison officers' advice when I arrived. But I knew God had sent me



Hugh presents a Bible to a prison guard

there. I admit I was surprised though when the first man to be saved was not a prisoner, but a prison officer who monitored my meetings with prisoners! He is now a

"Many regard being a Christian as un-Japanese."

member of the church I pastor. Extremely few prison officers are Christians. Many consider it incompatible with their

position as civil servants and regard being a Christian as un-Japanese.

I have a very good relationship with the officers now, but strict regulations can make things difficult at times. The emphasis is on punishment rather than rehabilitation and prisoners may have to wait a long time before they are allowed to see me. Nevertheless, God has so clearly been working in this prison.

One of the rules here is that chaplains are not allowed to contact prisoners after their release, so I often don't see how things turn out. But sometimes God allows me

glimpses into individual cases, like Mr Mori, a former member of the Yakuza who had come to my meetings in prison. We prayed together just before his release and he told me with tears in his eyes that he intended to follow Christ. I heard nothing for three years, but continued praying, until recently a pastor in another part of Japan invited me to speak at church, saying a member of the congregation had heard me speak in prison and was preparing for baptism. I immediately knew it was Mr Mori. It will be a joyful reunion when we meet in April.

Another incident happened the other day when I went to a local barber's for a haircut. It was my first time there. Next to me a man was having his hair washed. When he heard me speak he looked up and said "Brown sensei!" – Brown sensei (teacher) is what I'm called in the prison. He had come to my prison meetings and was still continuing to go to church.

There has been a striking rise in the number of foreign prisoners in Kobe, from around ten to around one hundred of the 1,800 inmates. My prison church services are now

international, although conducted in Japanese. One wonderful moment was the salvation of an Iranian Muslim who often asked questions about the Bible. I don't normally baptise prisoners, encouraging them rather to wait until they join a church. But I made an exception for him, baptising him just before his release, as he was likely to

be deported to Iran. He was determined to witness to his family there, no matter what the cost.

Violent crime is rising here and doors are being opened all over Japan for me to speak. Violence in prisons was



Kobe prison

In the chaplain's interview room

highlighted when a prisoner in Nagoya was murdered by officers, and I have also been asked to help with prison reform, which will take years. Please pray that God's purposes for this ministry will be fulfilled to his glory.

*Hugh Brown
JCL Mission Partner, Kobe*