

## The Power of Prayer and Perseverance

**It is fourteen years now since JCL Network Partner Morien James and his wife Yoko set up Hello English School in Ibaraki, Japan. Morien wants his students to learn good English, but, even more, he wants them to know about Jesus.**

We teach English at six kindergartens and five of our own classrooms in the Koga area in Ibaraki about an hour north of Tokyo. In a nutshell we seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ, make disciples and see God's church grow amongst the people we meet through teaching English. Often as a Christian in Japan it seems you have to wait a long time for anything to happen, but recently I have been reminded of the power of prayer as I've seen God bless us here.

**Firstly with Property.** We had long prayed for a larger house as living in a house where our four sons shared one bedroom and with a backyard that was literally a yard was a real challenge. We'd also started a Tuesday Bible Club but had no room to meet at home. Then Yoko saw a massive house which would be perfect. We couldn't afford it, but a series of events led to a big price reduction and now it is home! Each week ten children gather here for our Bible Club.

**Secondly - Personnel.** We prayed for ten years for a long-term teaching partner. It wasn't until January 2008 that



*Our English Bible study group (Morien far right)*

Simon Clark arrived, straight from university, and he has been a great co-worker and source of encouragement.

Thinking about Simon I realise that God heard our prayer at the beginning but Simon was about ten at the time and it took ten years for him to get here! In terms of co-workers we have been greatly blessed this year. In January Joe Townsend arrived on a gap year and has put his computer skills to work producing an excellent DVD of our concert in February and creating our school website.

Then in April Peter Learmonth, again on a gap year, arrived. It has been a time of great blessing and fellowship.

**Thirdly - "Ploughing and Sowing"** the Word. We discovered the manga (Japanese style comic book) Bible a few years back and used it as a present for Bible Club kids. They loved it so we began giving it out to English students,

**God heard our prayer at the beginning**



*Joe and Simon in action*

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who devour them and are always keen to get the next volume. It has led to an interesting discipline problem, “Stop reading the Bible in class!” Now we give them out at the end of class!

**Fourthly - Privileged** – this is what I feel to be living in this rural community. I’ve recently been asked to serve at neighbourhood funerals which take two days and give many opportunities for conversation and deepening relationships. I pray that through these God would open doors for the gospel and further his Kingdom. Our garage has also become a meeting point for school students. They play table tennis, work out and hang out. We are praying about starting a Bible time for them.

**Finally – some Prayer Points.** Please pray for new teachers to join us. Joe and Peter have completed their gap



*Hanging out in the garage!*

years and Simon leaves to get married next year. See our website [www.helloenglishschool.com](http://www.helloenglishschool.com) or contact JCL for more information on the school. Pray too for perseverance as perhaps the hardest thing about serving God in Japan is being surrounded by such excellent people who find it so hard to understand their own personal sin and need of forgiveness and salvation.

**An interesting discipline problem - “Stop reading the Bible in Class!”**

I’ve taught one class for fourteen years but still without any obvious response. Pray also for our English Bible study group, including Michi, Miyuki, Daijiro and Sayaka, that our lives might be changed and God glorified.

*Morien James*

*JCL Network Partner, Ibaraki*



*Too much Bible reading in class!*

## Where there’s a will . . .

A few years ago JCL had a problem. Receipts for the year were well below what was needed to cover expenditure and there was no foreseeable way to make up the difference. But God had already provided. He had moved one woman to leave a substantial gift to JCL in her will and that money amply supplied what was needed at just the right moment. We will have to wait until heaven to thank her, but her legacy has continued to help win more Japanese for Jesus even though she is no longer with us.

Legacies leave a lasting impression, sometimes even a tangible one. For instance, a local church in Sevenoaks wanted to use a bequest from a member to provide something that would serve as a permanent memorial of the person. Now each Sunday many people enter the church through the attractive glass doors they were able to install as a result of this woman’s forethought in remembering the church in her will.

Often legacies represent the joy a person experienced in their lifetime. One Christian organisation learned of a substantial gift from a lady who wanted to express her

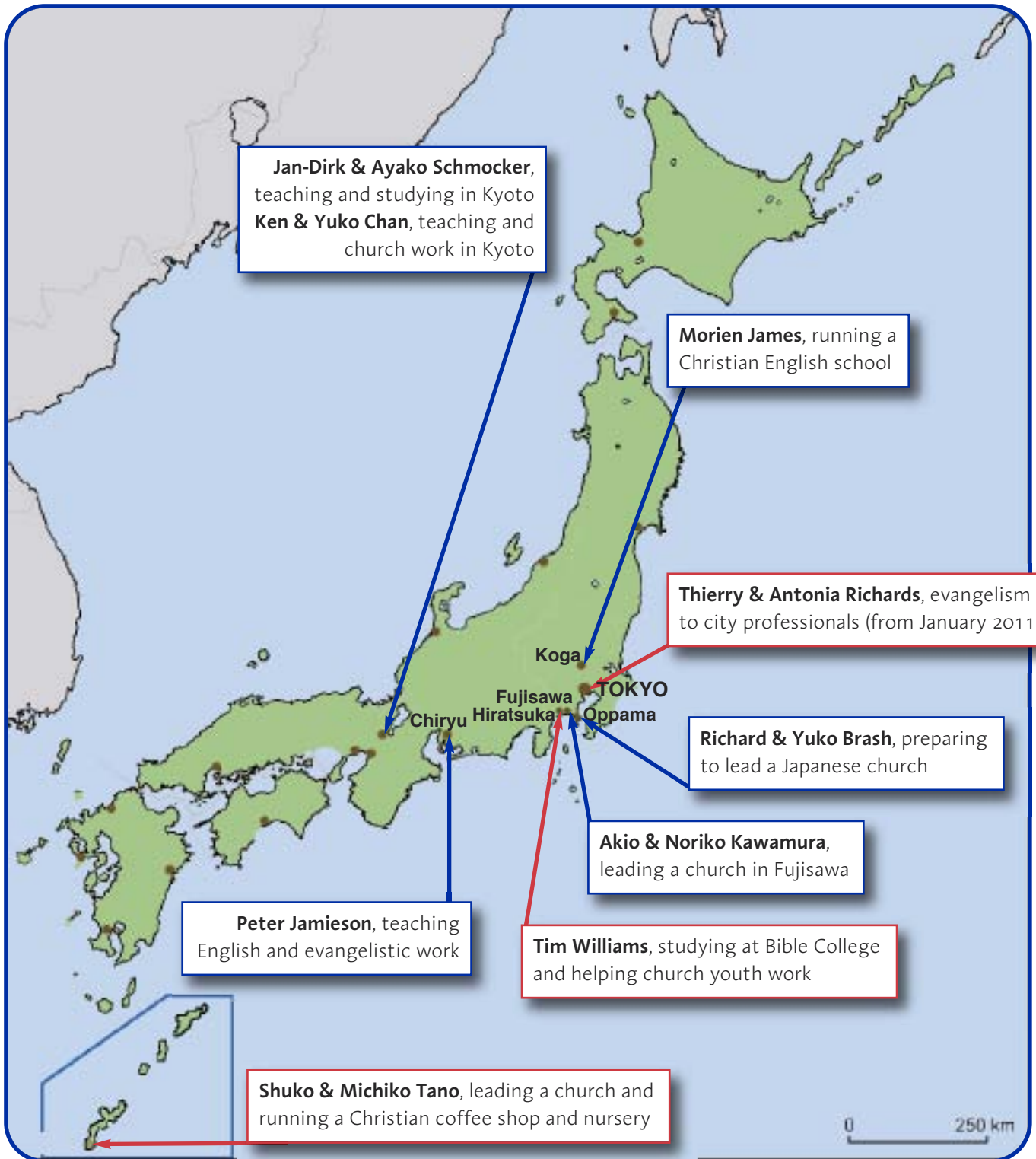
appreciation for Christian events they organised that she had enjoyed going to for many years. They can also be a mark of support for a cause which was important to the person, as is often the case with those who leave gifts to JCL. Sometimes individuals are moved to support a particular aspect of a ministry which may have been special to them. For instance one organisation has received gifts specifically to help their mission hospitality fund which makes it possible for some missionaries to attend their conventions.

Whatever the reason, leaving a gift in your will is easy. A simple codicil can be added to existing wills and, where no will exists, it is a good idea to draw one up anyway, with the advice of a solicitor, as this can save problems in dividing the estate later. Gifts to charities also help to reduce inheritance tax payable on an estate since money left to charities is deducted before tax liability is assessed.

Could a gift in your will be one way in which God is calling you to help build his kingdom among the Japanese?

# JCL Partners in Japan

The number of JCL Partners in Japan has been growing over the last few years - praise the Lord! - so we thought it might be useful to include this map showing where they all are to help you as you read about and pray for them. Thank you for your prayers!



# Obstacles to the spread of the Gospel in Japan - an historical perspective

Despite the work of many missionaries over many years fewer than 0.5% of Japanese are thought to be evangelical Christians. Why is this? Part of the answer lies in the history of Christianity in Japan. Here, John Cooke explores this, along with some of the human factors which have also hindered the spread of the gospel in Japan.

Christianity first reached Japan in 1549 through Jesuit missionaries who settled in Kyushu. The new religion was spread throughout Japan, mainly by national Japanese who gave it a “native face”. The missionaries’ strategy was to influence the powerful daimyo rulers, expecting that Christianity would then filter down to the commoners: indeed, when daimyos converted to the new faith, there was usually a large increase in the number of believers in their domains. So within some thirty years there were about 150,000 Christians in a population of 12.25 million (a little over 1%).

The Jesuits were soon followed by Spanish Mendicant orders, and later by Dutch Protestant missionaries. Intense rivalry spread among these groups and the Protestants engaged in negative campaigning against the Catholics.

In 1587 Toyotomi Hideyoshi was told by a shipwrecked Spanish sea captain that the missionaries were really in Japan to prepare her for foreign conquest. He began to fear this “foreign” religion. Successive rulers of the Tokugawa

Shogunate dynasty (1603-1868) also saw Christianity as a political threat and tried to stamp it out. They forced all Japanese to

## Those who refused to recant were executed

register at Buddhist temples, and closed the country to foreigners. Missionaries were expelled or executed on the grounds that their converts contravened government regulations and spoke ill of Shinto. In 1614 Tokugawa Ieyasu banned Christianity and made Japanese suspected of being Christians disown their faith by trampling images of Christ or the Virgin Mary. About 5,000 Christians went underground rather than deny their faith. Those who refused to recant were executed, often by crucifixion or drowning.

In 1853 Commodore Perry of the US navy sailed into Yokohama harbour and forced some reopening of the country to foreign trade. Emperor Meiji introduced measures under the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to bring about political and religious reform, and foreign missionaries re-entered Japan. His military rulers continued to support Shinto though, which taught devotion to the



*The execution of some early Christian martyrs*

pantheon of national gods, group loyalty to family and nation, and the divine status of the emperor. Meiji’s welcome of foreigners resulted in an initial welcome of western civilisation, but later a reaction set in against wholesale westernisation and the “foreign” religion that accompanied it. By 1900, once again it is estimated that a mere 1% of the population were Christian.

After the end of World War II the new Japanese constitution abolished the emperor’s divine status, and also reintroduced religious freedom. Numerous western missionaries came to work in Japan. Their efforts, particularly in the social sphere, won considerable respect. Yet, at the turn of the 21st century, still fewer than 1% of the population were Christians (64% Protestants, 32% Catholics).

## Could one really love both Japan and Jesus?

Some human factors (political, national, and religious) have militated against a ready reception of the gospel in Japan -

**Political:** When Japan reopened its country after the Meiji Restoration, western diplomats enacted unequal treaties with Japan, in which westerners had superior rights of residence, terms of trade, and freedom from Japanese law – rights denied to Japanese living abroad. These treaties were seen as a humiliation and threat to the nation, exacerbating the resistance to things foreign (including the foreigners’ religion).

**National:** The traditional Japanese norm of communality, with its duty of group coherence and identity, seemed incompatible with Christian teaching of individual salvation. The Japanese philosopher Tetsujiro claimed in 1881 that Christianity undermined the nationalist love and loyalty to the country and preached disloyalty to the state. Could one really love both Japan and Jesus? Social pressure from family, co-workers, bosses and other peer groups still results in criticism and ostracism of Christians.

**Religious:** The long history of Shinto and Buddhism in Japan contributes to a feeling of cultural uniqueness, which hinders the Japanese from embracing Christianity. The attitude of many Japanese towards Christianity can be summed up in the words of a Japanese lady in the late nineteenth century: "You can put your god over there next to our other gods. And if we think your god might be



*Japanese Christians were made to renounce their faith by trampling images of Christ underfoot*

useful, we'll adopt that god too – but only after we've transformed it into something quintessentially Japanese". Native traditions conflict with Christian beliefs: Japanese have less of a sense of personal sin, or a clear distinction between right and wrong. Many see Christianity as having too many strict rules.

Finally, the abundance of Christian denominations in Japan, and the hostility between some of them, is a drawback. There are so many sects that new converts are confused as to which to belong to, or as to what are really the essentials of Christian faith.

**I hope that this brief look at the some of the historical obstacles to the spread of the gospel in Japan will be useful to anyone sharing the gospel with Japanese or praying for Japan.**

*John Cooke,  
JCL Council Member, Salisbury*

## The last year has been a time of change and progress for Mission Partner Rebekah Hwang in Finchley - much of it exciting answers to prayer

**This year has seen many changes, including some very welcome ones. My husband Mark and son Michael were at last given permanent leave to remain in the UK and Michael has just started school! We also moved to a new home earlier this year and have settled in well. I was sad though to have to say goodbye to Takako and Mayumi, dear friends who came to my Japanese Bible studies, as they moved overseas.**



*After our first new Japanese monthly service*

### **New Connections**

Recently I was part of a street healing ministry and that's how I met Yoko, a Japanese woman who accepted my invitation to join our Monday Bible study. She is the fourth new person to join me and Ayako (a Christian) this year, after Miki, Ritsuko and Yuko. I'm so excited and am waiting expectantly for God to change their hearts to believe in

Jesus. I had been praying for newcomers and until recently had no response, but now there are four!

Another development is the re-organisation of Japanese outreach at St Barnabas, Finchley where I am now involved in monthly Japanese services. Our first meeting in September was wonderful. I had invited one Japanese friend along, but she declined. However, when I met her again later and invited her to come, she accepted when she heard I would be leading the meeting.

I am hoping that we will eventually meet weekly and am praying for many new people to join us. Please join me in praying for this and for still more women to join Japanese Bible studies. Pray too for Miki and Sayaka, to whom I teach English, for health and strength for me and my family as we carry out this work and that my Japanese friends would come to Christ, and grow in faith.

*Rebekah Hwang,  
JCL Mission Partner, Finchley*



*Our Japanese Bible study group*

# Are you retired, on a gap year or just have some free time and are wondering how God would have you use it? Could a stay in Japan be what he is leading you to? It was for Barbara and Michael Priestley.

When I first contacted the Japan Evangelistic Band (as JCL was then known) fifty years ago to get some information to use in religious education lessons, little did I realise that it would lead to a month-long stay in Okinawa earlier this year. My husband Mike and I are both retired teachers and have used our skills in different countries – Colombia, India, South Africa. We were praying about what to do next when I heard the Lord saying “Go to Japan.” I tried to put this aside but it would not go away and eventually we contacted JCL who arranged for us to help Shuko and Michiko Tano at their church in Nago, Okinawa.



Mike leading an English class

## Church and the Community

Our main tasks were to help in the Christian nursery they had just set up and to teach English to both church members and people outside the church. Every morning we played with the children, sang songs and rhymes with them in Japanese and English, did action games and some simple English teaching using jigsaws and everyday objects. On Saturdays we led adult English classes. At the end of each one Mike gave a short Christian message based on the parables of Jesus. We also participated in church services, reading the Bible passage in English, preaching and giving a testimony.

## Commitment, Care and Challenge

Throughout our stay we were impressed with the love and hospitality of our Japanese Christian brothers and sisters. One member gave up her apartment for us, staying with other members of the church. A young couple showed us around the neighbourhood and came to see us every day to make sure that we were all right. We were invited into the homes of other church members and shared delicious Japanese food with them. Sometimes there would be a knock at the door and there would be someone with a gift of fruit or

cooked food. We were lent a car to go shopping (an interesting experience!) or to explore the beautiful island of Okinawa.

Whilst in Okinawa we celebrated our 51st wedding anniversary, so we held a party in our apartment to which most church members came. This was just a small way in which we were able to thank them.

Their commitment to the Lord and to each other was very challenging to us. Most of Saturday was spent together working on the church buildings or garden and preparing for the Sunday services and the outreach to children and young people they were planning. They always had tea together on Saturdays and lunch and tea on Sundays. Prayer was very important and they met to pray very early on Saturday and prayed before everything they did. The pastor spent a great deal of time on one to one discipling. Even though the numbers in the church were small they were diligent in outreach to their neighbourhood. All this was very challenging and made us think about our commitment to the Lord and our church.

Their commitment to the Lord and to each other challenged us

## To be Continued?

Altogether we had a great five weeks in Japan and would love to go back. We made some wonderful Christian friends and were able to help a little in the work of the church in Nago. Our lives were enriched and blessed through being there. We thank the Lord for calling us to that place and thank JCL for the support and help we were given. We hope that others will hear the call to go and help the church in Japan.

Barbara Priestley  
JCL Volunteer, Cambridge

Helping in the nursery ▼



# What's new?

**The Japanese are the world's second largest unreached people group** - according to the newest edition of the prayer handbook Operation Japan, released this autumn. "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:38)

**Japan focus events** - With that in mind, taking advantage of the home leave of JCL Mission Partner Dawn Bolton from Kobe, and the presence of some new and old Mission Partners, we are arranging Japan Events in London and in Edinburgh as follows:



- **in London** on Monday 8 November from 6.30 pm at St Peter's Cornhill, off Gracechurch Street and Saturday 22 January from 9am at St Barnabas' Church in North Finchley; and
- **in Edinburgh** on Saturday 27 November from 7pm at the Faith Mission Bible College.

It would be great if you could join us for one or more of these events to learn more about Japan and how you could help reach Japanese - and to meet some of our partners. Just let us know if you would like to come - by email, phone or post - at least one week before the event.

## New Partners

**Dave & Heidi Skipper**, new JCL Network Partners whom we welcomed in our last issue, arrived in Tokyo with their year-old daughter Kira in September. They are currently in full-time language



study and plan to begin outreach work early in 2011 while continuing with language study part time. They will work with the Japan Baptist Fellowship's Innovative Ministries team and hope to reach many different people through their musical gifts.

**Thierry & Antonia Richards**, new JCL Mission Partners, moved during the summer from Oxford to London to spend a few months based at St. Helen's Church, one of their partner churches, working among Japanese in London. They hope to be in Japan by year end to work with a new church in central Tokyo, Grace City Church, whose main aim is to reach the working people of that enormous and needy city. You can meet Thierry and Antonia at the 8th November event mentioned above.

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## Japan Weekend Conference 2011

**Next year's Japan Weekend Conference is planned for 15-17 July 2011 at All Nations Christian College** and will be a great chance to hear what God is doing among Japanese today and to meet others interested in Japan or involved in ministry among Japanese. More details will follow in due course but meanwhile, please put these dates in your diary now!

## 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](http://www.jclglobal.org)

# Exceeding Expectations

**Tiffany Liang is a JCL Network Partner who has worked in Nobeoka, Miyazaki prefecture for the past year. As both a Christian and a Japanophile Tiffany was keen to find a way to share her faith with the Japanese. Her job as a Coordinator for International Relations has proved to be the perfect vehicle!**

Journalist. Published photographer. TV show guest. Event planner. International interpreter. Cooking class teacher. Magazine cover model. Local celebrity... If I think back to this time last year, when I was starting to get to grips with my new job as Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in the small city of Nobeoka, Miyazaki Prefecture, none of those terms would have featured on the job description I was given! In many ways, I'm pretty glad about that as I would probably have found it a bit overwhelming but thankfully God has given me the grace and strength to face each new challenge as it has arisen.

For those unfamiliar with what a CIR does, let me explain. I am one of 366 CIRs scattered all across Japan, working in city halls, prefectural government offices and international exchange associations with the aim of promoting international relations. On a practical level, this involves translation, interpreting, language instruction, event planning and a lot of interaction with the local community.

My job was organised through the JET (Japan Exchange & Teaching) programme. In addition to CIR positions the JET programme also brings many young people to Japan each year to work as English conversation teachers in Japanese schools. These jobs are open to university graduates and, whilst the CIR jobs require you to speak Japanese, Japanese is not needed for the teaching posts. There are currently over 4,000 people in Japan on the JET programme.

Although the JET experience can vary greatly depending on the individual placement, I have been extremely blessed and found the first year to be an amazing experience in which I have been able to learn so much and see God at work here in Japan.

I have been able to get involved in a local church, with a congregation of around ten. There is another JET couple who attend, so I interpret the sermon for them each week



*Tiffany in kimono*

as the services are run entirely in Japanese. We have also set up a free English conversation class once or twice a month, and have seen many people come into contact with church and the gospel for the very first time. It is very exciting to be part of this and we pray that many in the local community would hear about Christ whilst improving their language skills!

One amazing encouragement was a lady who started attending the church a few months after I arrived – it was a privilege to attend her baptism at a local river in July this year, and wonderful to see how her testimony has been used to encourage Christians all over Japan. Her story was published in a national Christian magazine and the editor liked my photos so much that he decided to use one for the front cover as well as with the article! I am so glad that God has been able to use each one of my skills and hobbies to bring glory to his name, often in ways that I could never have imagined. I am looking forward to seeing what he has in store for my second year as CIR.

Thank you to all connected with JCL for your prayer support, words of encouragement and advice!

*Tiffany Liang*

*JCL Network Partner, Nobeoka, Miyazaki*



*Church members gathered for the baptism at a local river*

*Sunset over Nobeoka*