

A TEAM MINISTRY = Misaki and George Aki

Report: Volunteer Missionaries, UCBWM
Associate Missionaries, United Church of Japan
(October 15, 1979 - October 14, 1980)

In heartfelt gratitude to God for our lives, and to our friends for their love and prayers, we were able to go to Japan and use our time as "volunteer" and "associate" (later) missionaries under the auspices of the UCBWM and UCCJ.

Our three main goals were 1/ to visit and get acquainted with my parents' people; 2/ to get an "inside" view of the church in Japan and 3/ to visit my relatives for the first time.

Our venture was divided into two major portions: the first half at Nagasaki and the second half in Kanazawa. (I will conclude with what we did in between and at the end of our journey.)

Rev. Hideo Iijima of the Nagasaki Furumachi Church "paved the way" for us to finally get our visa and prepared for our stay in Nagasaki. (October 16 till March 17, 1980).

We participated in the life of the Furumachi church: preached twice, attended the worship services, annual meeting, most of the prayer meetings weekly, the monthly "home" meetings, memorial services, picnics, et al. To a noon group I spoke on the "History of the Japanese Christian Mission in North America. Mrs. Aki kept busy teaching American-style cooking lessons. The "Shinto no tomo" (the magazine of the UCCJ) sent a reporter and a photographer to Nagasaki to interview us (articles and pictures appeared in the January and the July 1980 issues).

We made it a point to get acquainted with the missionaries and their work at the Junior Colleges, Kwassui and Nagasaki Wesleyan. We attended the regional UCCJ meetings, heard and met Dr. Noboru Iwamura, medical missionary to Nepal, saw the movie "Mother Teresa" with some non-Christians, VISITED CHURCH-sponsored pre-school institutions. Also went to Unzen Hot Springs, which is the locale where hundreds of Christians were tortured and killed.

As persons interested in social work and counseling, I visited the Nagasaki prison. We visited the city rehabilitation center and a pre-school for mentally retarded children sponsored by the church. We also tutored an older couple, who, in turn taught

us Japanese customs and treated us to Japanese dinners.

We took time out to visit the Peace Parks and Cultural buildings at Nagasaki and Hiroshima to learn about the effects of the atomic bombings. We have taken our American visitors there and we noticed the hundreds of school children taken in tours to these places to help them realize the cruelty, wastefulness and destruction of war. And for a change of pace, we visited Miyajima, one of the most scenic island spots in Japan.

In Nagasaki, Rev. Iijima obtained a teaching job for both of us in English at the YMCA. This was a great experience which helped us to get better acquainted with individuals. I led the Christmas service and interviewed the 40 students in my classes in terms of their daily lives and their goals. We visited coffee houses and walked to many places, such as markets, stores, historic places... So much for the first half of our venture.

I felt that my positive work began in Kanazawa with the Nanbu Church. The Rev. Keizo Osumi appointed me to be his assistant and initiated to have my "volunteer" status moved up to "associate missionary" by the UCCJ. This was done on May 15, 1980, I became an official member of the church and a member of the presbytery; preached six times (twice in Japanese!); visited hospitals, went to most of the meetings of the church, ministerial meetings and the regional UCCJ meetings. I was invited to the Hakuba Alps Jr.-Sr. High Church camp for three days with some 110 attending.

The minister had emergency eye surgery and was incapacitated for about 6 weeks, and at the same time, his wife went to the US on assignment and Miss Virginia Deter, missionary, very active in this church, also went to the U.S. on special mission, so I kept house during that time. I held weekly English bible classes for the high school students (majority were mothers) and Mrs. Aki taught English to nursery mothers in the field of cooking, bible and US church life.

Since we were offered the use of the parsonage, we got a wonderful look and feel of the "inside" of one of the churches in Japan. I think the compliment which I cherished most was: "I wished I had known you sooner!"

While still at Nagasaki, I was offered a teaching job at the Hokuriku Jr. College for women. So I taught the "Parables of Jesus"

two hours weekly from April. In many ways, it was quite an enjoyable and unusual experience! I preached twice at the Hokuriku chapel in "Japanese", and invited to participate in their Liberal Arts Department three-day Bible Camp as a resource leader to a discussion group, and also spoke at a panel and took part in other small ways.

Other activities in Kanazawa were: we led a two-day English seminar for teachers planning to go to the U.S. shortly and we spoke to the Hotline Volunteers one Sunday afternoon. I have had the chance to share some books on counseling and also some (US) techniques with teachers and leaders.

In between assignments, we visited some of our mission stations, such as "Shino-nome", Schools for Girls in Matsuyama (Dr. and Mrs. Clarence Gillett worked there), Doshisha, Kobe College, ICU, and met with many of the missionaries of various denominations. We had the pleasure of worshipping at Aoto Church (late Dr. Kagawa's church in Tokyo) on Easter Sunday 1980.

I was able to get in some visits with my many relatives on my father's side in Tokushima, Nara, Osaka and Kobe. Mrs. Aki was able to visit with her relatives in Tokyo and Yamanashi.

On our way back to California, in Tokyo, we were invited to look in on the Tokyo Family Court in action and to visit the famous Akagi Boys' Training School, and also visited the Kyodan offices. I was asked to begin the preaching mission at Aoto church on the last Sunday in September, and then to preach in the prestigious church of Reinanzaka church.

We are filled with so many new experiences, new friends who promised to visit us in the U.S. It was good to make "follow-up" visits with those Japanese students who were visiting us in the States and to see their "Christian" lives in action in Japan.

We came here with an open mind, to learn as much as we can, slow to criticize, and quick to appreciate. Thus, we were able to see a little more of God's grace and blessings around us at all times.

P.S.

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During the war, Mr. Eitaro Sasada (now 70) was employed by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. Mrs. Sasada and child were sent to the country to avoid the continued bombings of Nagasaki. From him we learned of his experience of the atomic bombing. Since the company was several miles away from the epicenter, he was able to escape. We will never forget his vivid recollections.

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Satisfactions - Problems - Future - Cutting Edge of Mission

The following is my observation as a foreigner having lived only one year in Japan (half a year in a parsonage):

The Japanese Protestant Church is made up of a deeply dedicated people of God. * ($\frac{1}{2}$ of 1% of population are Christians and the majority of that $\frac{1}{2}$ are RC'S). When 30 can gather and decide to become "independent" with a minister, it is a miracle! The ministers are a well-educated group and highly respected.

Though the Kyodan has much to be desired, the churches (Kanazawa area) work most harmoniously with each other.

The church faces many problems: one is to build new facilities as a base of operation. In 1979, 287 were without church facilities and there are 1670 churches listed.

It is a wonder that anyone desires to go into the ministry. The average is about \$6,548 per year and can ill-afford to retire; no place to go for retirement.

I have met ministers who went into the ministry from another professional job. But those young students who are seriously thinking of the Christian ministry find that seminaries are virtually giving no scholarships. And many of the ministers today are over 60 years old with very future replacements.

Most of the church members are of the educated class. For an "outsider" to write the following is easy, but the church must reach the other classes as well. And I am sure this is a long-term goal of the local churches.

Missionaries from the UCCJ are numbered around 29 to about 11 countries. Only four are receiving very small remuneration from the UCCJ.

The churches in Japan are doing their work for Christ valiantly and with hope. They need our every help and understanding to face the future in their God-given task.

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Our Hopes for Further Overseas service..

There is much work for Christ to be done everywhere and for everyone.

Yes, it would be a challenge to return to Japan, and I would like very much to work with a fine intelligent minister such as Rev. Keizo Osumi.

But I think of the unbelievable breakdown of communications between us and the UCBWM Pacific Area office and I would not like to go through that again for anything. I

have spoken with missionaries who have recently arrived here under the auspices of the Presbyterian and the UCBWM. To those I spoke with, everyone expressed disgust and ^{at} one point and/or another, deeply felt they were not wanted and didn't care whether they came or not.

This is written very frankly, because I sincerely believe Mission is the standard by which a local church is judged. I have always stressed the work "outside of the local church" to be the judging factor of a local church.

I believe it would be well if some of the top "brass" of all the major denominations would sit with "volunteers and associates" to find more helpful ways to proceed. I am very sure there are many eager and fine Christians of every age, willing & able to share their lives in this most important aspect of witness, but they will need more understanding and encouraging impetus from the foreign mission boards.

We are glad that we did not "give up" on coming to Japan. Our lives have been enriched beyond anything we had dreamed possible.

Respectfully submitted,

George Aki
George Aki

Misaki Aki
Misaki Aki

* Quote from the Japan Times, Dec. 12, 1979

"Getting Things Done" ('Filling Needs') by Jean Pearce:

(She is speaking of USED STAMPS solicited by non-profit organizations such as HELPING HAND FUND and Japan Christian Overseas Association .. and she ends her column:)

"And have you noticed? It is the Christian organizations that are frequently involved in charitable work."