

Prayer letter from Catherine Porter. April 2024

Dear Friends,

Happy belated Easter! I hope you had a blessed time throughout Holy Week and the Easter weekend. For Japanese Christians, Easter is mostly celebrated just through Easter Sunday. Very few churches remember Good Friday on Good Friday, and I've never seen a Palm Sunday service here either. In recent years, bunnies and chicks have been making their way into Japanese supermarkets around this time, but as yet, most people have no idea what this is all about. This year, Easter coincided with the schools' Spring holiday. I decided to hold a special intensive English programme for three days in my Sendai Church. While teaching English is definitely not my favourite thing, it is a tool that allows for contact with non-believers. I held two classes, one for 7-9 year olds and one for 10-12 year olds. Four girls attended the first class, three of whom don't come to church. I had eight in the older class. Over half of this class don't know Jesus. While making sure we did some serious study, I was also able to introduce Easter customs from around the world. I was surprised to learn about a death dance in one country, and kite flying in another. I read that the kite tradition was originally started by a Sunday School teacher who demonstrated to the children how Jesus was lifted high on the Cross. At the end of each class, we had a story time. On Day One, the story was about Jesus' life and miracles. On Day Two, the Cross. On Day Three, the Resurrection. Although this was initially in English, there were pictures and we reviewed it all in Japanese too. One girl was really surprised and exclaimed in shock, 'He came back to life!' By the third day, I was struggling to get the children to leave after the classes finished and they were arriving ready to start way before I was ready. Some left saying that they would like to do this again. It was a privilege to be able to share the Gospel with these children. Many Japanese churches, including my own, are ageing. We really need to be reaching out to younger people. **Please pray for the children who attended. Please pray that the stories of Jesus will stay in their hearts. Please pray that God will draw them to Himself and that we, as a church, may be able to walk with them more in days to come. Pray too for their families, that they would be open to hearing more of Jesus.**

March was definitely a month filled with opportunities. The concert that stood out for me was in Akita prefecture. Akita is a very countryside prefecture with a high suicide rate and no mission workers. The church that I worked with had a congregation of around 35 people. They had decided to hire a local hall for the concert, as the church building is small. While I was rehearsing, they were setting out the chairs. I confess, I almost suggested that they put out less chairs and waited to see who would come first. My thought was that it would be embarrassing if only a few people came and we had 200 chairs out! Over 150 people came. The church had worked hard and given out 10,000 flyers. They had invited friends, neighbours and contacts. After the concert finished, I heard church members getting alongside those who had come and sharing testimony. Some people received prayer. One university student joined a fellowship meal later that night. God answered the faith of this church. We were able to share the Gospel widely in an unchurched, needy area. **Please pray for those who heard the Gospel. Pray that they would want to know more and that they would seek after God. Pray that the church in Akita will be used powerfully to reach the unreached.**

We had our WEC Japan Annual Conference at the end of March. Our branch has a leadership team known as a Branch Council. The leaders (currently a Korean couple), deputy leader (currently a single lady from HongKong) and three other branch members make up the Branch Council. During conference, I was elected to serve on the Branch Council as one of these three extra members. This means that I will now be involved in decisions concerning the vision and direction of our branch, applications to join us, the ministry of our members and crisis situations among other things. It's a new responsibility for me and a new challenge. **Please pray for me in this, that I will serve faithfully and will listen to God as I serve. Please pray for this international team, that we will communicate well together.**

Thank you for praying for Erika over the last year or so. **Please could you continue to pray for her going forward? She has just started her new job. Her desire is to know God more and to develop a stronger faith.** Starting work can be hard for anyone, and Erika is someone who has been ill in the past. Please could

you pray for her during this overwhelming time, that God will keep her safe and that she will cope with the high demands of a Japanese workplace?

For me, while it was a joy and privilege to have so many opportunities to reach out throughout March, I did also find that my devotions didn't feel enough and the desire to get away to be fed by God was strong. **Please can you pray for nourishing times with the Lord in the coming days?** Having taken on new responsibilities, I need to lay down some of what I have been doing to regain the balance. Since May last year, I have been running a twice-monthly English class for some WEC missionaries who have been on furlough. In June this year, I will hand this back to them as they return to Japan. **Please pray that I will finish this well, and that the handover will go smoothly. I'd also appreciate prayer for my preaching in Sendai on 5th May, and for preparations to do some recording (harp) in mid-May.**

I will leave you with a picture of the cherry blossom that I went to visit yesterday. (If I've managed to attach it correctly!)

Thank you always for your prayers,
Every Blessing,
Catherine

