

The Year-End (Annual) Report of 2012

“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?” Matthew 18:12

This is the essence of Christ’s ministry in his coming to the world in the flesh. This is the truth about what Christmas is all about. Whether we are in a local church ministry or in home missions or in foreign missions, the purpose of our being sent out to the world is to seek that which is lost. That truth should never be lost even in the difficulties of sorting out ideas and means by which Christians tackle the Great Commission to reach the lost sheep. Yes, we must be where we are needed, having been called by the Spirit of God. And where is it where we need to be? It is often right where you are!

Small it may seem in the eyes of many, but what became to me a great encouragement this year was the declaration of desire and effort by our women in the church that they wanted to bring people in the neighborhood to church. They wanted so much to have an opportunity to introduce neighborhood people to our church that they decided to have a bazaar one Saturday in October! Bazaars are usually held only for raising funds for school or even church. But our ladies had one straight purpose: they wanted to open the church by way of a bazaar to introduce people to our church, those who otherwise would never put foot over the threshold of a church. Well, only church members and a few contacts came, but nobody from the neighborhood! Yet, the ladies are not discouraged. They will try a “return match,” next year to have people around the church come so that they could get to know us firsthand. The proceeds were given to the work of Nozomi Center for the tsunami victims in Yamamoto Cho established in 2011 by several foreign Reformed and Presbyterian missions plus the RCJ, the OPCJM being one of the main responsible bodies for that diaconal service.

Another encouraging event this year was that since summer Mr. Yarimizu began coming back occasionally to attend worship! Many of you remember that Mr. & Mrs. Yarimizu finished preparatory studies for baptism in the fall of 2010. Just as they were supposed to be examined they backed out from committing their life to Christ by making profession of faith and receiving baptism. Since then Mr. Yarimizu stopped coming to church altogether and his wife Miki’s attendance also became sporadic. But it seems (of course it is not “seems,” but a reality) that the Lord is still working in their hearts.

Dr. Yamamoto’s wife, Mieko, brought the ensemble to which she belongs to sing for the chapel in October. It was a blessed time of sweet music and testimony, touching the hearts of many. Mrs. Yamamoto belongs to a different church but recently expressed that she has begun wanting to worship together with her husband. She has visited us several times. Please pray for her.

At our fall special evangelistic service in November we had wonderful preaching and testimony from a young pastor, Akira Tateishi, Pastor at RCJ East Sendai Church. He has been serving as a head of the church volunteers in East Matsushima City where the tsunami swallowed up many lives and destroyed houses.

His volunteer service began as he went out there to look for a few members of his church. To make the story short, what he saw in some school gymnasiums and other places, to which people had evacuated, was, in his words, "a hell in this world." Survivors in their dirty, wet clothes were trying to get warm by sitting close to each other, having to look at many dead bodies laid down on the floor only a few yards away from them. Rev. Tateishi disparately cried out in his heart, "Where are you Lord. Are you really here?" He told us he had almost lost sight of his faith in God as he saw the horrors of the aftermath of the tsunami.

As time passed Rev. Tateishi found the deep grace of God as he read the passage in Matthew 12:11 where the Lord says, "What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out?" He rediscovered two precious truths: First, the Lord Jesus is pointing out the indispensable value of ONE SHEEP in His eyes, and secondly our Savior comes down to where we are and then takes hold of us and lifts us up from the pit, no matter how deep the pit is or how disparate the inside of the pit may seem. His second point was very meaningful because the Japanese Bible puts the two Greek verbs together into one verb by translating them as "Will he not rescue it" The Greek text on the other hand, shows God's sacrificial love toward us, by saying, "He takes hold of us where we are," then "He pulls us up." The Rev. Tateishi told us that that was what he was reassured of as he read the passage!

We rejoice in this connection that Dr. Yamamoto, our organist and my physician who saved me from the fatal invasion of cancer three years ago, brought one of his pharmaceutical salesmen, Mr. Endo, to this special service. And Mr. Endo brought his wife and little two year-old girl to the Christmas Worship! Pray that Mr. Endo will find his soul's true Healer!

I also was very happy that the Lord brought to our special service a young mother, my student from Yamagata Gakuin High School almost 15 years ago, who had a serious psychological problem which caused her to attempt suicide a few times and for whom I used to give counseling at school. She is now a mother with three children and responded to my invitation to come to this evangelistic service. This is one way to show us how the Lord mysteriously works His plan in our life. Her name is Kaori Yamakawa and I would like you to pray for her that she will come again to hear the gospel.

Yes, Christians and non-Christians alike are still struggling in so many ways with the meaning of the 3/11/12 Great Earthquake and Tsunami. Pray for the healing of the souls of those whom the Lord has already touched and those we want Him to open up.



Picture taken at the special evangelistic service in November

In my Thursday Bible Study we have now a new addition, thanks to the evangelistic and friendly approach of Mrs. Akiho. Mrs. Yoko Taira is in her fifties and is a great fan of the late Mrs. Miura, Japan's No.1 Christian novelist. Because Mrs. Akiho told Mrs. Taira that her pastor often refers to Mrs. Miura's literature, Mrs. Taira decided to come to the Thursday Bible study in June. She's been with us since then and for the first time she came to worship on Christmas Sunday! Please pray that she will continue to seek the Savior.



From left Mrs. Ito(member), Mrs. Akiho(member), Mrs. Tamaki(member), Mrs. Taira (seeker), a new addition in Thursday Bible Class, & Mrs. Nakamura(seeker)

We would ask your continuous and persisting prayers for all our seekers. Mr. Tada, a very long time friend, helped us by writing the Bible passages in his beautiful calligraphy for the church to hang on the wall in the sanctuary. We have known him over 35 years. He has a deep concern and serious interest in the matter of his soul. He comes every now and then to worship. Pray that Mr.Tada will come and hear the Word of God more often that he may soon rest his assurance in the bosom of his Savior.

Pray for Mrs. Nakamura. She has been very faithful the last two years in her attendance at Sunday worship and the Thursday Bible Class. Her husband has been fighting cancer for about three years. She too is indeed a lost sheep.

The Lord often sends to his church, no matter how large or small a congregation is, people in distress and even mentally disturbed. We have one lady who often comes to church with this sort of personal problems. Sometimes she confides in us and we struggle with how to deal with her. Pray for this lady and for wisdom that we may better serve the Lord in helping a person like her.

You may remember Mariko Tokairin, our guest member, who was preparing to join our church about two years ago but decided to postpone due to her irregularity in attending worship. Since then due to her health problem she actually was not able to attend church for several months. But since this past summer she began coming back to worship with us, twice a month or so. She has three boys two of whom have mental

and physical disorders. They need our support and your prayers. Pray that Mrs. Tokairin becomes convinced that her relationship with the Lord comes before any of her troubles and anxieties

Then, we would like to ask you to intercede on our behalf concerning two matters. First we have in our church circle several who are seriously sick. Mrs. Akiho's husband just had a stomach cancer operation in November and is undergoing chemotherapy for other organs already affected with cancer. We had the Akiho family for Thanksgiving dinner. It was the first time Mr. Akiho agreed to accept our invitation! Chie Sato's father, Mr. Matsuda, just had his heart operated on in December. He also comes to church once in a great while. His wife is the late Mihoko Matsuda, one of the founding members of the Yamagata Chapel. Their daughter Chie is our member with her covenant child, Mana. Please pray for Mr. Matsuda that he would find what his wife and his daughter have found for their life's treasure, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior. Dr. Yamamoto's brother-in-law is heavily handicapped due to a stroke in September and is still in the hospital for rehabilitation. Also Dr. Yamamoto's father has a serious condition with an aneurysm around his lungs.

We held the chapel's future vision conference twice this year, where we discussed some important directions for the church as my retirement will be a real issue in the next few years. We talked and prayed about (1) leadership training of men for elders, (2) how we may pray and help those who are now seeking the Lord to come to profession of faith, (3) how we should reach out to bring into the church more seekers, (4) what we are to do with the building project [our house-church is almost 40 years old and it holds only about 30 people for worship]: deciding on two matters: first, remodeling or rebuilding; second, when to do it. (5) In view of the possibility that the RCJ (Reformed Church in Japan), with whom the OPCJM has been working for more than 65 years, may change its constitution in the near future concerning the issue of women in church office, what we, the Yamagata Chapel, are to do.

My health is improving and I have been able to eat better since October, gaining just about 1kg (2 pounds). I am very thankful for my wife who encourages me with dietary advice and always prepares good food!

Lastly, let me touch on the family situation. The first important news is that our second son David is engaged to Amy Wood. David lives in NY and Amy in Tokyo. She lives with her family and her father is a missionary working in Japan for a long time. Morris, our 3rd son, after finishing his volunteer work at Nozomi Center for the tsunami victims, began working as a teacher at his alma mater, Christian Academy in Japan (CAJ) in Tokyo. Emi is in Okinawa teaching at an international school. James, our oldest son, his wife Tami and two children are in Brooklyn. James will be performing on Broadway this February, "Breakfast at Tiffany's." Megumi and Jason with their daughter are also in Brooklyn.

- *That the several seekers be brought to full confession of faith in their Savior.
- *That our members be encouraged to give their time to opportunities for future leadership training.
- *That our members be given more opportunities to expand evangelism.
- *That the chapel have a concrete vision for growth for the next several years in such areas as Christian education, increase in membership, outreach for the younger generation, encouraging the covenant children to profession of faith, and raising of elder and deacon candidates.
- *That the Chapel decide its directions concerning the present building: whether to remodel or build a new one and when to do it.
- *That our members, as well as their pastor(me!), may grow in grace and in the saving knowledge of Christ revealed in the Scriptures.