

MISSION PRAYER

January 2021

Attribute of God: God of Hope

Key verse: Romans 15:13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

This month's focus is on: Mitsu and Akiko Fujishima, Roy and Nancy Toma, Mitsu and Karen Nakamura, Makoto and Amy T., Kuni and Kristen Onishi, Jon and Maki Robison, and Todd and Jayne Fong

Missionaries: Mitsu and Akiko Fujishima

Country: Japan

Praise and requests:

1. Although the numbers are few, the cases of COVID are increasing in Japan and the hospitals are worried whether they will be able to give proper care to the patients.
2. In order to practice social distancing, they planned two Christmas gatherings with the neighborhood children. They also had two dinners with their friends.
3. Please pray for the Lord to work in the hearts of those who came and heard the true meaning of Christmas.
4. They also did lots of baking so that they were able to bring gifts to their friends around the peninsula. They also included a tract in the gifts.

Missionaries: Roy and Nancy Toma

JEMS Japan Missions

Praise and prayer:

1. Recently at Roy's meeting with JEMS missionaries, they shared that in the midst of this pandemic three baptisms took place in the last two weeks. In a recent prayer letter from Jon and Maki Robison, serving in Tokyo, they wrote that they have been able to develop more friendships during these last few months than any other time while serving in Japan.
2. In an article in [Christianity Today \(link to the article April 7, 2020\)](#), it was reported from some of the leading missions organizations that they have been experiencing a record number of people searching online about spiritual issues, as well as making decisions to receive Jesus Christ.
3. Our Lord continues to reign and this truly is a season where His kingdom is growing. Thank you for partnering with Roy in sharing the love and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to the world.
4. This is a time when many people are suffering. This past month there were more people who died in Japan of suicides than of COVID-19 during all of 2020. They are also seeing a large jump in suicides here in California. For this reason, Roy wanted to share with you a reflection from his friend and coworker, Rev. John Katagi. He experienced a disappointing result from a medical procedure. He reflected on his faith during this Christmas season. John's faith during this Christmas season is an encouragement to Roy and he believes it will encourage you. Here is the [link to his article \(link\)](#)
5. Thank you for your prayers and support. Roy's mom is still doing well and is as feisty as ever. Nancy has been doing well taking care of his mom, as well as Joseph and Roy. Joseph is at Cypress City College while working part time at Chick-fil-A.
6. Roy is still working as the Japan Missions Director at JEMS. He prepared a seminar for the Equipppers/RJC (Reaching Japanese for Christ) conference at the end of Dec. It informs people how to prepare to become a missionary in Japan.

Please pray for:

1. Roy's family's and the JEMS missionaries' physical and spiritual health.
2. The healing of the land from the COVID-19 virus.
3. God's guidance as they seek to establish a legal entity in Japan.

Missionaries: Mitsu, Karen, Abe, Miye, and Emi Nakamura

Country: Japan

Praise and prayer requests:

1. Emi's voice teacher did the concert as planned. Even in the midst of Corona, 160 people came (spread out in a large hall) and heard beautiful Christmas music and the message of God's love. The whole audience "sang" Silent Night in sign language together! Many of Karen's friends (from English class and Hippo multilingual club) came, most of whom do not yet know Him personally. **Thank God for this chance for them to hear, and pray He will continue to be at work in their hearts!**
2. Karen's friend's daughter has been wrist-cutting and talking of suicide. Her friend sometimes gets so down about it that she herself wants to die. In October, they began praying together by phone every night. Many of you have also joined with Karen and others here, in prayer! Very gradually, Karen thinks God has been bringing healing to her heart. As the mother heals, the daughter is also healing. **Please continue to pray that they will both find hope and healing in Him!**
3. The Nakamuras thank God for three new long-term staff from the U.S., and eight new interns, from the U.S., Singapore, and Korea! Karen is responsible to help the new long-term staff with orientation and oversees their language and culture training. **Thank God with them, and pray for their good adjustment.**
4. A beautiful Christmas tract that includes the story of the mother of Megumi Yokota, who was abducted by North Korean agents over 40 years ago (well-known in Japan)—How this mother came to know the God who knows and loves us deeply, and how she found hope in His Word. Karen put it together with Christmas treats and gave them to their neighbors, to her Hippo friends and others. **Please pray that God will use this to draw many to Him.**
5. Karen's friends are so creative! They had music, games, crafts, and a Christmas message, all online! Her friends invited over 60 of their English students and other friends! They did it twice, on Dec. 23rd at 1 pm and Dec. 27th at 4 pm. Karen did the message and accompanied Emi's singing on piano. **Please pray for God's work in their friends' hearts as they heard the Christmas message.**
6. Abe decided to work at Northstar Lodge in the mountains of Nagano, from next April. Thank you for praying for his decision. He tore the tendons in his ankle in a bicycle accident recently but has been helped a lot by friends at his church in Kobe.
7. Miye continues to work from home, for an IT company. She is active in Bible Study fellowship. **Pray for wisdom for her to improve her health.**
8. Emi was extremely busy in December, with numerous singing opportunities. **Pray that she will have wisdom to be able to rest.**
9. Mitsu recently finished writing a detailed commentary on the book of Hebrews, and is now preparing for teaching an intensive seminary class on the Doctrine of God (Trinity) for their staff in January. Karen is blessed by many times of sharing and praying with friends.

Please pray:

1. for God to continue drawing their friends to Himself through the Christmas concerts, parties, and tracts.
2. For Mitsu's preparation for teaching the seminary class in January.
3. That they and their children will walk closely with Him.

Missionaries: Makoto, Amy, Mia, and Samuel T.

Home Assignment

Praises:

1. The T. family is grateful for their friends in C---- who helped them move their belongings out of their apartment and into storage. In total, they only got to live in their new apartment for 22 days. An apartment they had hoped would become their home for many years to come, but more importantly the apartment they had planned would be a home for their newly adopted daughter.
2. 2020 has been a challenging time for all of us. Many of our plans, dreams, and hopes were disrupted. They for sure, never though they'd be back in the U.S. for this long (still with no clear timeline to go back home in C----).

3. Yet there's so much they hope for in the coming year. The possibility of vaccines, getting back to C----, moving forward with their adoption, etc.
4. This past year reminds them of what they ultimately continue to place their hope in: Christ alone. They follow the psalmist and say, *"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."* Psalm 121:1-2
5. Their ultimate hope for this year and all of eternity is this: *"but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Romans 5:8 and *"everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* Acts 2:21

Missionaries: Kuni, Kristen, Shion, and Maray Onishi

Country: Japan.

Praise and prayer request:

1. The year 2020 was very difficult for all of us due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was the year that all of us had to face many changes and fears. They were no longer able to meet for worship and were forced to change the ways of life and the ministry. They all had to put a lot of effort to adjust to those changes. Also, the rapidly rising number of Covid-19 cases made them fearful, anxious, and nervous every day. However, it was also the time of repentance and checking their faith. They saw themselves being uncomfortable and judging those who were not following the Covid-19 guidelines, such as wearing a mask or keeping the social distance. They realized how weak, sinful, and prideful they were once again, and this brought them back to the Lord in repentance.
2. It seems like there was not much going on in 2020, but as they look back, they can see the footsteps of God, who never stopped working in their hearts and lives. There were many things that they could not do, but at the same time, there were many things that they were able to learn because of the pandemic.

*They learned to realize that everything in their life was God's grace, especially the things they took for granted.

*They learned to seek God, who is continuously at work even though we can't see more earnestly.

*It would've been hard to find the time and place to meet people regularly, but because all the meetings were changed to online, they were able to have small groups regularly.

*They experienced joy when they were able to meet in person, even briefly.

*As the worship service was done online, their friends who live far could join their community.

*The children who have non-Christian parents were able to join their Kids' Church every week through Zoom.

*The longer they stayed home, the more they got to appreciate the nature God has created, such as fresh air, trees, wind, etc.

*They were able to have communion with their members over Zoom.

*They were able to have a retreat over Zoom. It would've been harder to plan a retreat if they were to go somewhere together.

*They were able to attend Soma School with Core members because it was done via Zoom.

*They are thankful for their kids who are understanding the pandemic situation.

3. Last month (November 15th), they got to meet up for worship service for the first time ever since Covid-19. They decided to meet once a month because it seemed that the Covid-19 situation was getting better. (They are reconsidering as it's spreading more rapidly than ever.) They had kids' church over Zoom since there was limited space for kids, and some kids wouldn't be able to join if they meet. For adult service, most members were able to come, and it was such a joy to be able to gather and worship together. Before Covid-19, everyone came to their place after the service and had dinner together. But since they are not able to do that anymore, it was very sad. A lot of them stayed and had fellowship at the parking lot for a long time.
4. They are planning to learn the key elements that become the DNA of the church. **Please pray that, through this time, they will learn to become a disciple of Christ in Japanese culture and grow into a community of making disciples of Christ together.**

Missionaries: Jon, Maki, Aki, Leon, Hugo and Rhea Robison

Country: Japan

Praises and requests:

1. 2019 was undoubtedly the Robinson family's most difficult year to date (and thanks be to God for that), as they saw Aquila's health deteriorate due to anxiety and what was described by a doctor as 'what looks like childhood depression', due to school bullying. For whatever reason, school bullying (and even bullying in the workplace for adults) is a very big problem in Japan. From the Fall semester, Aquila was homeschooled (and Leon too, he didn't want to go to the elementary school without his brother around), and didn't want to go outside locally because he didn't want to see former classmates. It was a very lonely year.
2. With that in the background, Jon reflected on both kids being at Christmas parties in 2020. Jon feels like 2020 was sort of a punt year. Like in football, if you can't advance 10 yards in three tries, conventional wisdom says you kick the ball downfield, and hope your next turn on offense is more successful. It's frustrating but that's football. You don't like to say it but that's often missions in Japan too, historically called 'the missionary graveyard,' and a place where they've seen the Christian population stay at less than 1%...basically forever. So, when the Robisons moved into Kodaira City, a town they'd never considered for ministry, a month before lockdowns started, they were frustrated, but it just felt like they weren't going to get that 10 yards on that set of downs. Maybe, like a lot of people, they'd just have to punt on 2020 and hope for a better outcome later. As it turned out, God had a different strategy.
3. Upon arriving in Kodaira, they were eager to establish a home church and restart working to advance the kingdom of God in Japan. But then, churches closed! Even while work frustrations compounded, family life improved immensely. Aquila was improving rapidly, and Leon loved his new school ('best in the world'). One day they drove past the elementary school and they noticed there was a baseball game going on. So, they turned around and went in to watch...the boys quickly signed up and that was the turning point. Instead of waiting for people to come to them on Sundays, they started going to them.
4. Aki went to a fifth grader birthday party, but a year ago they had punted on the idea that Aki would ever make meaningful Japanese friends again. He was emotionally done with Japanese children's society. Last week, Aki was the dance instructor for the fifth graders send-off performance of a Korean-pop/Fortnite dance. This was at a Japanese friend's house with only Japanese kids present. The sheer relief and gratitude Jon has as a parent to God for His mercy in Aki's life, for a kid that couldn't walk down the street without doubling over with a stomach ache and constantly searching the streets for kids to avoid, to dancing in the middle of a group of kids from the same culture, can't be overstated. God has been good to show them first-hand how bullying can affect people in Japan, and how He can save from it.
5. At Leon's Christmas party, he had four kids over for cake and Bingo. Normally Leon has three friends over, but recently a neighborhood mom practically grabbed Maki after a preschool performance. That mom has a son in Leon's class, one in Hugo's class, and twins Rhea's age. She was trying to warn Maki that one of the boys Leon plays with is bad news, and that the friend is one of the reasons that her son cries every day after school and doesn't want to go to school anymore. So, when the boy who had been targeting their neighbor friend again teased him in front of classmates, Leon sharply and publicly rebuked the offender (Leon also plays with this boy and he has come over to their home to play too). The struggling boy has now joined Leon's four-friends group at their house twice, including Leon's Christmas party and his mom texted Maki saying that, since that day, he doesn't cry after school anymore. Again, the sense of relief and gratitude for God's goodness to their family was very real as they considered the boys Christmas parties.
6. Jon may have considered 2020 a failure for ministry, just punt on it and hope for a better outcome next year, but God had a different strategy. They don't know what that strategy is, but they have a lot more non-Christian friends than they have had in more traditional ministry settings, including six of the moms from Christmas parties and connected groups that she is regularly chatting with on messaging apps. Please continue to pray that, in whatever God leads, they would follow, even when they don't know what that looks like ahead.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and thanks so much for your prayers and support!

Praise:

In spite of the massive changes in the ways they have approached ministry in 2020, the Lord has proven faithful. Here are just a few ways they have seen God continue to do work in their community, their ministry and even in themselves.

1. Reaching Wider with the Gospel Message.

- In the case of their English Conversation class which had been meeting weekly at church before service every Sunday, except for a brief period in July and August, they have been meeting online since March. They have grown used to seeing each other on video every week, and people are a bit less anxious knowing they don't have to risk their health commuting to church to attend. An added blessing has been having people join in from virtually anywhere in the world.
- Eventually, they'll be able to go back to meeting face-to-face, but being able to incorporate participants from other parts of Japan and the rest of the world is something that they would like to continue to be able to do in the future.
- They also took their English Summer Camp program online this year. Though not as large as their in-person program has become, the joy and enthusiasm from the children who participated was as strong as ever. Their partner church in California, Redwood Community Chapel, prepared a large amount of online material which was shared over a 5-day period in a Facebook group.
- Jayne has had some opportunities to work with special needs children and their families. In addition to the boy she helped diagnose and continues to provide guidance and encouragement to his parents, she has been working with a missionary family whose daughter was diagnosed with a developmental disorder and worked with another boy, whose mother was also interested in attending a Christian church. When COVID is less of a concern, she hopes to work with the missionary family to start a new ministry with them supporting families with special needs children.

2. Moving Slower in Daily Life.

- This year, with ministry, and perhaps life in general, moving at a slower pace has forced them to take their time and spend more time on their personal needs. In their case, they were able to plug in with their old Bible study group they attended in Singapore (now meeting on Zoom with participants in Singapore, Australia and Japan)! This has become somewhat of a transitional year for Todd. He has been able to do more work on freelance writing and photography, preparing for changes that the Lord is orchestrating in their ministry.
- As Todd has traveled around Japan, the Lord has revealed how He has influenced this nation much longer than he realized. Though the long and brutal persecution of Japanese Christians from the late 16th century to the late 19th century was believed to have eradicated Christianity from Japan, Todd is finding this is far from the truth. The persecution made it impossible for many Japanese to hear and respond to the gospel openly, but for those who already believed, it strengthened their resolve. Learning about this history of Japan rarely talked about gives Todd hope for the future of the gospel in Japan.
- 2021 will be a major change for the Fong family in many ways, with Ayumi heading for college (she was accepted at Wellesley, which is her first choice) in the U.S. leaving them as empty nesters for the first time. It also puts a big question mark on their financial situation as they don't yet know what it will cost to send two children to private universities at the same time. But they have trusted in the Lord with each step of change and they are at peace with what the future holds for them.

3. Going Deeper In Relationship.

- With less large-scale ministry opportunities, they have greater opportunity to build deeper relationships with people in their lives. For Jayne it has meant more opportunity to work with special-needs children and their families. For Todd, it has been focusing on key friendships the Lord has given him over the past few years and working harder on those. Building friendships with people he interacts with regularly has been rewarding as he seeks to show the love of Christ to those around him. This is especially true with the people he is working with, as he is the oldest person in the company (!) and people sometimes look to him for wisdom and advice for that reason!

- On a personal note, their son, Jeremy is in his second year at Carleton College in Minnesota. He still has plans to attend Spring quarter in Italy and they pray that will be able to happen because he's been looking forward to that since he was accepted to the program early this year.
- Ayumi is graduating this year from CAJ and has been accepted at Wellesley in Massachusetts. She recently had a fairly serious accident in industrial arts that required 14 stitches to her finger, but she's handled things well.
- In Feb., they adopted a kitten who was living outside on the porch for a couple of months along with their dog, Aoba whom they adopted in September 2018.
- They have no doubt that as they continue to follow the path the Lord has set for them, they will continue to bless and be blessed by their ministry in the Tokyo area.

Thank you for your faithful prayers, encouragement and support over the years as you have partnered with them to allow them to serve in Japan.