

## 2010 Annual Report by Stewart Lauer

To the OPC FMC, OPCJM and the Presbytery of Ohio

### The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

#### ***Inquirers***

Messrs. Tomimoto and Ikeya continue to attend worship occasionally; the former also attends monthly English worship and faithfully participates in weekly English Bible Study.

***Please pray for the Lord to convict both men of sin and to cause them to hunger for salvation in Christ.***

The Ohtake family's daughter, Thaliya, and sons, Daisuke and Seiki, Univ., Sr. high and Jr. high, respectively, made public professions of faith and were baptized in late November.

***Please pray for the parents, whose current jobs have them working most Lord's Days.***

Mr. Irisawa (former policeman; mid 50s) was examined for baptism in September; he was baptized in October. ***Please pray for his growth in grace.***

Mrs. Imoto, a member of a different church, has been attending regularly. Earlier in the year, I performed a memorial service when her husband died. She has introduced six of her friends to our church. One of these, Mrs. Katsumata, has been attending worship occasionally for the past several months, and has attended *fujinkai* (ladies' group), too. ***Please pray for Mrs. Katsumata's understanding.*** She comes with much 'baggage' from previous religious (pagan) experiences. Two of Mrs. Imoto's neighbors have also attended several times. Please keep Mrs. Imoto's daughter in prayer. Although Kumi is a baptized believer, she stopped attending church at the time of her father's death.

For the last couple of months (more of Mrs. Imoto's friends), Mr. and Mrs. Umino and his older sister, Mrs. Suzuki, have been attending worship each week. Mrs. U. is a Christian from Korea, but speaks and reads Japanese. Her husband and sister-in-law are Koreans who were born and reared here. While these two have not been baptized, they are both very interested in the gospel. Mrs. Suzuki says she read the whole Bible through 10 times in 2010. Dr. Hayakawa (dermatologist) and his 3 older children began attending our weekly (Japanese) church services in September. We met him and the three older kids a year ago at a city sponsored year-end/Christmas party for foreigners. At that time he and 2 of the kids began attending the English Bible study (they are all very proficient in English) and monthly English worship services. His wife attends the monthly ladies' outreach (cooking class + Bible message); she is expecting their 5<sup>th</sup> child. She attended the October church retreat and made thoughtful comments regarding the messages, although she still shows little interest in Christianity. Please pray that she, too, will begin attending Lord's Day services and that the whole family will profess faith and be baptized.

In May of this year, Miss Vicki Tsoi came to the church as a visitor to Numazu from Hong Kong. She said that she would be in town for 2 months and wanted to study for baptism. Although she attended a Christian school growing up, she came from a Buddhist home. Vicki agreed to study 2 times a week and she attended worship faithfully. When she was nearing the end of her study of Confessing Christ in June, she was suddenly called back to Hong Kong for a family emergency. Months passed, but in December she sent word that she had indeed made a profession of faith and was baptized into a church in Hong Kong. We praise God for the opportunity to have ministered the Word of God to her.

This past year, we have had numerous visitors, some of whom have attended for a month or longer. Please pray for the many men, women, and children to return and believe in Christ.

## ***Worship and Other Ministry to the Congregation***

In morning worship we have continued through Matthew and are currently completing chapter 25. The congregation seems to be responding well to God's Word, though there are several members who attend rarely and two, Mr. and Mrs. Leslie, who have stopped coming for two years. As per the RCJ FOG, they were moved to the non-regular membership roll as of December; that roll is a prelude to erasure for non-attendance. As they have declined to accept visits, I have sent them two letters appealing for them to return over these last two years of non-attendance.

Overall attendance is up by about 3-4 over a year ago. Our afternoon English worship continues to go well; a couple of the men who come to it recently attended the Japanese service, too. I am preaching through John and my 18 year-old son, Jonathan, is doing interpretation of the English messages into Japanese. In addition to Dr. Hayakawa his two children, several other men come regularly and we have occasional visitors. Most of those who attend frequently have good English skills.

At Wednesday evening prayer meeting I completed study of 1 Corinthians and then taught on the Psalms. Most recently I began teaching on Hebrews. Prayer meeting is usually attended by our family and 3 adult, single male members of the church. Since September, 2009, we have also held a morning prayer meeting twice weekly. We often have two men and one woman attend along with our family. It has been encouraging to see concern for one another developing among those who attend.

There are 4 covenant youth—2 each from 2 families where in each case the wife is married to a non-Christian—who do not attend church. We have been seeking to reach out to them, inviting them to other activities, too, but have been unsuccessful thus far. ***Please pray for all 4 children, 3 of whom are now teenagers. Pray that they will return to church and make professions of faith.***

Our Sunday p.m. studies in Genesis, the WCF and the men's group's study of John M.L. Young's *The Two Empires in Japan* continue. The women continue to use a devotional guide, *Living Life*, which is written in Korean and published also in English and Japanese.

Prayer for the congregation is much needed in several areas. First, as what could be called a "first generation" congregation (all members have come to know Christ in high school or as adults), they are in great need of in-depth Bible teaching. As one member of the chapel committee commented just recently (he being faithful to read the Bible daily), he understands *now* how important it is to seek answers for life and doctrine in the Bible itself and not simply to hear the teaching of some favorite pastor or read some book on a subject. Many are grasping Reformed doctrines and seeing them in the Bible for the first time. They are being challenged to rethink certain concepts. Second, we as a congregation, need to develop a deeper commitment to caring for one another through prayer and other expressions of love. Third, we need to pray for expanding the outreach to youth through Sunday School and other youth meetings of which currently we have none.

In October, the church held its second retreat since our arrival. I delivered messages on the topic of the church as the body of Christ, first generally, then dealing with fellowship and use of gifts. 20 attended. The evaluation afterwards by the chapel committee members was uniformly positive.

As we close out the year, we continue to give thanks that it is Christ who builds His church. At the beginning of the year, one member went to be with the Lord. A month later, one of our faithful members along with his wife (not yet a member) and 3 friends transferred to a Korean church. In November, another faithful member left our congregation for a Korean cult. We continue to pray for them and miss their fellowship. This has brought much sadness to our small group, but the Lord has also brought numerous visitors and added 8 new members through baptism (5), profession of faith (2 of our children), and one transfer.

## **Outreach**

Our English Bible study which meets for 2 hours every Thursday night is working through Romans (currently we are on chap. 15). Attendance has held steady at 9-11; only 2 are baptized (i.e., members of the church). Mr. Nagahama, a young man who works at Fujitsu, whom I met at a gym and invited, who began coming in the spring has also occasionally attended (Japanese) worship on Sunday mornings. The friend he introduced to the class in late spring (Mr. Imada) has also brought a friend to the class, Mr. Nakano. All three attend the Thursday night class; all are very good in English. We held a BBQ for the class in July, inviting family members to come, too.

I tried to continue to visit Miss Shibata once she was transferred to a prison, though I was unable to do so. The temporary detention center where she had been in Tokyo had allowed my visits, but the prison policy allows only family members to visit. I was able to leave some literature for her which she had requested. She does appear to be reading her Bible and sincere about wanting to study for baptism. Lord willing, she will be released at the end of September, 2011.

Although Mr. Ali (in immigration detention) declined my visit earlier this year and I had I feared he may be tempted to return to Islam and go back to Somalia in order to be free from detention, he recently contacted me again and I did visit him. I was also able to leave literature for his as well. His faith is firm and he is awaiting the Japanese immigration dept. decision on his application for refugee status. Both Miss Shibata and Mr. Ali will need jobs when they are released.

Rev. Ushioda, who was the presbytery minister assigned to Kita Numazu for our 1<sup>st</sup> year (now retired), was our guest speaker for a special evangelistic service in June. We passed out hundreds of invitations and many members encouraged friends to come. Sadly, there were no new faces (a week later we had 4 new visitors!!), however those seekers who attended did ask several good questions in the discussion time following the luncheon.

Since April, the women's fellowship has held a once a month cooking class followed by a Bible message which I give and lunch together. Several unbelievers have come quite consistently. Thankfully, the group is beginning to "gel," and friendships have developed which is an important part of bringing the gospel to these women as well as helping them to feel welcome in the church. Laurie was usually the teacher for the cooking and I delivered the Bible messages.

Other regular efforts to reach out to new people include the weekly fellowship luncheon following the service through which we encourage people to stay and become acquainted with one another. Additionally, this serves as an opportunity to talk about the Lord and His Word. Every December, the chapel also holds 2 special services near Christmas. It is particularly easier to invite friends and neighbors to these since there is a minimal understanding that Christmas is some sort of Christian celebration. The Christmas Eve candle service and "Christmas worship" service (held on the Sunday closest to Christmas) had a number of first time visitors including one of the ladies from the cooking class and 2 of the men who attend the English worship service. We are grateful to the women of the chapel who diligently serve through their providing food for all.

Another avenue of outreach the Lord has opened has been visiting friends and family of members in the congregation who have been ill. It was through regular visitation over a 2 year period that Mrs. Wakao came to profess her faith in Christ and received baptism on December 26. Mrs. Matsui, who has come to worship several times, recently fell. The Lord blessed our visit to her home with the opportunity to read the Bible with her and pray. We were encouraged to learn that she has recently begun to read some of the Bible on her own. There are others as well who

have been visited and have attended worship as a result. There are more people to be visited. May the Lord be pleased to communicate his glorious love and good news of forgiveness of sins to those who will repent and believe.

#### Teaching

I continued to teach NTI at KTH again this year. In addition to quarterly 2-day intensive session (8 hours each), the KTH faculty invited me to teach a special session in July on the Gospels in July when Dr. David Weir (history Prof. at Nyack College) was lecturing on church history.

In December the current KRTS president called me to request that I teach OT Exegesis, beginning in April, 2011. I have accepted, though this will be a brand new subject for me, requiring significant prep time.

#### **Dissertation**

I completed and submitted the dissertation in the fall, and sustained the oral defense (*viva voce*) at the Univ. of Wales, Trinity Saint David in late December. The two examiners, D.P. Davies and David Wenham, passed the dissertation but are requiring that I add several footnotes or appendices to deal with certain topics that I had either cut out (to meet word limits) or had not, heretofore, treated.

I believe that completing and hopefully publishing this thesis will be a help to our work, here—not only by helping our voice to gain respect in the Japanese church, but also by contributing to undermining the higher critical view of the purported development of the Jesus tradition during the first several decades following Jesus' resurrection. That view, together with the notion that most of the data in the three Synoptics is, historically speaking, fundamentally a unitary historical source undermines many Christians' confidence in the integrity of those three Gospels, and undermines the authority of the entire OT in the end. The problem is here in Japan, too.

#### **Bible Translation**

My work on the Hebrews revised translation for the New Revised Japanese Bible continues, though with church work growing, I have made little progress on this task this last half year, but hope to pursue this important work in more earnest after final submission of the dissertation.

#### **Other Activities**

I continue to attend the Numazu area pastors' meetings, which opened the door for radio preaching twice per year on a local station. Laurie and I also attend the Shizuoka Prefecture missionary gatherings. Both of these are about every 2 months. I usually attend ministers' meetings both for the whole Eastern Presbytery and also for the Kanagawa Prefecture, the portion of the presbytery closest to Numazu.

I attended the PCJ general assembly in November, giving fraternal greetings on behalf of the OPC and the mission. I also attended the October RCJGA and its officers' conference in June.

Respectfully submitted,

Stewart Lauer