

UPDATE - JAPANESE STAFF

The Lord has provided JM with a team of well-qualified, dedicated and experienced Japanese workers who help keep things running smoothly.

The following staff members work as a team to facilitate evangelism, counseling, Bible study, literature, correspondence, church introductions and the production and distribution of audio-visual materials. Workers also help with administrative matters as government regulations require JM to fulfill various legal obligations, as a registered non-profit religious entity.

- ▶ Mr & Mrs Takahara ▶ Misa Shepard ▶ Mrs Takemori
- ▶ Mrs Yonekura ▶ Mrs Fukunaga

The following workers coordinate their efforts to write and publish a new **Fountain of Joy** tract each month. About 25,000 of these tracts containing a testimony of salvation are sent to many churches and individuals throughout Japan and overseas.

- ▶ Mrs Takahara ▶ Mr & Mrs Tamada ▶ Mrs Aihara
- ▶ Mr & Mrs Kodama ▶ Mrs Kubomi ▶ Mrs Kawabata

Pray for strength, creativity, protection, and wisdom. **Pray** that workers would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be effective witnesses and **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks them (you) to give the reason for the hope that they (you) have.** (1 Peter 3:15b).

PRAISE & PRAYER

Various personnel changes occurred recently, with one worker leaving and two new workers joining JM. We praise the Lord for new and well-qualified workers. **Pray** for smooth transitions, strength and discernment for all:

1. Moi Samte felt led to stop working with JM in December after 5 years of service. **Pray** that the Lord would bless, guide and protect her as she seeks His will for the future.
2. Meljun Picardal joined JM in January from the USA to teach in the English Evangelism Program. He is also helping with various audio-visual projects.
3. Kim Ayars returned in January from the USA to teach in the English Evangelism Program. She worked previously with JM for one year as a KCS teacher.

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THE HOWLING WINDS

Keiko was born on Nov 14, 1943 and raised in Osaka with six brothers and sisters. They did not go to the local temple. "We are too poor to visit the temple," Keiko's mother told her children. "Every time you go there it costs money. Only rich people can afford to worship!"

Her mother was also bitter about her husband leaving the family and blamed her misfortune on the gods. She taught her children to rely on their inner strength for everything. She was determined to never let the children see her cry or show any sign of weakness, but one day all of that changed.

When Keiko was about ten years old a strong typhoon hit the area. She remembers the terrified look on her mother's face as the powerful winds caused the old rickety wooden house to sway. Just as a gust of wind would come, they would hold poles up against the pillars in order to stop the house from swaying. As she held the pole against the wall in the midst of a strong gust Keiko shouted, **Kamisama tasukete kudasai! (God, please help us!)** Strangely enough, the winds subsided. That was the first time that Keiko felt that somewhere out there, there must be a God.

She later thought that the best chance to meet this God would be on New Year's Day, when most Japanese go to worship. She joined the throngs of people at the temple, dropped some coins in the offering box, clapped her hands to get the attention of the gods and prayed; but the experience left her feeling empty. The God she sought was not there. She soon became weary of searching and her interest to find Him waned.



Keiko Takahara

When she graduated from Junior High School, Keiko started to earn money to help the household by working long hours in an electrical factory while attending night school. Her malnourished body was strained and she could not understand why she felt so exhausted.

The company doctor advised her to take an X-ray. The terse note that followed from the hospital sent shock waves through her. The diagnosis was tuberculosis and the recommendation was immediate hospitalization. Tears welled up as she gazed at the document. She felt like it was the most miserable day of her life.

A few days after being hospitalized, she spent her nineteenth birthday alone among strangers, curled up in a hospital bed. Her boyfriend visited her and told her that they could no longer be together. All her future dreams were shattered and her misery was beyond description. How bitter life was! Day after day her pillow was wet with tears.

She then received a Gideon New Testament and started to read it. The genealogy seemed boring. When she read about the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine and walking on the water, she felt dismayed and could not understand how people could believe such ridiculous claims. Nevertheless, she continued to read the Bible to the end.

As she slowly regained her strength, she attended a Christian meeting in the hospital. A speaker from JM inspired her and helped

her see how parts of the Bible were relevant to the problems she was facing. She then decided to read the Bible for a second time to learn more about its truths. This time she felt as though she understood it more.

Although she did not want to rely on religion and admit her need, for some reason she felt the urge to read the Bible for a third time. Matthew 11:28 made a deep impact on her. It was as though Jesus was saying those words to her! While still feeling utterly despondent, she clung to the words of Jesus: ***Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.***

Without any help, while lying on her hospital bed, Keiko gave her heart to Jesus. She rolled her burdens over onto Him and He set her free. She experienced a peace that she had never felt before.

An evangelist from JM visited Keiko and said, "You look different." Keiko said, "Yes, I was utterly despondent, but Jesus came into my life and changed my whole outlook in an instant!"

Keiko then started a Bible correspondence course and learned about sin. She did not think she was as bad as the people around her, but the course explained her heart's condition very clearly and she was deeply convicted. As she confessed her sin, she came to understand the true meaning of the cross and why Jesus shed His blood for man's sin.

Keiko then started to develop a strong desire to study the Bible.

As she saw many around her who were ill and dying of TB, she told the Lord that if He healed her, she would serve Him for the rest of her life. She did not feel that she could be an evangelist, but knew that she could cook and clean.

It was then that she felt the Lord asking, "Even if you do not recover, are you still willing to serve Me?" She decided to serve the Lord no matter what the future held.

She slowly recovered and after being hospitalized for two years the doctors declared her well. She then joined JM at 21 years of age. She had a burning desire to serve the Lord, so JM helped her to attend Kansai Bible College. After graduating, she started to reach out to TB patients, who were suffering as she had. Many today belong to Jesus because Keiko pointed them to Jesus.

Yukio Takahara was a bright young man who was also working with JM. The Lord soon showed Keiko, "He is the man you will one day marry." She kept it in her heart for almost five years without revealing it to anyone. Then suddenly one day Mr. Sato, a senior evangelist at JM, suggested a marriage between the two of them. They were married in April 1973 and are still serving with JM today.

"God taught us how to live and always showed us what to do," Keiko said as she reflected on bygone years. ***I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, and who leads you by the way you should go*** (Isaiah 48:17).

Pray that Mr. and Mrs. Takahara would continue to be bold and faithful witnesses to members of their own family as well as to those in the surrounding community. □

JAPANORAMA - NEW YEAR IN JAPAN

New Year is a time when people return to their hometowns to enjoy a few days with extended families and partake in traditional festivities.

Many stay up all night on Dec. 31 and start by eating buckwheat noodles to wish for a life that's as long as the long, skinny noodles they're eating.

As midnight draws near, the air is filled with the deep sound of temple bells being rung. The bells are rung 108 times to symbolize the 108 human sins in Buddhist belief, and to get rid of the 108 worldly desires regarding sense and feeling. Tens of millions worship at temples and shrines during the New Year, even though they may not visit for the rest of the year.

Sunrise on New Year's Day is believed to have special supernatural powers, and praying to the first sunrise of the year has become a popular practice as crowds gather on mountaintops or beaches with good views of the sunrise to pray for health, prosperity and happiness in the New Year.

Pray that people's eyes would be opened to the Truth as we witness and spread the Word to this dark and lost nation.