

NEW WEBSITE

Japan Mission has launched a new website. Please visit us and stay up-to-date with the **most recent news and prayer requests** at:
www.japanmission.org

CHURCH INTRODUCTION SERVICE

Michiko Watanabe had difficulty finding a church when she returned to Japan. Many Japanese struggle to find a good church when they return to their home country. Japan Mission offers a critical service to help those in search of a local church. We do our best to introduce people to a church that best suits their needs. If you know of any Japanese people who are returning to Japan, please put them in touch with us.

MEETINGS IN THE UK

David and Sue Verwey plan to travel to the UK to take meetings and visit with friends and supporters of Japan Mission during May and June 2018. **Pray** for protection and that the Lord would give them the ability to be effective in communicating the vision of the work in Japan.

JAPANORAMA - DEATH BY OVERWORK

One in five workers in Japan are at risk of a stroke or heart attack from overwork. In 2013, a 31-year-old journalist died after working 159 hours of overtime in one month. One worker who recently died was found to have worked 14 hours a day for the past 10 years without a break. The 40-hour work week is standard, but not well respected. In one of every five companies, workers regularly clock up to 20 hours of overtime each week. It is common for workers to not take all of the vacation time they are entitled to, due to pressure from colleagues and the company. Workers generally work about 10% more hours than their counterparts in the USA and 35% more than workers in Europe.

More is now being done to help the distressed as hotlines have been set up. Chronic overwork has also been officially recognized as an occupational disease, allowing survivors to file for compensation, though few claimants actually receive monetary settlements.



JAPAN MISSION

CALLED TO SERVE

March / April 2018

GOD'S LOVE IN ACTION

Machiko Watanabe was born in Osaka in December 1969. "My father and his parents were Buddhist, but my mother did not believe in any god," she shared. "I sometimes went to temples and shrines to pray for good luck, but I didn't really believe because my mother used to tell me, 'god does not exist'.

"My parents did not get along, so I felt like I grew up in a family where I did not feel loved. My father would get drunk and abuse my mother. He was irresponsible with money and was not willing to help raise me, my younger brother and sister, so my mom raised the three of us very strictly, while working hard to earn money for our household. My parents were later separated, but never divorced.

"This was probably why my dream since early childhood was to meet a kind man who would treasure me and to have my own close-knit family. I remember becoming interested in boys before entering junior high school. I started looking for someone who could become a wonderful future partner, but I was immature. I would often notice the various things that I didn't like about the boy, so my feelings towards them quickly grew cold.

"When I was 26, I married a man whom I had dated off-and-on for 8 years, but it did not work out. We were divorced after a year and a half. I tried dating several different guys after that, but that also did not work out and I gradually became depressed.

"During 2008, I started working for a trading company that required me to work many hours of overtime. The hours were so long that I lost all purpose in life. I was consumed with waking up, going to work and then going home



Machiko Watanabe

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on the last train, just to do it all over again the next day. I did not have a single day off during an entire month's work! I felt trapped, lonely and depressed. I lost all meaning and purpose in life and felt that the only way to escape the situation was to end my life.

"At that time, I was contacted by a man from Switzerland who was a former classmate when I was studying at a language school in England. This led me to quit my job and go to Switzerland. I came to love the country and began to dream of marrying a Swiss man and living there permanently.

"I then met a guy with high-functioning autism. I was drawn to him, partly because I learned that people with his condition were not good at lying and tended to be very honest. I thought that he would be easier to relate to than a 'normal' guy and started to date him. After a few months, he proposed. I felt that this may be my last chance to find happiness.

"I moved into the apartment where he was living with his mom and started studying German. I thought that everything would go smoothly, but one month later, the relationship between the three of us had become strained and I was asked to move out.

"I asked for help from the school and the tourist information center, but they could not help me find a place to live. The school also told me that they could not refund my tuition, so I did not know what to do. I did not want to return to Japan where I had previously worked so hard and felt so lonely. I was at my wits' end and lost all hope and

energy to keep going. I contemplated taking the many sleeping tablets that I had brought from Japan to end my life somewhere in the beautiful countryside of Switzerland.

"The next day at school, one of my classmates, Carol, noticed that something was wrong and talked to me. I explained what had happened. This was the first step I unknowingly took towards the door of salvation. She asked me to wait one day, since she could probably find a place for me to stay. The next day I moved into an apartment with two of Carol's friends, Rachel and Astrid. This was an amazing and unbelievable miracle!

"I couldn't understand why these two ladies were willing to accept a Japanese person that they didn't know, with no conditions attached. They told me that I could use any of the rooms, eat freely from the fridge and that I did not need to pay rent!

"I later found out that they were Christians who wanted to show God's love by helping someone like me who was facing serious difficulties. They seemed to live their lives in such a gracious and cheerful manner. I thought that it would be great if I could be like them and asked them to teach me about the Bible and the teachings of Jesus.

"One day, I shared with Carol about my childhood and the difficult and lonely experiences of my past. She said, ***'You may have thought for your entire life that you were alone, but actually Jesus was always there with you, watching over you. He knows all about your hardships and sadness and has been waiting for you to realize His presence. We cannot see Him, but He is with us***

right now in this room, listening to our conversation.'

"The moment I heard those words, my heart was filled with a warm feeling and tears flowed from my eyes. I understood that I was not alone after all! Upon this realization, the depression that I had suffered for so many years, which could not be cured by medication or treatments, suddenly disappeared! I later wondered why I had such a strong desire to end my life and could only laugh at myself for being so silly.

"I never believed in religion, gods or Buddha in the past, but I was miraculously assured of God's existence as I became certain of His awe-inspiring love for me. I was born again and accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior in January of 2010.

"Looking back, I realized that God graciously allowed me to walk a difficult path to help me overcome my stubbornness and realize my need for a Savior. My parents, friends and boyfriends were all imperfect human beings who made mistakes. God used them in my life to show me my desperate need and to deliver me from an empty and lonely life that was filled with suffering.

"I now know that God is perfect and will not make mistakes or betray my trust. I now receive encouragement from God's Word and know that He loves me, so I don't get lonely and depressed when faced with difficult circumstances as in the past. God is truly loving, faithful and eternal."

The Lord appeared to him from afar, saying, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness' (Jeremiah 31:3).

"I returned to Japan shortly after accepting the Lord as Savior and had a difficult time finding a good church. I went to one church, but it was very formal and not what I expected. The church in Switzerland was a house church that was more informal. We would often eat together while sharing and studying God's Word. The churches in Japan seemed more traditional and it was hard for me to make friends.

"I finally found a missionary from the USA who offered to meet with me weekly to do Bible study. I met with her for 3 years until I started to attend an international church in Osaka. There, I finally found a fellowship where I could make friends and feel at home. I now serve at this church as a church secretary."

Pray that God would continue to bless, protect and lead Machiko.

"I now sometimes meet with my father. He is quite elderly and cannot drink anymore because of his poor health. He regrets the decisions of the past, but still seems quite stubborn about being a Buddhist. He now lives by himself, but we do get together as a family for birthdays and various special occasions."

Pray that Mr. Watanabe's eyes would be opened and that he would have a true revelation from the Lord.

"I now live with my mother. She is also quite elderly and needs special care. She does not believe in Jesus as I do, but when we eat she puts her hands together and waits for me to pray. She seems open, but does not attend to church, except on special occasions such as Christmas."
Pray that Mrs. Watanabe would find Jesus as her Lord and Savior.