



2023 Year in Review



Abraham and Sayuri Kist-Okazaki

A glimpse at what your support made possible:

In the summer of 2022, we were visiting our supporting congregations in America on our home assignment and it was somewhat shocking for us to be living in a world where the pandemic was being spoken about in the past tense. In Japan, the COVID restrictions were still in effect and would remain so until mid-May of 2023 when the government finally ended those restrictions.

In March while I (Abraham) was giving my final English class for the semester at the Soen Preschool, I was teaching the children how to sing the song, “When you’re happy and you know it clap your hands.” I decided it was time for me to bend the rules a little bit and show the six-year-olds what a happy face is supposed to look like. So, I unmasked for a brief moment to display my happy smile. Immediately, some of the children started pointing at my face and shouted out in Japanese, “You have a mustache!” These children, who have known me for almost half of their lives and had been with me so many hours, were seeing my face for the very first time. Their reaction helped me realize that the end of the restrictions didn’t mean that we could simply take off our masks and return to things as they were before the pandemic. After nearly three and a half years, much had changed.

Ten years ago, in response to the dwindling number of youth in the congregations throughout Tokyo, we began a districtwide annual youth event to foster cooperation between congregations so evangelism could be reinvigorated. It was exciting to see that event continue to grow and blossom over the subsequent years. Unfortunately, COVID put an end to large in-person gatherings, and we found it rather difficult to find ways to create that event in an online format during the pandemic. This was very disheartening because we were afraid it might not come back. This fall when we rebooted the event after a three-year hiatus, although the number of youth who attended was down somewhat from previous years, the number of participating congregations was the highest ever. For us, this was a sign of hope that the event could grow into something greater in the future than it had been in the past.

Before COVID, Sayuri had been traveling to several locations each month to give lectures on Christian principles of homemaking to gatherings of housewives. In 2020, the pandemic forced them to move to Zoom. Now, even with all the COVID restrictions having ended, these lectures continue to be held over Zoom because being online opened up the lectures to reach beyond the metropolitan Tokyo region. There are women from all over Japan who now participate regularly. What is exciting is that the number who attend has more than doubled and, more overwhelmingly, the majority of them are seekers.

Sayuri has been very active throughout the years with The National Federation of Kyodan Women's Societies (an organization akin to what the RCWM used to be in the RCA) and was elected to a two-year term as the

chairwoman of its central committee. We ask for your prayers for wisdom and guidance as she takes on this new role of responsibility.



We also ask prayers that our work at Kugahara Church might continue to bear fruit. One of the highlights of 2023 was that the guitarist in our Evening Worship Band was baptized on Easter, making him the second member of our band to do so. Please pray that our congregation can continue to proclaim the message to its neighbors.

Finally, we ask that God will continue to open doors for us throughout Japan. During the pandemic, our work has been mostly with our congregations in Tokyo. 2023 allowed us to also be utilized in other parts of Japan. We were able to do ministry in congregations in Tokushima, Oita, Fukushima, Chiba, and Saitama. We hope that this can expand even further in 2024.

We are so grateful for your continued support throughout the years as we endeavor to proclaim the gospel to the people of Japan. Our prayers are with all of you and your ministries as well.

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