

Japan Update Letter #4 from Our Missionaries Mike and Rowena McGinty

Dear Friends & Family,

Many thanks for all your messages with assurance of prayer and concern for us, for the land of Japan and for its people, especially those in the areas who have lost so much. My days and nights have blurred together recently with so much happening at once and normal routines have become a thing of the past. Our March 11 became like America's 9/11, but on a much more devastating scale. As the news continues to unfold and the numbers of dead and missing continue to rise there is a sobering sense of reality that is sinking into everyone's consciousness. Things will never be the same again.

- The number of people either dead or missing is now over 17,000 and rising. There are several places where the Self Defense Force is only now reaching so no one knows what the final death toll will be. Once the army has finished their part of the rescue/recovery operation in a particular location people are free to enter.
- The situation at the Fukushima nuclear plant still remains critical, though experts say that there is presently no immediate danger to Tokyo but several countries are evacuating their citizens. A group of workers is based at the plant trying to keep all the reactors and spent fuel rods cool enough until the pumps can start working again. We understand there are several Christians among those workers and others with Christian wives. Obviously these men are putting their own lives at risk to prevent a disaster.
- Hundreds of thousands remain in evacuation centers, many of which have inadequate heat and this week has seen sub-zero temperatures.
- Our OMF Japan Crisis Management Team meets daily by Skype and goes back and forth between the obvious demands of the destruction caused by the earthquake and the varied reports of possible impending doom by a nuclear meltdown.
- The yen is actually rising significantly (it was high enough before the earthquake) which of course has the effect that donations from abroad do not go as far when converted into local currency.
- Two OMF missionaries based in Aomori in the north of Honshu went on a fact-finding trip over the last two days to see what help OMF could provide. I have attached one of their reports which gives a literal on-the-ground view of the situation. They located a church in one town of 60,000 people called Miyako, which has seen significant damage and loss of life. There are also smaller places beyond that town nearer the coast where the devastation is even greater. **Next week we will lead a team of 6 OMF missionaries from Hokkaido into this same area using that church as our base.** We will take supplies and aim to minister to the people by providing simple hot meals and performing other practical tasks as needed. We have been scrambling the past few days trying to coordinate this trip by gathering needed supplies, recruiting appropriate volunteers for this kind of work, developing a ministry strategy and working out transportation which has been quite a challenge given the extent of the destruction.

- Gasoline and diesel is unobtainable in the stricken area and gasoline is very difficult to transport as it requires special containers that have been snatched up, but we were able to locate three of them so far. Fortunately both of the vans we will take run on diesel which has less restrictions in transporting so we will take a good quantity with us ensuring we won't be trapped there! We were also able to track down a couple of electric generators which are very scarce items right now. Our original plan was to rent a truck so we could take a lot of relief supplies but trucks were unavailable and it was also impossible to book a place for a truck on any of the ferries that remained in operation.
- Working conditions are likely to be very Spartan and the weather isn't cooperating as more freezing temperatures and snow is predicted throughout the week. We will leave here Tuesday morning (22nd) at 5am our time to race to the ferry terminal in Hakodate, which is 5-6 hours away. From there we will go to Aomori City and make our way down to Miyako. The plan is to return to Sapporo on March 29th and start preparing for other teams to follow as conditions continue to change.
- Despite the difficulties of recent events, it has been a tremendous blessing to witness the body of Christ in action both here and around the world. People's generosity with their time and possessions for those they have never met should be a characteristic of the church and indeed, we have seen that in action. I had a moment of laughter in the midst of the chaos the other day when I was asked by an OMF leader if we "needed any money and how much?" I savoured the moment and had a good chuckle as I couldn't recall being asked that question by an OMF leader in 27 years of mission ministry. 😊 Obviously, the question wasn't intended to address my personal needs but rather the overwhelming needs brought on by our 3/11. God's people are giving generously which allows us to serve as the hands and feet of Christ to those who do not yet know Him.
- One other bit of very happy personal news for us is that we are expecting to become grandparents in August as Megan is expecting. Life goes on and we give thanks to God for His many blessings to our family.

Please pray generally for health and daily strength for ourselves and everyone on the OMF team here. These are busy and stressful days and we have only a vague idea of what is in store for our team on this upcoming trip to the scenes you have been witnessing on TV. I will preach from Psalm 67 tomorrow which is appropriate as we ask God to bless the world's largest unreached people group on the heels of one of history's most devastating natural disasters.

Still standing firm,

Mike & Rowena

"May God be merciful and bless us. May his face shine with favour upon us. May your ways be known throughout the earth, your saving power among people everywhere. May the nations praise you, O God. Yes, may all the nations praise you." Psalm 67:1-3