

McGinty Important Prayer Update October 20, 2011 - Letter 13 from Mike and Rowena

Dear Friends & Family,

Although a month has passed since our arrival in **Miyako** it seems like we have embarked on a journey with no clear itinerary. We have literally traveled up and down the coast of **Iwate Prefecture** and have surprisingly become quickly accustomed to seeing vast empty spaces scattered here and there where towns and fishing villages once stood. We have also made countless trips to the various temporary housing sites where the residents of those former towns and villages are now facing a bleak future. Each day brings with it new destinations representing overwhelming needs that we cannot begin to fill. While we travel literally from place to place responding to the immediate crisis before us, we are acutely aware that we are waiting upon the Lord to reveal His will for the journey yet before us. Like Moses before the exodus from Egypt, Nehemiah before the broken walls of Jerusalem and Joshua before the fortified walls of Jericho, we wait in faith for God to give us a vision for the work ahead of us. Like people of faith who have traveled before us, we fix our hope on the Living God alone, trusting that His provision is somewhere ahead of us on another bend in the road just beyond our eyesight. **We are therefore inviting you to journey with us through prayer** as that is our only weapon in such circumstances. Many of you joined us 12 years ago and prayed into being a **miracle building** that was used for the birth of a church that became known as the Lighthouse. Now we sense the need of prayer for our ministry more than ever. We are not in despair, but rather we are particularly aware of our need for utter dependence on God, which is actually a great place to be. This new ministry is a new experience for us in many regards.

A New Area

For 27 years we have breathed the air of Hokkaido and focused all our energy and efforts into establishing and building up the church there. OMF had a large 'footprint' in Hokkaido whereas in Iwate we are historically the first OMF missionaries to live and work here. Although Iwate is Japan's 2nd largest prefecture, we have been told that we are currently the only missionaries registered to live here. Iwate is a very different culture, with a different dialect, isolated by its many mountains with much of its population hugging a narrow coastline in which we now reside.

A New Demographic

As church planters, and then as a mission leader, our ministry focus has usually been on a younger generation and families, but these days we are spending the majority of our time with the older segment of Japan's population. Many of the younger people have moved away or are busy working during the day so the elderly are the ones we most often meet as we go from place to place. It is too late for many of them to start over and rebuild their lives so they face a very uncertain future. "How do we bring them hope?" is a question we constantly ask ourselves.

A New Objective

OMF has historically been a church planting mission in Japan so relief work is an entirely new ministry for which we have no blueprint to follow. Japan is not a 3rd world country so disaster relief means something completely different than normal relief efforts you might witness on the news. The government and people in general have responded in amazing ways to the crisis so we are looking for unmet needs where we can minister in both word and deed. We are considering various ideas but we are keenly aware that the window for reaching people is closing rapidly so there is certainly a sense of urgency in determining these matters.

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New Partnerships

In Hokkaido we were privileged to be part of a large team of missionaries and churches that OMF had planted. These partnerships have been stripped away from us so now we are trying to forge new relationships with the few scattered churches in Iwate and the tiny church congregation in Miyako where we live. Each week volunteers are coming from all over Japan and overseas to work with us and stay next door so we are meeting a constant stream of new people whose names we barely learn before they are replaced by others. Since our focus is on relief work, we have also chosen to work with the local church in cooperation with the pastor. After leading five church plants or serving in churches without pastors this will be a new experience for us requiring sensitivity for a successful partnership. In the midst of all these new relationships we are very thankful to have M/M Honma on our team to share the daily burdens of ministry. They represent a portion of the spiritual harvest at Nanae that we were privileged to reap 15 years ago so it's great to now serve with them as coworkers for the Gospel.

New Circumstances

We are living and working 24/7 in a disaster zone that not only shapes our ministry but impacts us on a number of levels. It is impossible to avoid absorbing the trauma of others and our current circumstances also curtail personal boundaries that we would normally maintain. While we are thankful for the way God has sustained us so far we realize we cannot maintain present patterns and be available to serve others long term. We would appreciate prayer for wisdom as to how we should integrate a day off into our chaotic schedule and establish healthy boundaries that others would understand.

New Resources

In this new ministry venture we have two resources not normally at our disposal: money and volunteers. People from around the world and within Japan have given generously towards relief work in the tsunami stricken areas so this presents us with a wider range of ministry opportunities. For example, through these funds we were able to hire M/M Honma as OMF staff members to provide desperately needed assistance. We want to be wise stewards of these gifts entrusted to us and use them for God's kingdom work in Iwate. In addition God has placed this hidden corner of Japan on the hearts of many who come here to serve as volunteers generally for a few days at a time. Many of them need a place to stay and they are looking to us for ministry direction so this is another valuable resource that we do not take lightly. How we use this constant influx of people is an integral element of the strategy that we are trying to piece together on the fly.

New Challenges

While we could squeeze a number of items under this topic, the **lack of churches** and a **suitable vision** seem to be the main things that weigh most heavily on my mind as we seek to determine a course for this new ministry initiative. With only one semi-healthy evangelical church located along a 200 mile stretch of ravaged coastline, it is difficult to initiate badly needed ministries so the greater need for church planting in Iwate is quite obvious. However, we were called here to initiate and lead relief efforts so a vision that facilitates this immediate objective and yet leads to a greater impact on this spiritually impoverished area is badly needed. Please pray with us that God would reveal these important matters to us and that we would respond in faith.

Your fellow sojourners,

Mike & Rowena

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P.S. Please continue to pray for **Tonden Church** in Sapporo as it lacks leadership and people to preach on Sundays. We are also mourning the loss of a dear colleague, **Ruth Ayling**, who went to be with the Lord last night. Ruth and her husband Gareth, served for a number of years as the house parents at Chefoo School and provided a godly example for our children that we deeply treasure.