

McGinty Japan update March 16, 2011

Letter #3 (from Mike)

Dear Friends & Family,

It has been 4 days since the Great Tohoku Kanto Earthquake, and as many of you will be able to see all too clearly on TV and the Internet, the extent of the damage caused by the earthquake and tsunami is quite sobering. All of us here appreciate so much the prayers and concern of so many at this time. You are all playing such an important role as you pray and lift up this nation and its people to the Lord in these days of tragedy and uncertainty.

The combination of the earthquake and waves completely devastated the infrastructure of several coastal towns and surrounding areas which is hampering rescue efforts in these regions. People who survived the tsunami are now living in schools and other public buildings but are desperately short of food, heat, and water. There have been some miraculous stories of survivors found in the rubble, but generally there is little hope of finding more, especially given the time that has elapsed since the earthquake and the freezing temperatures at night.

It is difficult to know where to begin. These past few days have obviously been emotionally draining as we watch the stream of pictures and listen to the stories of human tragedy and suffering. Being in Sapporo, we are far removed from the areas most affected, but our hearts are heavy and the aftermath of the earthquake is constantly on our minds. In many ways, life here in Sapporo goes on as normal. But in other ways, things are far from normal. Even in Sapporo, gasoline prices have shot up with rationing measures being implemented and panic-buying has started – some things are sold out and stocks of rice, dry noodles, water, and toilet paper are also being depleted. In other areas it is much worse, with empty shelves in the stores and many places having significant gas shortages, if it is even available.

Here are some ways in which you can pray at the moment –

- A massive rescue and relief operation is underway. Many thousands remain missing, and the final death toll is expected to be well into five figures. For now, the rescue operation is being staffed by the Japanese army, emergency service workers, and experienced relief agencies. The work is dangerous as aftershocks continue. It has been said that an additional major earthquake could occur.
- The situation with the Fukushima nuclear plant is changing all the time. People are obviously very concerned as no one knows exactly what will happen. Wind directions will, of course, impact where any leaked radioactive material is carried. People in the immediate area (within a radius of 20km) have already been evacuated, and those living within an additional 10km radius have been told to stay indoors. People are fleeing the area, but not necessarily with anywhere to go.

- At this stage, the immediate priority is searching the affected areas for any survivors. Many thousands have lost everything, and many are living in evacuation centres. It is hard even to begin to imagine what this is like and the sheer scale of the damage and the number of displaced people make for a huge logistical challenge.
- The government leaders (central and local) need much wisdom to make the right decisions and coordinate the rescue and relief operations.
- As we mentioned in a previous e-mail, a group called CRASH operates in Japan to help in the case of earthquakes and other disasters. It is a Christian network in which missionaries from different agencies are heavily involved, and Overseas Missionary Fellowship is very much part of this group. It is difficult to get access to the areas just now, but over the coming weeks and months, OMF and other agencies will be involved in helping in the relief operation.
- At the moment, all OMF missionaries are safe and well, including those who are in Sendai. Of course, they have suffered the most damage and their food supplies are limited. In the Tokyo area, people are facing power outages, as well as food shortages and increasing concern over any radioactivity which may travel from further north. For now, OMF is not asking any of its people to leave, though a few have chosen to do so for various reasons. Hokkaido will serve as an evacuation centre should the need arise, so we are preparing accordingly and keeping a close eye on the constantly changing news.
- Due to tsunami damage at some of the ferry terminals, ferry services are disrupted from Hokkaido, so we are trying to find ways around this as we assemble aid and volunteers to take to the heavily damaged areas on the island of Honshu. A few advance teams are now determining the needs and gathering the information essential to our rescue efforts. The OMF office will serve as a collection centre for supplies, as we network with other churches in Hokkaido toward a common goal.

It seems that normal life has come to a temporary standstill for all of us, no matter what our situation, as we wrestle with unprecedented circumstances. The Lord is daily deepening our understanding of what it means to walk by faith, not by sight. We appreciate all of you.

Standing firm in Him,

Mike & Rowena