“The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm.”
Exodus 14:14 (NLT)

Hold Steady, Stay the Course

It was only a few of years ago that I sat in a meeting with representatives of a bank that Tamagawa Seigakuin had worked with for a number of years and listened as they warned us that without a “drastic change,” the school was facing a very uncertain future. What might that drastic change entail? Going co-ed, as many Japanese girls schools are doing? Not requiring junior high students to attend church anymore? Bringing in an innovative administrator and changing the focus of this mission school?

There was discussion among the leadership of Tama Sei, but the decision was made—we would hold steady; we would stay the course. We would continue to trust God for His guidance, protection, and blessing. From that point on, the downward spiral in enrollment began to reverse.

For the past few months, we have been asking you to once again pray for the Tama Sei entrance exams, that we would get the number of new students needed to meet our fiscal needs. The required number was set at 296 new junior and senior high students. We had 76 girls being promoted from junior high to senior high—so for the remaining 220, I had been praying for 100 new junior high girls and 120 new senior high girls. This would need a miracle.

When the junior high test was finished the first week of February, we had 91 new girls—just one less than last year’s 92, but 9 short of the 100 I had been praying for. What would God do?

The senior high exam followed a week later, and we didn’t get 120—we got 140!

This brought our total of new students to 307, eleven over the total number we had been praying for! We had held steady. We had stayed the course. And once again, God has proven His promises to be true. Praise the Lord with us!

Home Assignment

We will be in the US for home assignment from mid-May to the end of August this year. We will be focusing on Living Link churches we couldn’t visit during our 2016 home assignment. Also, we will be at the national Convention of the Church of God in Orlando, Florida, June 27-30, and hope to see many of you there. Give a holler if you see us and let’s spend some time talking.

Our schedule is still in process but already includes churches in Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Colorado. We will publish the full schedule on our ministry Facebook page Japan For Christ, @Bartonministryupdates, and ask that you keep us in your prayers. We hope to see you this summer!

Asia-Pacific Missionary Meeting

The biennial Asia-Pacific missionary staff meeting was held at the end of March in Penang, Malaysia. While this time away offered a welcome break from our regular schedules, the days were full. In times of worship Rev. Tom and Denise Dougherty, pastors of Cloverdale Church of God in Boise, Idaho, challenged us to forge ahead and be proactive in our mission. We spent time sharing and praying for one another, and also being brought up to date on happenings at Global Strategy by Director Andrew Gale.

One of the exciting new initiatives at Global Strategy to help churches and individuals become more deeply involved in missions is Pentecost Life. You can find worship, devotional, and small group resources; curriculum for children; and preaching and teaching resources at https://www.chogglobal.org/pentecostlife/ on the Global Strategy website.
Raising Up the Next Generation

Raising Up the Next Generation is an initiative of the Japanese Church of God Home Missions Committee to minister to children, helping them grow into leaders and workers in God’s church. Two camps, one in the spring for families and one during the church’s national summer conference, have been held the past four years. The spring camp, “Or Kids’ Camp” (Or means “light” in Hebrew), is coming up April 27 to 29 on the northern island of Hokkaido. Pray for camp leaders Rev. Meigata, Rev. Kanda, Rev. Fujiwara, and Rev. Ando, and for the kids and parents who will attend.

A Heart for Service

In our last prayer letter we asked you to pray for the entrance exams of Noyuri and Midori Aihara, daughters of national leader Rev. Noriyuki and Rev. Yukimi Aihara. We thank God that both girls passed exams into the schools they want to attend. Noyuri’s exam was for the nursing department of Kobe University. She feels God’s call to serve the church overseas through medical missions. She has excelled in English and has learned Korean also. She has also been an effective evangelist among her high school friends. Please pray for Noyuri as she takes this new step in fulfilling her calling.

Family Matters

Son Benjamin and Yui were married in a beautiful ceremony on Guam on January 11. We thank God for bringing them together and ask that you pray for them as they make their home in Kobe.

Akiko and I were able to visit daughter Stephanie and Donald and grandkids Benjamin, Hosanna, and Sammy in January in their home at Kodaikanal International School in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. It was great getting to see them in their daily school setting. Stephanie is a dorm mom to 17 high school boys, a job she is really enjoying! Donald is working in development for the professional soccer team FC Goa, coaching soccer at the school, helping much in the dorm, and substitute teaching. The fact that the kids go right back out to play after school indicates that they have made good friends and are enjoying their new environment after last summer’s move.

Please know that Christ’s mission in this place is made possible through your love and prayers. We thank God for you!

In Christ, Bernie and Akiko

Praise God for the 307 new 7th grade and 10th grade students enrolled for the 2019 Tama Sei school year. Pray that God will work through chapels, Bible classes, and church attendance to bring many to know Jesus as Lord! Praise God for calling His servants to full time service. Pray for Noyuri Aihara as she studies nursing and seeks God’s guidance of these next four years of university.

Please Pray

Pray for Ron and Jacque Maurer as they come to replace Bartons while they are on home assignment. Pray for God to use the Maurers in a powerful way to build up the English program and bring others into contact with the church.

Pray for seminarian Makoto Nagata and his family (see our last prayer letter) as he prepares for ministry. Pray that God will supply their financial needs. Pray also for their three daughters, aged upper elementary to university.

Pray for those with special physical needs. Pray for English class student Mrs. Maeda, whose cancer has recurred. Pray for healing, and pray that the church will be able to minister to her spiritual needs and help her come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. And pray also for faithful Christian brother Akira Okabe as he recovers from back surgery.

Pray for the plans for a new church building for Futsukaichi Eiko Christ Church. Pray for the church in their capital funds campaign as they raise the $400,000 needed for this project. You can participate in this vital campaign through Global Strategy’s “Futsukaichi Church Building Project,” #42.30261.

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