



## May - June 2020

Dear Praying Friends,

For us, it's been just over two months. Like most churches around the world, we also found the necessity to change the way we meet. And while the change has been difficult, it has helped our church family to grow in ways we didn't expect.

### **HOW COVID-19 AFFECTED OUR NATION**

At the end of March, just a few weeks after our last prayer letter, Tokyo essentially shut down. And for good reason. The rampant spread of the COVID-19 in other large cities, and the fact that we were one of the most condensed cities in the world reflected the oncoming doom that many in our city felt. This also came with the realization that Japan has the highest proportion of elderly in the world, with 1/3 of the nation being over 65 years old. It didn't look good for us.

Yet God was very gracious to us. While there was a significant infection of COVID-19, it didn't spread nearly as much as everyone was fearing. And while there were a lot of unknowns because of the lack of testing, the deaths were proportionately few in comparison to other cities. This may have had a lot to do with the culture here, with wearing masks being very common, and physical contact like handshaking and hugging relatively nonexistent. We will see over the next few months how significant the economic effect will be for Japan, as only essential places of business have remained open, much like the U.S. That being said, we are grateful for how God protected so many of us here in Japan. It could have been a LOT worse!

### **HOW COVID-19 EXPANDED OUR MINISTRY**

While Tokyo shut down, our ministry took a turn that none of us expected just a few months ago. And, to be honest, I think it's helping with one of the struggles of outreach that many of us here in Japan face in reaching people for Jesus.

There's a saying in Japan: "The threshold of a church is very high." The phrase points to how emotionally difficult it is for the average Japanese to walk into the doors of a church building. It makes sense if you think about it. Less than 1% of Japan are Christians. This means that while most Japanese recognize the worldwide existence of Christianity, very few are willing to pursue what it means to follow Jesus enough to be willing to step across the threshold of a church. There is a real fear of getting "sucked into a cult," even if they are invited by their trusted Christian friend or loved one.

There was an obvious answer to this, and yet embarrassingly, I was oblivious to it. As the Tokyo shutdown began, we were looking for the best platform to stream our services over the internet. LINE, an app that is used extensively in Japan, was my preference, as we had a group for our church already set up. For a few weeks we went that route, and it worked well. But one day, Bethany suggested we use Facebook Live instead. I quickly dismissed it, saying how embarrassed I would be that anyone who wanted to could hear me preach. But as I thought about that, the Holy Spirit hit me. "All this time, you've been trying to get people to come to church. Why not just bring church to them? Why not just remove the threshold of the church?" There are a few occasions when I really feel foolish. This was one of them. And with that, Facebook Live for Akigawa Baptist Church has begun. Our hope is that, along with our other outreach endeavors, it will be used as a tool to help more people to hear about the good news of Jesus.



Just today, the governor of Tokyo announced that the emergency status will be lifted. This coming Sunday, we as a church family get to gather together again. I can't wait! But also, I'm so excited to have yet another way to share the goodness of Jesus with those here in Japan!

Serving Him,  
The Carters to Japan