



December 2020

Dear Praying Friends,

This has definitely been a year in which God has broadened my perspective of serving Him here in Japan. It's had its share of both trusting Him in the times of foggy uncertainty as well as rejoicing in the moments He reveals his glorious plan for us.

WHAT IS CHURCH LIKE IN JAPAN WITH COVID-19?

From mid-September, Tokyo started allowing people to gather again, although with strict "suggestions" for how a gathering takes place. For a typical church like ours, it means that every church attender wears a mask (not a big a deal here in Japan as this has been a common practice for decades), the windows must remain open to allow airflow (winter will be veery interesting...), and we must maintain enough space in our seating. This is the most difficult issue, as our main "auditorium" is essentially an oversized Japanese living room, where before COVID seating 30 people was doable but tight. Now, we're limited to around 15 to 20 in our Sunday gatherings, and use an overflow room when the auditorium gets full. This, along with those in our church family who are either themselves or have family members in the high-risk category, has reduced our church attendance by about half. That being said, God still continues to grow our church family.

HOW GOD WORKS THROUGH COVID TO CARE FOR HIS CHILDREN

Here is just one of the ways God's been working through our church family. Ikuya and Sachiyo Suzuki came to Akigawa Baptist Church in 2018. The story of how they came to be with us, along with Ikuya's salvation can be found in the July 2018 letter at cartersjapan.org. (Side note: one day when you meet Sachiyo, BE SURE to ask her about her salvation story. It will blow your mind.) THIS story though is about how God used Ikuya and Sachiyo to bring two dear ladies to our church family.

In the apartment complex that Ikuya and Sachiyo live in is a dear Christian lady named Mrs. Tamura. For years, Mrs. Tamura had been riding the train for an hour and a half each way to go to her church in downtown Tokyo. But her knees started getting weaker, and she just wasn't able to make the trip. For 8 months, she had been unable to go to church, struggling with not knowing what to do. It was right around this time that Sachiyo's mom, who also lives in the same apartment complex, fell and fractured her hip. Through another Christian, these two ladies met, and started helping each other as they recovered together. They soon became fast friends.



Not long after they met, COVID came on the scene and shut down Tokyo, including our church's Sunday services. This led to us starting our online streaming services so that our church family, (and anyone else who wanted to) could watch and participate as the Bible was being taught. Sachiyo, who had gotten to know Mrs. Tamura through her mom, invited Mrs. Tamura to join her and Ikuya as they watched the Sunday message. After watching the sermon together with them in her living room, Mrs. Tamura was so excited, she begged them to make sure they came over every Sunday so she could watch. As the COVID shutdown eased and we were once again able to gather together on Sundays, Mrs. Tamura couldn't wait to come to church. Not only that, a few weeks later, she brought along Sachiyo's mom to come with her, and now the four of them come to church together every week. Each Sunday, Mrs. Tamura tells me how blessed she is that God brought Ikuya and Sachiyo to her so that she could be part of her new church family. God is so good! Thanks for your part in this too!

Serving Him,
The Carters to Japan