

First Quarter Report

April, 2017

“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message I tell you.’”

Jonah 3:1-2

What would have happened to us if the Lord’s patience with us had been but once! Just as God spoke to Jonah the second time, and indeed, as we read the rest of the account, the Lord spoke to him more than twice, so does He speak to us the second, third, fourth time and still many more times to bring us back and closer to Him. With this enduring love and patience of our Lord and Savior, we are given the ministry of reconciliation to share the gospel of Christ with the people we meet here in Yamagata, Japan.

Indeed, I ask the Lord, “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love...as a father having compassion on the children, having compassion on those who fear Him,” to be again patient and merciful to one seeker, Yuichi Tada. Mr. Tada has been with us for more than thirty years and he began coming to worship every Sunday and faithfully attending the weekly English Bible class Katie teaches since 2014. However, he came to see me at the church one afternoon in January and told me that he had been caught between the gospel and the way of the Japanese. The way of the Japanese in his understanding, commonly shared by most of the Japanese people, would be such matters as “Who will look after the ancestors and the family graves?” “How can I possibly refuse to participate in various social events (especially those religiously handed-down traditions, i.e., funerals, going to shrines)?” In addition, Mr. Tada told me that he has tremendous pressure by his relatives as he is the head of the Tada family. Thus, he told me that he needed to be away from his pursuit of Christ and His word. Please pray that the Lord will take away Mr. Tada’s fear of following Christ and bring him back where he was before and continue to seek Christ with us! We have not given him up! You’ll find out later in this report one realistic reason why we can be positive about his coming back.

In contrast to this discouraging and sad event, here is a person, a rather new member of our Yamagata Church baptized in 2015, Miki Yarimizu, who showed deep concern about how a Christian should behave when her faith faces a pagan custom. One day in late March she called me on the phone and asked, “Pastor, I am at the funeral service of my late uncle. It’s going to begin soon, but it’s going to be carried out with Shinto rites. My family told me there will be a prayer in which everyone must participate by reciting according to the Shinto book of prayer. What should I do, Pastor Yaegashi?” I advised her that before the ritual begins, she should talk to the Shinto priest and tell him that because she is Christian, she cannot participate in the religious practices different from what she believes. Mrs. Yarimizu called me again thirty minutes later, joyfully reporting that it worked! No one and not even her relatives, some of whom have already known she became a Christian, gave her a bad look! Still some minutes later she called me again and asked me another question: “Pastor, the family is requested to wash (wipe with a wet cloth) the deceased’s body. What shall I do?” I told her quickly the way how Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took special care of the body of our Lord in order to prepare Him for burial. Unless there is any element of Shinto she can detect, I told her there was nothing wrong to wipe the body clean to prepare him for the burial. Mrs. Yarimizu with a new-born heart is eager to know how she is to please God according to His Word. Praise be the Lord who can change one’s heart so drastically to be able to follow Christ.

I have been taking our two elder candidates, Mr. Sasaki and Dr. Yamamoto, and a deacon candidate, Mr. Inoue, through a course with various areas of study to prepare for their ordination in the near future. In March, we just finished “Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs” by J.I. Packer. Now we are studying the sections on ministers, elders, and deacons from the Book of Church Order of the RCJ in conjunction with those of the OPC and the PCA. Then, hopefully we will study the Westminster Confession of Faith. These men have been faithfully supporting the church, especially as members of the church’s Steering Committee. My colleague, Rev. Uomoto of the OPC Japan Mission, and I make up a temporary session for Yamagata Church.

In the first week of April, the OPC Japan Mission had a joint retreat with the Japan Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Covenanters) in Kobe City, about 800 km south of Yamagata. While I was not able to attend due to my physical difficulties, Katie attended with the rest of the OPCJM missionaries. The speaker was Dr. George Scipione, an OPC minister, teaching counseling at RP's seminary in Pittsburg, PA. He also came as a representative from the new Japan Mission's oversight organization, the Presbytery of Ohio of the OPC, to extend the right hand of fellowship as well as providing the missionaries with spiritual care and encouragement from the Committee on Foreign Missions of said presbytery. He came with his wife, Eileen, who spoke to our ladies on April 7th. We had 20 women attend the meeting including seven of our own members! The people who attended were greatly encouraged as she spoke on the theme "A Gentle & Quiet Spirit," which only Christ can give us through the Holy Spirit as a gift to those who are united with Him and made like unto Himself each day. One of the participants in this meeting was Mrs. Mitsuko Tada. Mr. Tada's wife! She told the people there during the sharing time how her family has been befriended by the Yaegashis and she is grateful for the opportunity to hear a Christian message. This means we know that the Lord still has patience and a plan for the Tada family. Again, please continue to pray for Mr. Tada and his family as we continue approaching them in Christ's love and patience.



From left in front, Shio our translator and Eileen, our speaker

We had a congregational brain storming meeting after the worship service on March 26th. We discussed two immediate needs of the church: The first is “the need to look for a Japanese Presbyterian & Reformed denomination to join.” The second is “the need of serious preparation for Pastor Yaegashi’s retirement, the plan of which is set for year 2022 or before.” This second need has a double connotation or maybe more. It means, first, looking for a pastor who will succeed me; secondly and simultaneously, looking for a church to join, and then thirdly, preparing what to do if the church can’t find a successor or a church to join. Yes, we had indeed much to discuss and to pray for at the meeting. Along with calling a new pastor in the face of my retirement, Yamagata Church has a long-wished-for building project. The church owns its land and building, but the building is just a plain old house with seating capacity for only about 35 people, and thus is not designed for future growth, nor does it provide a worshipful atmosphere. Thus, it has been our people’s long time and strong desire, the Lord willing, to rebuild the church with space for an abode for a new pastor (with his family). Please remember this church building project in your prayers for Yamagata.

In this connection, we would like to ask you to remember Shio Yashima and her husband Masato. Shio has been our member, but her husband belongs to another non-Reformed evangelical church. His church has been closed due to practically no members left except for him and his mother. So, he goes to another church in the same denomination in Yonezawa City, 45 minutes’ drive from Yamagata City; in winter on the snowy road, however, it would take a good 75 minutes or sometimes longer. Shio and Masato have not decided where to settle for their church life. Frankly speaking, I and the rest of Yamagata Church are praying that he will join us “the right church,” and serve the Lord with us!

Our Sunday School had its annual Easter Party for Children at the church on April, 15, in which 11 children and seven adults gathered. While five of the children were of a missionary family from Sendai, six were from Yamagata whom our Sunday School can encourage to come and join its activities from time to time, even if not for every Sunday.



On a personal note, in March, Katie and I celebrated our 45th anniversary, for which we are very grateful to the Lord who kept us together in His love for so many years! Here is a picture of how we look these days and a picture of a beautiful anniversary desert dish the restaurant made for us.



Your servant for Christ's sake in Yamagata Japan,

Kazuhiko (Kaz) Yaegashi

OPC Missionary & Ministerial Member of the PCA

Presenting the report to:

The Presbytery of MS Valley of the PCA

The Committee on Foreign Missions of the Ohio Presbytery of the OPC

The Committee for the Support of Japan Mission

The Committee on Foreign Missions of the OPC General Assembly