

Dear Friends,

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Those of you who don't receive our email update *Osaka Direct* may think we have forgotten our friends back home (it has been 18 months since our last *Moshi Moshi*), but be assured that we do love you and remember you in prayer. But our ministry schedule has gotten more and more demanding as the months go by, and it's hard to find time to compose things like this. Email is more a part of our modus operandus, so if you want to hear from us more often, please say hi at ellrick@proverbs2525.org, and ask us to add you to the mailing list for *Osaka Direct*, our email newsletter.

In our last letter we said, regarding pastoring Osaka International Church, "This fall Dan realized...that God wanted him to be willing to serve long-term if called – by this summer the church will call Dan or someone else." That summer, though, they didn't do either one! Instead, they asked Dan to stay on as interim pastor and to seek ordination so that OIC could call him in accordance with their constitution, which requires a "regularly ordained Protestant minister". His missionary commissioning was not considered sufficient, and he wrestled with whether to simply move on from OIC, but the Lord again told him to stick with it, and was faithful to open the doors as well – in July Dan was ordained, and in October the church voted to officially call him as their pastor.

By the time it was finalized, we were quite entwined in OIC already – you'll read about much of that in the following pages. But the church is definitely in a good transitional period, mostly finished recovering from the crisis that brought us to them, and beginning to move on to maturity and outreach. The question has been how the Lord will keep the cell church ministry going smoothly without us investing the kind of time we had imagined we would. But He has answered that question bit by bit, through Aukje's gifts and faithfulness, M&M (see page 2), and Aukje's new husband Will (as of April 2 – congratulations!), who is now in language school and will no doubt become a wonderful asset in the ministry.



Will and Aukje

We pray that the Lord is blessing you also, and we would love to hear from you!

In Jesus' love,

Dan and Karen



IMF: A New Connection

Before we came to Japan, Dan considered joining an organization called International Ministerial Fellowship (www.i-m-f.org) to start the process toward ordination. IMF describes themselves as "an association of laymen and clergy persons who work across denominational lines to love, serve,

encourage, and enable those who are called to Christian service", but a key part of their ministry is to provide ordination for those whom God is calling to pastoral ministry but are not part of a denomination or other ordaining group. But Dan decided not to take any action then, seeing no logical need for ordination for our ministry in Japan.

When OIC voted to require ordination before calling Dan, he looked again at various organizations, and IMF still rose to the top of the list, having high screening standards, a broad spectrum of members, and a good reputation. It took several months to gather the materials they requested for application, write answers to their many theological questions, and request references from both continents, but he got the package to them in May, and the reference letters soon followed. IMF's complete process from the start of ministry until ordination is usually three years in length, but they can decide that an applicant has already fulfilled some parts of it and speed up the process. We decided to attend IMF's biannual conference in July in order to see the organization firsthand, as this would be a long-term relationship.

Well, IMF processed his package very efficiently, and decided that he had fulfilled the equivalent of all their steps (as a "transfer" applicant), so at the conference he was ordained along with four other men. He even appears in their conference highlights twice (see <http://www.i-m-f.org/pdfs/Conference05/05ConferenceHighlights.pdf>): the ordination is on page 3, and the two of us are featured on page 7.

We were impressed with IMF and its members, and enjoyed getting to know many of them. They have a delightful mix of people from across the spectrum of Christianity and display a wonderful unity in diversity. We are pleased to be a part of it.

This letter contains only a tiny bit of the news from the last year and a half. For more, please see back issues of Osaka Direct on our web site.

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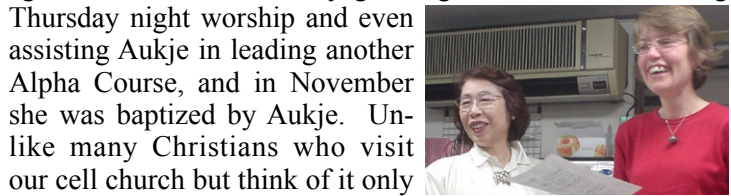
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Alpha is Bearing Fruit

We have been offering the Alpha Course (see alpha.org) extensively at both OIC and the cell church over the last two years, and the Lord has been using it in wonderful ways. We have seen a number of people accept Christ for the first time, rededicate their lives to Christ, and/or grow in their walk. Allow us to share just a few examples.

Motoko is in her early sixties, and began her contact with Grapevine Cell Church by taking English lessons from Aukje. Then she decided to try the Alpha Course – she's pretty shy and doesn't like interaction in large groups, but three or four people watching teaching videos and talking about them was just about right for her, and she already knew Aukje, who was leading the course. She missed a few sessions, but became interested enough to join the next course to make up the sessions she missed, and was soon born again. She has been really growing in her faith, attending Thursday night worship and even assisting Aukje in leading another Alpha Course, and in November she was baptized by Aukje. Unlike many Christians who visit our cell church but think of it only as a network of Bible studies because we don't have a big Sunday service, she considers Grapevine Cell Church her home church. Please pray that her husband would come to an Alpha Course, too!



Motoko and Aukje laughing off their nerves at the baptism ceremony

Michinao and his then-fiance Risa first came to the cell church to see the drama team Covenant Players. They both professed Christ, but Michinao's faith had grown cold, he was struggling emotionally, and he was unable to find work,



which caused their wedding plans to be put on hold. They came to Alpha, and Risa even brought another friend to a second Alpha. A few months later a wedding invitation arrived (in fact, they asked us to be the MCs for their reception)! Risa directly credited us and Alpha for getting Michinao back on track – reading the Bible, going to church again, and finding a job, which enabled them to move forward on their plans for a life together.

Finally, here is a photo of our first OIC Alpha, in May 2004, and it illustrates the potential of Alpha to raise up lay leaders. Besides those mentioned, others in this photo have become motivated to do other types of outreach, and almost everyone who attends Alpha recommends it to friends – a very natural way to share Jesus!

Danilo learned leadership skills on this English course, and his wife Chiwa accepted Christ through a Japanese Alpha, and now together they lead a thriving group in their home

Eddy was baptized right before this course started, so this became a good discipleship course for him

Chie attended this course, assisted on the next, and led the third course

Teiko assisted when Chie led, and may lead her own course soon

M&M were Mmm, Mmm, Good!

MUP has a program called the Luke 10 Challenge, which is longer than a typical short-term program, placing people with an existing missionary for three to nine months. This worked out great for Micah and Melanie Wilson, and it worked out great for us as well.



Micah was an exchange student here in high school, and a few months after he went home he got a very strong indication that he was called to return to Japan as a missionary. He continued to study the language, and is quite fluent. Meanwhile, Melanie had no interest in ever leaving her hometown of Tacoma, WA, but married him anyway! Then she decided that she should see Japan and experience missionary life for herself, whether she felt comfortable with it or not, so they joined the Luke 10 program and came to Osaka for nine months.

M&M at their farewell party, posing with the four students of their Japanese Alpha. Only one was a Christian at the time, but another has believed since then, and all four want to run another Alpha course for their friends!

God used them mightily while they were here. It seemed they made friends with and shared Jesus with everyone in Osaka! They led two Alpha classes (one in each language), got an English class going in their apartment building, conducted various outreaches to Osaka Christian College students, and personally befriended local storeowners, people on the train, and anyone else who would talk to them, which was just about anyone – two personable blondes, one of them over six feet tall who spoke smooth Japanese, made a bit of a splash wherever they went. Their farewell party at Sekime Chapel was a testimony to the effectiveness of their ministry, as all kinds of people from all over Osaka were there, wishing them well and listening to their testimony of God's grace.

At first, living in Japan away from family was pretty hard for Melanie, but she got over the hump after a few months, and it appeared that by the time they went home, Japan and missions had gotten under her skin. We pray that the Lord will bring them back at the right time. If anyone you know wants a taste of what long-term mission work is like before committing long-term, we recommend "Luke 10".

No, we haven't been to Africa, but this is one more thing we have become involved in - we are now on the Japan board of Deaf Ministries International, which sponsors deaf churches, schools, and children in poor countries.



OIC Rejoices with Lots of New Brothers and Sisters!

In our last letter we reported Dan's first baptism, that of Eddy Yamamoto in January 2004. Since then, it has gotten even more wet! After a couple cycles of Alpha courses, three more people were ready for baptism in July 2004: Japanese Chiwa, Filipino Carlos, and Chinese Cheng. Being summer, we used our portable baptismal outside Osaka Christian Center, where OIC meets.



Then, in December, Pablo from Chile was about to go back home after four months in Japan, and he had become a Christian while here and suddenly decided to get baptized the day before he left. We didn't have much time to prepare, so we had a simple ceremony at Sekime Chapel, with his Colombian friend Paulo interpreting into Spanish for him. It was right after the cell church's Saturday morning worship, so Aukje and Motoko (see page 2) also attended – it was a good chance for Motoko to see what a baptism is like, even before she became a believer.



Then in November we had another group baptism. There was no place at the Osaka Christian Center to have it, so after worship 26 people jumped on the train or into cars and went to Sekime Chapel. Iruma and Rhoderick are two of the ever-growing group of Filipinos that call OIC their church home, Victor is a Korean Canadian who had grown up in a Christian home but just this year committed his life to Christ, and Isao is a Japanese who became a Christian while in the U.S. and immediately upon his return began attending OIC and asked to be baptized. We are excited about what the Lord will do through all these new brothers and sisters!



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ARE WE BUSY YET?

When we launched the cell church and had 36 short-termers in one summer (2003), we thought we were pretty busy. Then we got a second facility for the cell church, and with Aukje's help, began to regularly conduct three or four Alpha courses simultaneously at a combination of three locations (2004). Dan also increased his office hours at OIC and his counseling workload followed. Then in the spring of 2005, OIC's full-time secretary moved to Hawaii, and we could not find a replacement immediately, so Karen and Dan shared that load. The replacement started working seven weeks later, but most of the office work is computer based, and she was (still is) a computer beginner, so we still have that stuff to do. Then we launched a small group ministry at OIC – it started with Dan leading only one of the three groups, but recently two more have been added and he is in charge of both of them. Will it get busier yet?

Please pray for us as we juggle our schedule and try to keep all the balls in the air. Of course, we have many special events and tasks that are not connected to events at all, but this here is our weekly schedule of regular events:

Sunday: 10:00 OIC main worship (Dan leads, Karen plays guitar on worship team and consults on sound system), 6:00 Grapevine Cell Church (GCC) prayer meeting at Sekime

Monday: Day off (in theory 😊)

Tuesday: 9:00 Karen has worship planning and practice session with pianist at OIC, 11:00 Dan leads GCC Bible study at Abeno, 1:00 Dan has Japanese tutoring session

Wednesday: 10:30 OIC small group (Dan guides, weekly study leadership rotates), 6:00 OIC small group in Toyonaka city (Dan leads, Karen participates)

Thursday: 10:00 Japanese Alpha at OIC (Dan leads), all day Karen helps an OIC member with a project in Takarazuka city, 7:00 GCC worship at Sekime (Dan leads, Karen leads parts of the worship, Pastor Hirano preaches on video)

Friday: 10:30 (twice a month) Dan leads a Bible study in Takatsuki city, 10:30 (the other weeks of the month) Dan supervises an Alpha class led by someone else, 4:00 Karen has worship practice at OIC



Friday in Takatsuki: Teruko rearranges her kitchen for this study attended by both Christians and seekers

Saturday: 6:30 OIC bilingual worship (Karen leads worship, Dan leads service and preaches)

Throw in Dan's counseling hours at least three days a week, monthly council meetings for both churches, guest preaching for a homeless ministry every couple months, conferences, etc., and you get a pretty big schedule stew. Fortunately, Aukje leads three GCC events that we don't even attend (bless her!), and lay leaders take the ball for two vital small groups at OIC. So as more people get training and confidence to take on ministry roles, it should get easier, right? We'll let you know next time!

••••• Missionary Quotable Quotes •••••

• *"And people who do not know the Lord ask why in the world we waste our lives as missionaries. They forget that they too are expending their lives, and when the bubble has burst they will have nothing of eternal significance to show for the years they have wasted."*

• *Nate Saint*

Karen's Hi-Tech Ministries

While Dan takes on more and more leadership and teaching roles, Karen's reputation for hi-tech tasks has been spreading, and people all over Japan are turning to her for help with moving their ministries into the 21st century.



Karen at Horizon Chapel, giving Nami some tips

It started with video. In the spring of 2004 a missionary introduced her to Tokyo Horizon Chapel, a growing church that has many "video churches" meeting in homes and elsewhere who watch video of the main worship service every week (does this sound familiar? we have had a vision of cell worship with video for some time!). They wanted to upgrade their video

operation, and asked Karen to travel to their church to advise and train them. While she was there, she also filmed Pastor Hirano giving a series of short evangelistic talks explaining *The Passion*, just a couple weeks before the movie was released in Japan (Japanese people are particularly confused by the movie, not having exposure to the Bible stories). She came home and made them into a DVD, and burned hundreds of copies for distribution both here and in Toyko.

After Horizon finished the upgrades to their video process and began releasing their Sunday worship on DVDs, we began to reap the benefits ourselves. Pastor Hirano is a very gifted Bible teacher, with a Calvary Chapel background like us, so Grapevine Cell Church now subscribes to the DVDs and uses them in our worship at the moment. It is the kind of resource we thought we would have to film ourselves (finding a willing and compatible local Japanese pastor, scheduling special studio sessions with him every week, and doing all the editing work ourselves), but the Lord is providing it by a way that consumes far less time, when time is a premium in our ministry. Eventually we would like more Japanese teachers on DVD, but for now, this is a wonderful blessing!



Pastor Hirano, ready to film "Understanding The Passion"



Then came the wave of web sites. As you know, Karen has

maintained proverbs2525.org for some time, and a couple years ago started a site for Grapevine Cell Church, budounoki.org. Then her attention turned to the OIC web site, which has a good base of links on other sites and a high ranking in search engines, but was due for a big redesign. We tried to gather a team of OIC people to revamp it, but in the end, Micah Wilson and Karen made it happen (some things are hard to do by committee!). It has been wonderful to hear over and over from first time visitors, "I found OIC on the Internet!" Take a look at oicjapan.org. Then other ministries began to approach her for help. Jack Marshall, the founding pastor of OIC, now in Australia with his wife Keiko planting a new Japanese church, asked Karen for help choosing a domain name, getting space for a web site, and getting started. Then the Japan board of Deaf Ministries International asked her to build a DMI site for Japanese readers, and most recently the Japan arm of Prayer Summits made the same request. Those are still in progress, at japan.deafmin.org (the original English version is at deafmin.org) and japanprayersummits.net – feel free to take a look if your computer has Japanese fonts. Also related to web design are her online databases for keeping track of ministry contacts (i.e. people, attendance of events, etc.) and worship songs. Currently there are three copies of the contacts database in use (our own ministry, OIC, and DMI) and two copies of the worship database (for the two churches), and she is continually adding features to both as needs arise.

Powerpoint and printed matter are also a regular part of her tasks. Since OIC's new administrative assistant is not ready to take on the many computer-based office tasks, Karen still does the Powerpoint presentations for Saturday and Sunday worship services, the weekly bulletin, monthly newsletter, and various flyers, newspaper ads, etc. She does the same for DMI: she just finished a tri-fold brochure for DMI fundraising, and helps them lay out their monthly newsletter. Of course right now, Christmas flyers, posters, outreach materials, etc. are all the rage.

Dan likes the fact that Karen is the technical one in the family. It takes time to keep current on computer knowledge, and in recent years he has focused more and more on people ministry instead. So when he sees that window appear that says, "A problem has occurred – please contact your system administrator," he gets within earshot of Karen and calls out, "Hey, System Administrator!"



Prayer Points

1. Pray for divine wisdom as Dan steps into the role of long-term shepherd for OIC.
2. Pray for the Lord's will as we balance activities and projects of OIC, GCC, MUP, and other ministries – that we would choose God's priorities, not just what looks urgent.
3. Pray for Sakai Chinese Church, a vibrant church plant ministering to Chinese who come to Japan to study. Both OIC and GCC support them financially, and they borrow GCC's Abeno Room for some of their activities.

Pray that we would not let all the "doing" distract us from "being" with Jesus – spending intimate time with Him!



The hall in the new building of the Osaka Christian Center, where we now have Sunday worship (only part of the seating is visible in this photo). Pray for more people to fill the 300 seats!

Katsuhisa, a single dad and long-time member of OIC, found his new bride Yukiko through a Christian dating service. She and her son moved halfway across Japan to blend two families, as well as join our church family.



A Final Word from the Word
"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,"
 Romans 5:15 (NIV)