

Dear Friends,

Greetings on the eve of a long-overdue trip to the States to see some of you! We will spend the next month visiting friends and relatives on both coasts - our first visit to the east coast in 3½ years, and Dan's first time to the west coast in 6½. We had hoped to get this letter out in time for all of you to get it before we embarked, so that you'd know we were coming before we passed through your area. But life and ministry pressed down on our time schedule, and we almost didn't get time to write it at all.

Anyway, we will first fly to Maryland on Feb. 6th to see our sending church, Grace Fellowship Chapel, then to Virginia to visit Dan's grandkids and various old friends. On the 16th we'll fly to Nevada where Dan's sister lives, and then drive to the San Francisco area for a conference on reaching Japanese for Christ while they are in other countries and helping them integrate into Christian life when they return to Japan (Dan will give a presentation about the role of international churches in the returning process). Following that, we drive down the coast to Southern California to visit Calvary Chapel Oceanside (the church where we began our walk with Jesus), various friends, and Karen's father, and then continue to Phoenix to visit other friends before flying back to Japan. If you get this in time and are on that route but not in either named church or a friend we have already contacted, email us if you want to see us, and we'll see if we can work it out. It's a pretty fast schedule, but God will orchestrate how He wants us to spend the time.

Speaking of a fast schedule, the fast pace of our ministry continues, with worship services and small groups, baptisms, weddings, Alpha Courses, counseling, video production, web development, board meetings and event planning, outreach, training and mentoring, and many other things. If you can name it, we are probably doing it!

Thank you for your prayers, and may the peace of Christ be with all of you!

In Jesus' love,

Dan and Karen

Frames from four of the Japanese praise videos (view the PDF of this letter on our website to see it in color)



Sing a New Song

In a couple of previous letters we briefly mentioned that Karen is working on a Japanese worship video project. But now it has become a major event, so we want to explain more and ask for your prayers.

The idea started four years ago. We had purchased the "Doing Life Together" DVD-based Bible studies for OIC's English-based small groups, and also bought the accompanying worship DVDs. We enjoyed using the worship DVDs even for our home devotion time, and the small groups loved them too - well-known worship song recordings with inspiring nature or other scenes and the words displayed on the screen. Easy to use, easy to sing to, with no musician or leader required. We even occasionally used one of the songs on Sunday morning as a closing song for a worship set, especially to introduce a new song. The church members then started asking for them to be stocked in the church bookcart, and they sold like hotcakes. But there was nothing equivalent for the Japanese small groups and individuals, because no such video product yet exists in Japan. Dan elbowed Karen one day and suggested that she make such a thing. At first Karen thought he was crazy, but the idea grew on her, and she began to collect scenic footage whenever she could, taking her video camera on everything from hiking outings to overseas trips and filming at every opportunity.

But using the songs is a copyright issue, and using commercial CD recordings of the songs is even more so (we don't have our own band and studio handy). At first we decided to only undertake making videos for a few songs from a church in Tokyo who writes and records their own songs for free use without royalties. But those are not the songs most churches are familiar with, so in November 2007 Karen got the courage to approach a well-known Japanese praise music recording company about producing videos that they would call their own new product line. They liked the idea in concept, and we started on a partnership. She selected songs for a three-DVD series from their 30 years of production (about 20 CDs), met with them again with two songs completed and discussed terms and strategies, and although there were various differences in our ideas of how to proceed, it seemed that it was workable. But only a week ago, just when she had completed a draft version of all 12 songs that would be on the first DVD, they suddenly changed their mind about what kind of risk they were willing to take, feeling that they didn't know how to market such products. Their new proposal was unworkable. But by then we had learned a bit about how the copyrights work, so we researched more detailed information, and it would appear that the road is open in front of us to produce our own product and pay the recording companies to use their recordings (we could branch out and use more than just songs from that one company). We hesitated to say what we were thinking to the company we had been working with for so long, thinking that

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Growing Pains (and Gains!)

OIC is continuing to grow in numbers - we set an attendance record on Christmas Eve of 212 people, and even on a more normal weekend, we typically have about 150 people between Saturday night, Sunday worship, and Sunday School. It is exciting to see, but it also brings some challenges, particularly to the pastor if he does not have help. We have people who help with administrative tasks,

service roles during events, and small group leadership, but the counseling and pastoral care load has been still primarily on Dan's shoulders. Also, although we continually have new visitors, people also fade away from fellowship, and Dan cannot possibly follow up with all those people.

So OIC started a new program last fall to try to help with that and at the same time develop people's gifts. We call it the Pastoral Assistant program. Dan and the church council chose 44 people who they felt might have the maturity and gifts to be able to encourage and help other people, and invited them to pray about becoming a Pastoral Assistant (PA). Eleven of them volunteered, were trained, and given a list of 15-20 people to care for, matching gender, and as much as possible also primary language and age range. Not just regular attenders, but everyone who has had contact with OIC and is known to still be in the area is on the list to potentially be assigned a PA - about 300 people at the moment. There are not yet enough PA's to cover the whole list, particularly of the right combinations of gender and language (e.g. there are not yet any male Japanese PA's, and only one Japanese woman), but we pray that that will change.

Although many people in the congregation are not yet used to the idea of going to someone other than Dan with their problems, some are warming up to their PA. And one very visible positive effect of the program has been the reappearance of a number of people who had fallen out of fellowship but came back after being contacted by their PA with a warm, "How are you doing these days?" Please pray for our new PA's, and for the Lord to raise up additional people who can help with this ministry.

Worship Videos (continued from front page)

they might be offended, but when Karen did mention the idea of reversing roles, they didn't mind at all. We don't know yet what they would charge, but others have used their recordings with such an arrangement before, so there is probably a precedent and a standard percentage.

You can see one video (the one she did for a freely distributable song) on our website - under Ministry Activities, choose DVD Resource Project, and go to the very bottom of the page.

If we do this, it will be a bold new venture with more work and financial risk, but it will give us more freedom to do it the way we feel would most minister to churches and individuals. God appears to be opening doors, but we want to be completely in step with Him - please pray with us for His guidance.

Love Your Neighbor...

After seeing our building-mates in the elevator over the last year and a half and putting seasonal greetings in their mailboxes a couple times, we held our first outreach event for our building of 104 condos - a Christmas party in the building's common-use meeting room. Since there are lots of young children here, we decided to make it kid-focused, and even invited Santa (a missionary friend). In the States, Santa is often a distraction from Jesus, but in Japan it is a bridge to share the Gospel. Since living, breathing Santas are rare here (mostly just statues in stores), our party was a big hit - about 40 people came, about



half of them kids! In addition to exposure to the real meaning of Christmas through singing carols, each family went home with Gospel materials for both adults and kids, and many people now greet us more personally. Praise the Lord, and pray for continued outreach.



Upper: The excitement when Santa first appeared (view of about 1/3 of the people). Lower: Karen, Ed (Santa), and Dan lead everyone in singing Christmas carols. The empty chair is for photos with Santa.



Prayer Points

1. Pray that our time in the States would be productive, but also restful in the midst of its fast pace.
2. Continue to pray for Dan's lower back. He had another setback this last weekend, and the rigors of travel may be hard on him.
3. Pray for the Lord's leading regarding the cell church. If it doesn't grow enough in 2009 to become financially independent, we may need to do something else. There are some recent hopeful signs, particularly with Jose's ministry to Filipinos, but it will need to be consistent stable growth to become independent of the support funds that are running out.
4. Pray for OIC's newlewededs and those preparing for marriage: Raneil & Yukako (Nov.), Michio & Atsuko (Jan.), and Frederick & Cotoyo (scheduled for March). If you still have a copy of the July 2008 Moshi Moshi, Cotoyo is the left-most photo of the river baptisemes (hands above her head in praise).
5. As always, pray for the people of Japan, that they would know the truth so that the Truth would set them free! And also lift up the new believers, that the Lord would establish them firmly in their faith in this challenging society.

A Final Word from the Word

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord...

Ephesians 5:19 (NIV)