



And he (Christ) is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. Colossians 1:17-18



Newsletter #12 十二

祈tenzlers in 禱Japan

Julian und Karolina want to reach students and staff at Japan's universities with God's good news of love and forgiveness, and disciple and accompany them in following Jesus.

A little bit of Japanese

Japanese is a language that pays a lot of attention to relationships and differences in rank. For example, people of higher rank are addressed by their title instead of saying "you" or their name. Examples of such titles are:

- sensei* teacher/doctor/pastor
- senpai* senior in school/senior colleague
- kacho* section manager
- oniisan* older brother
- okusan* wife of the person you speak to/about

The title often indicates that the person is older or has been in office longer:

先生 先輩
sensei and *senpai*

both begin with the character for "earlier" or "before". *Sensei* literally means "born earlier" and *senpai* is the "comrade who was there before me". Its counterpart (*kohai*) is the "comrade who came later".



There is a strict hierarchy between *senpai* and *kohai*. Even if the *kohai* is hired just one day later, he must obey everything the *senpai* says.

Dear family and friends,

07-04-2024

While in February it was still possible to build meter-high castles out of the masses of snow on Hokkaido, now at the beginning of April, thanks to the strong sun, only scattered remnants remain. May the bright light of the Gospel crumble the fortresses of darkness in Japan in the same way!

We are getting back to you again after another travel period in March. This time we went to a Christian student retreat by KGK, visited Christians from a church in Asahikawa for a few days and then spent a time of Bible study and prayer with the couple at Lake Toya (photos on page 3). Finally, Julian preached in a church in Sapporo. For the time being, we have had enough of traveling and are focusing on Kitami again. Because we had seen such overwhelming progress as a result of our 28-day prayer time in December and January, we have now started a similar prayer initiative with some members of our church in Kitami. We have now met seven times and prayed for two hours each time. It is indescribable how these prayers help our Japanese brothers and sisters to change and grow in their faith. There is not enough space in this letter for all that has already happened as a result in the spiritual and visible world around us. But we will give you an example at the end of the letter.



Snow sculpture of Neuschwanstein Castle at the snow festival in Sapporo

More and More Churches without a Pastor!

As of this month, our church in Kitami is officially without a pastor. Although the previous pastor is still continuing his ministry, he retired on April 1 and a new pastor has not yet been found. With this situation, our church joins a growing number of churches in Hokkaido that have either lost their pastor due to retirement or burnout, or where the pastor has left the church due to some disagreements. There are also hardly any new pastors. The number of graduates from the few Bible schools in Japan is decreasing every year. One reason for this is that the Japanese churches have neglected to look after the next generation in recent years. On the other hand, the pastoral profession is very unattractive due to the heavy workload. It is expected that by 2030, half of all churches within the JECA church federation in eastern Japan will have no pastor.

This development may paint a bleak future for the church in Japan for some, but it also presents a great opportunity, as the standard Japanese model of "one church, one pastor" is not without its problems: Fundamentally, Japan is a society that is characterized by hierarchy and obedience to authority figures. This can be seen, for example, in the complex system of politeness levels in the Japanese language and in the dynamics between age groups in schools or seniori-

ty levels in the workplace. Even if it was not intended, this way of thinking has been transferred to the church, resulting in a clearly visible two-tier society: The pastor has absolute authority spiritually and what he teaches is not questioned. At the same time, the other church members do not feel able to understand the Bible themselves or explain it to others. People who are interested in Christianity are immediately taken to the pastor.

We have already encountered Japanese people who were taught wrongly by a pastor, but did not dare to disagree because in their eyes he was "like God himself". And we heard from a church without a pastor that they have a pastor flown in from another prefecture once a month because otherwise they can't hold a service and no one else can administer communion.

As a result of this dependency, little spiritual growth is seen in Japanese churches and many churches, because their pastor is completely overwhelmed, only work to maintain the established systems and the status quo instead of evangelizing and spreading the kingdom of God. Also dangers are lurking such as spiritual abuse, mere fixation on money to pay the pastor's salary and lack of accountability and pastoral care for pastors, which has often led to burnout and even suicides.

With both pastors and the whole church suffering under the current system, churches in Japan are in desperate need of change, for which we have been praying for some time. We want to tell you briefly about an answer to prayer.

Jesus Builds His Church

A woman from our church who is part of our prayer group suddenly got the impression that she should go with our pastor to the annual meeting of JECA Hokkaido, and stand up in front of the 40 pastors present and say that Jesus is the Lord of the church. After an opportunity to speak actually arose, she assured everyone present that we were praying for them, read Ephesians 1:22-23 and Matthew 16:18-19, and said that the only perspective for us is Christ's victory. Afterward, several pastors came up to her with tears in their eyes and said that they had needed this reminder and had repented. Our pastor also said that when she spoke, the atmosphere in the room suddenly changed.

This event was a big surprise and a miracle for us, because not a single part of it is normal. We don't know how Jesus will solve the situation, but we have entrusted this problem to him and are excited to see what he will do next.

Thank you very much for your interest, your prayerful intercession for us and your faithful financial support!

Julian & Karolina

Upcoming events

- 01.04. Begin of new academic year
- 10.-14.06. OMF training in Tokyo

This is how you can support mission in Asia

- Order our prayer letter (write us an email).
- Become a prayer partner of us or support us practically: [Link](#)
- Become part of an OMF team of volunteers close to you: [Link](#)
- Do a short term mission trip with OMF Serve Asia: [Link](#)
- Or does God call you to Asia as a long-term missionary? [Link](#)

Pray for Japan [Link](#)

In the face of declining pastors and shrinking churches in Japan, please pray that Christians and spiritual leaders will have open eyes to these problems and instead of trying to solve them with human efforts, look only to the leading of the Holy Spirit and what Jesus is doing in His church. He is the Lord and master builder of the church. He knows all the details of the current dilemma, and He alone can restore the Japanese church and transform it into a living body that fits into the Japanese culture on the one hand and represents a healthy counterbalance on the other.

Please check out our Telegram channel for more photos, videos and stories. (No Telegram account needed)

 **Our Telegram channel**
[Julian & Karolina in Japan](#)

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 **Our Homepage**
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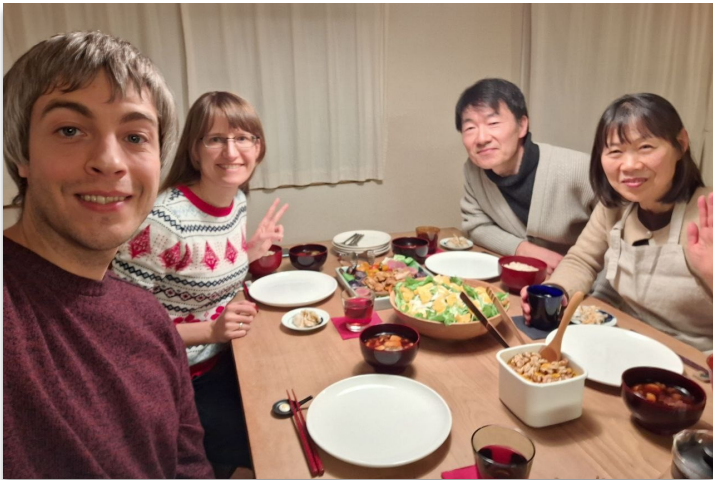
Group photo KKGK student retreat



Julian's small group at the KKGK retreat



Karolina's small group at the KKGK retreat



Fellowship with the K. couple at lake Toya



Visit to the Ayako Miura Literature Museum in Asahikawa. Miura was a Christian author (1922-1999) who lived on Hokkaido and reached many people in Japan with her novels and their film adaptations. She herself was originally an elementary school teacher and an advocate of the ideals of Imperial Japan. After Japan's defeat in the Second World War, her world collapsed. She became a nihilist and fell ill with tuberculosis. Through several acquaintances, she found Jesus and began to process her deep thoughts about God and life in her novels.



Semester End Party of our local KKGK group