

# The Bencke Family in Japan

Volume 18, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## Welcome, Chaplain Huang!

With the start of the new school year, Kyushu Lutheran College welcomes Pastor Huang as the new Chaplain. A native of China, Pastor Huang comes to KLC from Kagoshima, Japan with his wife and children. He is quick to smile and engage in conversation.

## Being a woman in Japan

I am asked every once in a while what it's like to be a woman in Japan. I always have to clarify whether the inquirer is wondering what it's like to be a *Japanese* woman in Japan, or a *foreign* woman in Japan, as the differences can be significant. In many situations, foreign women are exempt from cultural expectations of Japanese women. Easy examples that come to mind are the need to use formal and appropriate language (called *keigo* in Japanese), dress codes, or blowing one's nose in public (which is not acceptable). Should a Japanese woman not comply with any of these expectations, she'd probably be ostracized quietly, but conspicuously. This double standard of cultural expectations is not ever explicitly stated, but like in many places around the world, foreigners often enjoy a status of not being required to follow all the cultural rules.

Sometimes, however, the rules that discriminate against women (according to American definitions of discrimination), apply to me as well as to Japanese women. Here in Japan, while women have most of the same rights as women in the United States, there are some differences that stand out in my mind as noteworthy. For example, I recall back in 1999 when I first came to Japan after marrying Patrick, a well-established neurologist wanted me to teach English conversation to his research students. Instead of asking me directly if I could teach them, however, this neurologist called Patrick to ask his permission for me to work. Another more recent example was last winter, after I found out I was pregnant, when I was informed that pregnant women are not allowed to be members of health clubs (exercise facilities), so had to terminate my membership. And even a month ago, as we negotiated child care and deal with the bureaucracy of paperwork (child care facilities are, for the most part, run by the city), we were forced to answer the questions of why I, as the mother, am unable to care for my children during the day, or why our daughters' grandmothers can't care for the children.

While at times, these differences have caused me considerable grief, I understand that God can use these cultural differences as springboards for conversations that glorify Him and for me to better understand the culture in which I live. I remember one conversation in particular that had to do with women and equality and so forth, and the spiritual fruit of that conversation was that I was able to share with this woman the Christian perspective that God created men and women with an equal amount of love for each gender and that we are intentionally designed to complement each other. It was a novel concept for this young woman to consider this fundamental Christian belief that we are created, intentionally, by a loving God.

## Prayer requests:

Please join with us as we pray with praise and thanksgiving...

•*March – For a warm home and for the development of new relationships in our neighborhood, we are thankful*

•*March – For senior students at the college, as they have now graduated, may the seeds of hope in Jesus Christ that have been planted throughout their time at KLC continue to grow even as they leave the Christian environment at campus.*

•*April – we pray for the new students at Kyushu Lutheran College; May they find opportunities to examine or explore for the first time their relationship with God, and may God plant a yearning in them to foster a continuing relationship throughout the year*

•*April – As I return to KLC this spring and manage the additional responsibilities of working outside the home, may our family be blessed with patience to make this transition and with wisdom to guide decisions in all of our respective activities.*

•*April – for my cousin, who was recently diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer, and his family who prepare for a difficult journey ahead, may God be a solid presence in each of their lives in the coming days.*

**Our NEW mailing address:**

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**Missionary Sponsorship**

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[www.elca.org/missionsponsorship](http://www.elca.org/missionsponsorship)

**Did we miss anyone?**

If you know anyone who might like to receive our newsletters, please have them send us an e-mail requesting to be added to our mailing list.

**ELCA— Global Mission**

If you are interested in learning more about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's global mission, please visit:  
[www.elca.org/globalmission](http://www.elca.org/globalmission)

**JELC: Mission in India**

If you wish to support the efforts of the Comprehensive Rural Health Project in Jamkhed, India, please send donations to Rev. Twila Schock (address above). **Please make sure to mark donations as "Level 2 funding (JELA): Helping Children in Need."** A gift of \$25 will buy materials for an artificial leg for someone who cannot afford that expense on his/her own. We are thrilled that this year some college students from Kumamoto went to Jamkhed as a part of the work camp! These students called the trip 'life changing.'

**Back to school**

With the beginning of the school year at hand, our family is facing a huge shift in our routines. Patrick, of course, will resume his full time courseload plus a little extra due to a fellow colleague who had a stroke and is unable to return to work. Emilie will begin second grade at the local Japanese elementary school, Hannah will begin attending a local daycare for up to 13 days a month (the maximum allowed), and I will resume my teaching of the chapel choir, organ lessons for 15-20 students, and a Christianity and Music class.

As an aside, I will say that it is nice to be back in the saddle of working at the college, but it's a lot more difficult to do so without the luxury of day care systems as they are run in the United States. Socialist economic policies make both medical care and child care a much more complex effort, especially when navigating the system as a foreigner.

Another new project we're getting underway through our Murozono congregation is an effort to develop a keyboarding symposium for pianists and/or organists who wish to learn how to play piano and improvise using chord charts instead of written out accompaniment. The demand is very high for people with this type of skill, especially in churches, and because of the structure of the music education system, it's not a skill that's widely developed in higher education systems. More on this outreach as we iron out the details!

**When colleagues ask tough questions**

You've all been there. Someone asks you a question and you are stopped short, not knowing how to answer. The question should be easy for you, but somehow you are confounded. As missionaries we have to face such questions from time to time. Who is Jesus? What does it mean to be a Christian?

Recently at a faculty meeting, Patrick was sitting next to a colleague who teaches computer science but whose main area of expertise is physics. He is fairly fluent in English and occasionally asks Patrick to assist him with editing of his research papers.

During this meeting, this colleague passed Patrick a note (yes, even teachers pass notes amongst each other when they're supposed to be paying attention to the speaker). On this note were three words and a question.

Average  
Normal  
Typical

What's the difference?

How would you have answered?