

The Bencke Family in Japan

Volume 22, November 29th, 2009



Lights for Luther!

Prayer requests:

Please join with us as we pray....



Emilie and Hannah look at the ribbons



A view of the front of Luther High School.

A HUGE thank you to the many congregations, families and individuals who bought, sorted, prepared, packed and sent off Christmas lights for the annual Illumination Ceremony that was held at Luther campus in Kumamoto this past week. The lights were received with delight and perhaps no one was more appreciative than the custodians, who had the pleasure of stringing together lights that they could feel confident would WORK! Altogether, the donations totaled over 4,000 lights (that's individual lights) that you contributed. The sounds from those who gathered reminded me of the "oohs" and "aahs" of Fourth of July fireworks.

The service was held outdoors. Thankfully, the drizzle that threatened the ceremony all day passed by and the evening was dry and even a reasonable temperature. Songs from the choir, hymns sung by the attendees, a short message by the Chaplain of the Jr/Sr High school, and a countdown by the Lutheran Kindergarten children all made for an enthusiastic welcome to the advent season.

•October – thanks be to God for the life of Joshua Paul Bencke, who died on October 16th. Joshua was Patrick's youngest brother and especially as a young child brought considerable happiness to Patrick's life. Joshua is deeply missed, and his family, especially his parents, are enduring tremendous pain at this time. Please lift Mary, Ron, Stephen, Desiree, Patrick, Matthew, Carla, Isabelle, and Greyson in prayer, especially as we enter the holiday season.



意味がある？

“Imi ga aru?” “Does it mean something?”

“Does it mean something?” That was the question posed to me yesterday when two ladies that I see fairly regularly in the park next to our house asked about Christmas trees, presents, and other familiar icons of Christmas. I had just given one of them a bag of baby girl's clothing, which included a pair of baby slippers that had little Christmas decorations on them. This was the springboard from which the conversation about Christmas icons came. It's the sort of question that opens up a sweet opportunity to share the gospel with folks who might not otherwise ever hear about the real meaning of Christmas.

I was able to share with them the symbolism of everlasting life through Jesus in the evergreen trees, and that the first 'present' came in the form of a baby named Jesus, who was a gift sent from God. They were somewhat surprised to learn that 1) Christmas is a Christian holiday and 2) that Santa Claus doesn't figure in to the original meaning. I also explained that historically, Christmas was not a large celebration as it is today. This, they found quite interesting. Of course, this was all done in my mediocre Japanese, but I think I was able to communicate something of meaning.

After that conversation, I invited them to our Christmas Eve service at Murozono. Hopefully, their interest will be piqued enough to consider going. I may invite them to just come along with our family. I imagine it can be a little intimidating to step inside a religious sanctuary for a major holiday service. Please pray for these blossoming relationships, that the seeds of faith might be planted ever so gently.

Our current mailing address:

Bencke Family
KUMAMOTO SHI
SHIMIZU MANGOKU 5-17-17
861-8068
JAPAN

Phone from U.S.

011-81-96-344-2642

Email:

jackie@bencke.com

Missionary Sponsorship

For more information on ELCA missionary sponsorship, please contact:

Rev. Twila Schock, Director,
Global Mission Support
8765 W. Higgins Road
Chicago IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2641
twila.schock@elca.org OR
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.

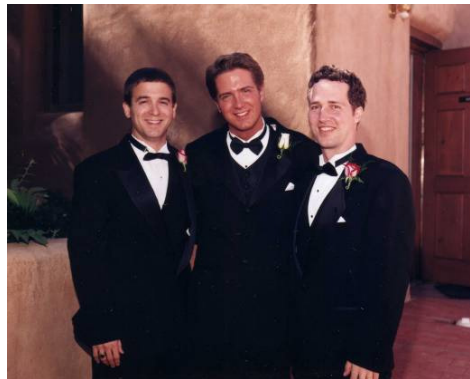
ELCA— Global Mission

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

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 past year some college students from Kumamoto went to Jamkhed as a part of the work camp! These students called the trip 'life changing.'

Grieving the loss of Joshua



Pictured here:

Matthew, Joshua, Patrick
August 7th, 1999
Josh's wedding day

It happens when we least expect it. Always. Even if the prognosis for a loved one is disclosed to us and we know the end is near, we can't really be prepared for the death of those closest to us when it actually happens.

On October 16th, about six weeks ago, Patrick's youngest brother, Joshua Paul, died unexpectedly in his home. He was 35 and leaves behind a wife and two small children, ages 8 and 2. Joshua Paul struggled for many years with drug addiction, so while the precise cause of death is unknown yet, it is presumed that drug use was involved, either directly or indirectly.

Patrick was unable to return home for the memorial service because his passport was being renewed at the time of Josh's death. Emergency documents were impossible to procure, so Patrick used Skype to call his family, all of whom gathered in New Mexico, and talked with them using video technology.

A cornerstone in Patrick's grief process came unexpectedly in the form of providing music ministry to the congregation of our English Service at Suidocho. Patrick prepared a song entitled "Fly Again," a song that was recorded by David Phelps some time back. Patrick introduced the song by talking a bit about how the lyrics of the song reflect his relationship with Josh and the hope he has for Joshua now that he has gone to be with his heavenly Father.

Many of the folks who attend that service are ex-pats and could relate to the experience of losing someone you love and being far away. Even for those who hadn't had such an experience, Patrick's gift of this music served as a powerful tool to remind us of the fragility of life and relationships. It also helped Patrick to turn his grief into something that was positively received by all who heard him sing.

We posted a clip of the **rehearsal** for this (the clip of the actual performance during the service was too long to upload): Feel free to take a peek.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjzDKTR6Mw>