

# The Bencke Family in Japan



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## Transition..... transition!

Hopefully you read that title with the famous melody from Fiddler on the Roof, “Tradition!” in your mind! Yes, it is the season of graduations and entrance ceremonies. As my older daughter recently remarked, “Japanese people sure love their ceremonies!” Along with the ceremonies often come traditions. Some of the traditions are well-documented, and other traditions continue despite the original reasoning being lost to the sands of time.

One cute example of a more recent Japanese tradition is that of giving KitKat candy bars to students who are taking their entrance exams. Japan has a phenomenal range of KitKat flavors, and I think that instead of trying to explain this in words, I’ll share a video that explodes with the colors and vitality of the humble KitKat (and why it has become a tradition at entrance exam time).

<https://fb.watch/qB6cQ736zV/>

Traditions are usually thought of as helping people or groups to marking time. Annual events or seasons occur and we pause to reflect on the growth that has occurred in between. It might be just as plausible to think of traditions as marking transitions. We never really experience the traditions in the same way every time. Because of growth, loss, maturation, new vantage points, experiences, or just the inevitable circumstance of aging, a holiday tradition or birthday tradition never feels exactly the same from year to year. My Lenten journey has been different every year, even though the number of days has remained the same and it has always culminated with Easter. We are ever evolving. Transitioning.

When Lutheran missionary Martha Akard established the girls’ high school here in Kumamoto in 1926 (98 years ago), I don’t know that she could’ve ever imagined that one day, almost a century later, that these grounds would also be

the educational home of a nursery school, a kindergarten, a junior high, a senior high, a college, and a graduate school. When Patrick and I came in 2006 (80 years after Martha Akard established the school), we never would've imagined that in our lifetime we would see the establishment of an international school in Kumamoto or an elementary school *on our campus*! Both of those things are being realized this coming school year, which starts on April 1, 2024. Today, we held the dedication ceremony for the building in which the Kyushu Lutheran International Primary School will be housed. We welcomed new teachers and staff members from South Africa, the Philippines, Scotland, China, and elsewhere in Japan to Kumamoto. These folks have committed to bringing our Lutheran mission to a new generation of children in Kumamoto, and for that, we can praise God.



**Still under construction and renovation, this is a front view of what will be the Kyushu Lutheran International Primary School. It is expected that grades 1-6 will each have about 20 students in each class. Students will represent a variety of cultural and citizen backgrounds, including Taiwan, France, Japan, the U.S., and others.**



**In this picture, Uchimura-sensei—a longtime faithful servant in the Japanese Lutheran Church (left)—and President Matsumoto (right) ceremoniously add the last few scoops of dirt to the newly planted olive tree outside of the elementary school. The school motto will be the same as it is for the other Lutheran schools on the campus, which is 「感恩奉仕」 or Gratitude and Service.**

Please join us in prayer in these coming weeks that the Lord will guide the hearts and minds of teachers and staff as they build this new educational and spiritual community.