

Bencke Family
NEWS FROM THE MOTO, JUNE 2024

Dear friends, family, and partners in mission,

Greetings from a very humid Kumamoto, where we have gotten over two feet of rain over the past week. Hannah even enjoyed getting a "rain day" off from school (kinda like a snow day, but rain keeps the trains and busses from running).

In fact, it was awful today, and in the middle of a handbell rehearsal, I exclaimed "KIMOII!" which I have thought for 18 years meant, "It feels yucky." I thought it was shorthand for another longer-but-similar expression that means the same thing. I was wrong.

It actually means something like this: When you look at a fresh road kill, it turns your stomach and is *kimoi*. If you watch a graphic movie where there is a lot of bloodshed, it is *kimoi*. When you *see* (not just feel) something gross, you say, "*Kimoi*." So, basically I had just told the handbell students that looking at them made my stomach turn. They knew I didn't mean that, but still, I felt embarrassed to make such a mistake. Even after 18 years, I'm still learning Japanese.

I hope that this message finds all of you jumping into summer with both feet and enjoying rest, relaxation, and fun.

I am attaching a short newsletter, with great intentions of writing something longer in the not-too-distant future.

Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Jackie and the whole Bencke family

The Bencke Family in Japan



June 2024: 104 番



Making all things new in the Holy Spirit

Patrick's 60th birthday

In Japan, one's 60th birthday is an auspicious occasion. Referred to as *kanreki* in Japanese, the 60th birthday is celebrated by wearing a red vest and cap such as what you see in the picture. Our good friends came over to help us celebrate the occasion and provided the sign, which reads "Kanreki, Omedetou," or "Happy 60th birthday!"

Kanreki is a birthday that symbolizes something like a rebirth. "Kan" means to return, and "reki" means history. Cakes are decorated with the crane and the turtle, which symbolize wisdom and long life. The color red is used because the word for baby includes the Japanese word for red, and red is also used in big celebrations such as New Year.

For Christians, the color red marks the Pentecost season. Fire, which is central to renewal and regeneration, is that which kicks off a long period of growth (symbolized by the green color), sometimes called "Ordinary Time" in the Christian calendar. It is notable that Pentecost also marks the Christian calendar by emphasizing the idea of being sent. Christians are a sending faith. God sent Jesus to accompany humanity, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to accompany the disciples, and the Holy Spirit sends and accompanies believers to proclaim God's love throughout the world. God's creation, while not tethered to time and space, is continually being rebirthed into something new.



Kyushu Lutheran International School

In April, our Lutheran campus opened its doors to a new group of students. Kyushu Lutheran International School is the educational home for 40 students, whose English ability ranges from “very little” to “fluent.” As one might imagine, there has been a steep learning curve for everyone—teachers, students, administrators, and parents—as routines have been established and we learn to live in harmony on this campus.

Teachers have come from all corners of the worlds, including South Africa, Turkey, Wales, Philippines, France, the United States, and Japan. That old saying that “It takes a village to raise a child” invites us to consider the world as a unified village. That’s pretty difficult to conceptualize in this day and age, but nevertheless is central to the Nicene Creed, which invites us to be unified in the things that matter most to God.

Reinventing the campus to include an elementary school has not been without its challenges. In no particular order, parking issues, scheduling common educational spaces, increased television coverage, establishing an identity, and communication with parents who are not English speakers nor do they have experience with International Baccalaureate programs are among the first to come to mind.

It continues to impress me, however, how things get done and how the positivity of the faculty trickles down into the faces of the kids when they gather for worship at the college chapel. I am blessed to witness how steadfastly the Holy Spirit freshens their work and redeems it for God’s larger purpose. For a school campus that began in 1926 with a small girls’ high school and over the past 100 years has come to include a pre-school, kindergarten, an elementary school, a junior and senior high school, a college, and a graduate school, it is clear that the Holy Spirit plays the long game.

May today and every day be made new and fresh as the Holy Spirit awakens you to the work that has yet to be done for God’s Kingdom’s sake.