San Diego Jpanese Ministry

OCT 2026



Racing Through the Summer, Welcoming the young people…

This summer was so hectic it made my head spin. No, I should probably say I just raced through it headlong!

This summer, we held our first church camp since coming to the U.S. We'd been conducting site visits and making preparations for this since last year. We also held JAPANFAIR again, just like last year. What's more, we invited many guests this year, making it a truly grand event.

First, among the guests who served with us were Mr. and Mrs. Takase, a Christian music duo.

At the time, they were ministering at various churches in Los Angeles. Because of this, coming to San Diego had initially seemed impossible. However, through God's miraculous guidance, all their appointments were canceled on the very day of our JAPANFAIR! So they made a special trip all the way from Los Angeles to San Diego to participate in and serve at the event. We were also honored to welcome Tracy, a gospel hula dancer, and her husband all the way from Arizona. She is a seasoned hula dancer with a long history in the art, having performed at numerous public ceremonies and serving as an instructor. Her dance, rooted in deep faith, conveyed the many prayers and hours of practice that went into it, and we could feel the Lord's presence throughout the entire venue.

Behind the scenes, we were supported by the Bethany team—who, like our very own extensions, united in heart to pray and serve once again this year—as well as Rev. Hiroaki Sato and Sister Eriko, the chairperson of the Support Association, who joined us from Japan, and numerous volunteers from the Desert Springs Community Church team in Arizona.

Although we at the San Diego Japanese Christian Church are a small congregation of just over ten members, supported by such a truly splendid lineup of guests and wonderful servants, we were able to offer rich worship to the Lord—as if we were a church of hundreds—and sow the seeds of the Gospel among many people. Truly, Hallelujah to the Lord! Both at Camp and at JAPANFAIR, we experienced God's amazing guidance and mighty works. We thank the Lord from the bottom of our hearts and exalt His name!

Shortly thereafter, nine college students from Japan, accompanied by two American missionaries, were sent to San Diego. This team was gathered primarily from churches within the Conservative Baptist Japan, driven by a desire to "nurture the next generation of leaders," and sent out for an overseas mission experience. In order to embrace the great mission of global missions entrusted to the church, it is extremely important for both the church and individual Christians to experience what global missions are like.

However, I and Haruka were feeling completely drained—perhaps from the accumulated fatigue of the summer—and we couldn't begin preparations right after JAPAN FAIR. "What on earth can we do? What kind of experience should we provide? Can we really do this on our own?"… After spending many days praying to the Lord together and pondering these questions, we were finally able to welcome them. By the Lord's mercy alone, everything fell into place and we were guided through it all once again. The Lord is truly a wonderful God. Now, each of the young people wrote their own testimonies. I really hope you'll read them to see what they felt.

If I were to say just one thing here, it would be, "You were all truly wonderful!" Their enthusiasm, sincerity, courage to face themselves and take a step forward, awareness as Christians, humility, joy, and excitement… all of it was wonderful. Even Missionary David, who led the group, looked at them and said, "The future of the church in Japan is bright!" I couldn't agree more. Let's continue to pray together that the next generation of leaders—who are so desperately needed—will continue to rise up.

San Diego Nikkei Christian Church Hideyoshi Kashiwagura

Racing Through the Summer...





JAPAN FAIR 2026

TAKASE OF DUO, TRACY, AND THE WORSHIP TEAM















To all the volunteers who supported us behind the scenes





There are so many, many more volunteers! I'm sorry I couldn't include all the photos. Thank you all so much! I'm so grateful for this wonderful family of God!!

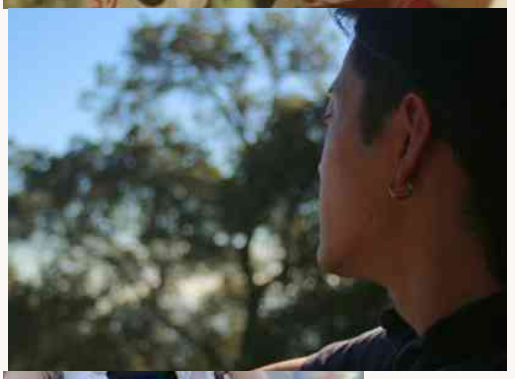
Welcoming the young people...



No matter how wonderful the environment may be, if the individual doesn't want to grow, they cannot expect to experience meaningful growth. Isn't that right?

The college students who gathered this time had a strong desire to grow in their faith. They also fully understood that many people were offering their prayers and support, and they strove to absorb everything they could with all their might so as not to waste that support—so that it would not go to waste.
Furthermore, with an eye toward the future of the church in Japan, they constantly reflected on what they could do with this experience and what they had learned, striving to view things from various perspectives with faith.

Their stay lasted about two weeks. Since the schedule was packed every day, they may not have had a moment to rest. Jet lag must have been quite a challenge as well. Yet, they overcame these challenges to serve.
Jesus Himself offered prayers and served while it was still dark. Perhaps we were able to experience a little of that as well.



The first Sunday, in particular, must have been especially tough. Starting at 6:00 a.m., we played soccer for two hours with about 20 non-Christian fathers! After that, we attended the morning worship service in Oceanside, followed by an evangelistic meeting in La Jolla, about 35mils south of there, in the afternoon. At both services, we led worship, shared testimonies, sang special songs, and more. The evangelistic meeting drew 75 participants (45 of whom were non-Christians).
All the meetings didn't finish until after 8:00 p.m. Perhaps because there were more participants than usual, the food ran out quickly, and some of them weren't even able to eat during the meetings. Yet, while battling jet lag and hunger, they served the Lord and the church without a single complaint.









There's certainly an element of "they were able to do this because they're young!" to all this. However, I don't think that was the only reason. I believe their drive came from a strong desire within them to grow, and above all, because the Lord strengthened them.

On this trip, the young people may have been inspired by the various forms of entertainment in the United States. But more than that, they must have experienced a passion for missions, a sense of unity, a living faith, and the guidance and power of God at work in their midst. And isn't this precisely what is indispensable for the church in Japan today—and for the church in Japan in the future? They experienced all of this firsthand. Now, who will be sent next year?

If you are considering partnering with us and our mission to share the Gospel in San Diego,Please scan the QR code to support us.
Thank you in advance.

📞442-966-0804 ✉️ sdncc2023@gmail.com Pastor Hideyoshi Kashiwagura



""A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."" John 13:34-35 ESV

On this occasion, as 11 members of the Conservative Baptist Japan young group (5 men, 4 women, and 2 American missionaries) were sent on a mission trip to the San Diego Nikkei Christian Church, I also joined them from Japan as a support staff member. For me, this was the first time I had met all the members in person. However, as soon as the mission trip began, I felt a sense of unity in Christ. We began preparing for the evangelistic meeting on the third day after our arrival. What impressed me most was the members' shared desire to "offer the very best to the Lord," their positive attitude toward learning from every opportunity and encounter, and their unity—as each person recognized their own role, helped one another, and cheerfully overcame challenges together. I was truly amazed to see that these qualities were already present within the team.



Of course, some members fell ill due to jet lag or the change in living conditions. Each person's physical strength and gifts differ, and everyone experiences and perceives things in their own way. However, it was precisely within those differences that the Lord's wisdom and grace were poured out abundantly, and I myself learned so much through each and every one of them. I was reminded once again that each person is a precious being, and not a single one is dispensable.



For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." Romans 12:4-5 ESV



"On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." 1 Corinthians 12:22-25 ESV

Through this mission trip, I feel I was once again taught the unchanging essence of evangelism that remains the same in every age.
Just as Christ loved us, we too love one another. I felt that within that fellowship, the Kingdom of God is revealed, the Holy Spirit is at work, and the simple yet powerful Gospel reaches people's hearts.



年に１回、学校が始まる前のKick Offイベント。友人を誘いやすくする工夫が随所に見られました。









On this trip, Pastor K had the opportunity to invite an international student I met at a tourist spot to join us for a dinner gathering at the church right then and there, where we got to know each other while playing card games and other activities. At the end, Pastor K also had time to freely discuss the existence of God in small groups, making it a truly meaningful experience. I heard that on the ride home, the international students were delighted, saying everyone was so kind and warm.
Although our time together lasted only a few hours, but Pastor K oderd to Team exchanged contact information and have stayed in touch even after they returned home.

Looking back, it was the same for me when I was an international student and not yet a Christian. Seeing the church members love one another like family, I thought, “I want to be like these people,” and I began attending church as if drawn in by a magnet.





I believe it was a truly valuable experience for the Young members to actually interact with non-Christians from diverse backgrounds—including Japanese international students, families of expatriates, and businesspeople active on the global stage.

Furthermore, as we visited churches in the United States, observed the local ministers in action, and listened to them speak about their work, I myself was deeply inspired by their rich approach to missions, their constant openness to the community, and the way they joyfully put each person’s unique personality and gifts to use in unity and peace—rather than comparing themselves to other churches or believers. It was a two-week trip packed with places and experiences unique to the United States. I am also deeply grateful for the dedication and hard work of Pastor K and his wife, who prayed for, planned, and prepared each and every one of these enriching experiences.



I hope that what the Lord has spoken to each of us over the past two weeks will be shared with our church, families, and friends, so that it may serve as nourishment for the Body of Christ and become a source of renewed strength.
I believe—and pray from the bottom of my heart—that the Lord Himself will abundantly nurture every seed sown during this mission trip and lead us to His blessings and plans that far exceed our imagination.

Eriko Yoshiki

I Had a Great Time in San Diego



My name is Ibuki Oibayashi, a sophomore at Tohoku Gakuin University. This summer, I participated in a short-term mission trip to San Diego, USA. I would like to thank everyone who prayed for and donated to support this mission trip.

I am truly grateful that my first trip abroad turned out to be such a blessed experience.

During this short-term mission trip, I felt that each encounter and opportunity for interaction carried more significance than they did when I was in Japan. This made me realize just how many opportunities I had missed while in Japan. It also made me hope that Christianity would become more integrated into daily life in Japan as well.



Ibuki Oibayashi

I think that while many Japanese people may participate in events like the first shrine visit of the year or Christmas, very few actually practice their faith in their daily lives. In the United States, however, Bible verses were written on things like hamburger wrappers and the bottoms of drink cups, blending naturally into everyday life. Rather than simply dismissing this difference as a cultural one, I felt there was something to be learned by confronting it head-on.

I believe that environmental factors play a major role in the low number of Christians in Japan. That is precisely why I think the number of people with faith would likely increase in a place like the United States, where there are many Christians and their faith is woven into everyday life.

During my recent trip to San Diego, as I interacted with non-Christian Japanese people, I noticed a common theme. It is that even if someone connects with a church, actually coming to have a faith of their own is by no means an easy thing. Of course, I do think that connecting with a church is a big step in itself.

However, I came to realize that the real journey actually begins once someone starts attending church. I felt it was important not to be satisfied simply by having them come to church, but to continue engaging with them afterward—and to make their faith as natural a part of their daily lives as possible. I, too, struggled before I found my faith, and there were times when I even felt afraid to believe. Still, I believe it's important to convey—through the way I live and the words I speak—why we believe in the God of the Bible. Even if someone doesn't come to faith after just one encounter, there is great significance in maintaining a connection with the church and with Christians. Let's all continue to pray from Japan so that the people we met this time will stay connected to the church and, someday, come to believe in God.

Even if we become disappointed by the current situation in Japan and feel like giving up, God never gives up. Pastor Hideyoshi Kashiwagura, who planned this short-term mission trip, always told us to keep searching for new ideas. God generously grants wisdom to those who seek it. In Japan, people are sometimes met with skepticism simply for suggesting something new. However, I would like to move beyond this cultural tendency unique to Japan and continue to propose new ideas.

Report on the Short-Term Mission Trip to San Diego



I would like to report on the many blessings and graces we received, thanks to the tremendous support of missionary couples—including Pastor Hideyoshi Kashiwagura and his wife—and the local church leaders. I am deeply grateful for your many prayers and donations.

On the first day of my trip, I hit a major roadblock. During immigration screening at the Los Angeles airport, I was questioned more rigorously than I had imagined. Unable to fully understand the English being spoken, I panicked and felt a sense of defeat. It was an experience so filled with fear and anxiety over the language barrier that my hands were shaking.

However, through this setback, I made a conscious effort over the next 14 days—at the churches I visited and even at the supermarket—to “take the initiative and strike up a conversation.” What I learned through this experience was the truth that God opens the door to wonderful encounters and fellowship not because of perfect language skills, but simply through a smile and the courage to take that first step. I learned that it is precisely when I accept my own weaknesses, rely on God, and take that first step that I am led to rich fellowship.

In San Diego, I visited “North Coast Church,” a large congregation with a membership of 13,000, as well as "Bethany Church" and “Youth Church,” which is open to the younger generation. While I was acutely aware of the differences in scale and approach between Japan and the U.S., I was deeply inspired by the sincere efforts to build churches tailored to the needs of the local community and each generation.

The moment during this trip when I most strongly experienced God’s plan was my fellowship with Japanese exchange students living in the area. Although the Bible study with Japanese exchange students that had been originally scheduled was suddenly canceled, on the fourth day, while walking in a park, I spotted a group that looked like Japanese exchange students. Pastor Hideyoshi took a chance and spoke to them, and to my surprise, five of them visited the church the following evening.

Up until then, I had harbored fears and prejudices such as: harbored fears and prejudices, such as, “Non-Christians probably aren’t interested in the Bible or God,” and “What if they’re turned off by it?” However, when we actually spoke openly and honestly, they opened their hearts, asked many questions, and showed genuine interest. I was especially grateful that I was able to mark my favorite Bible verse in the New Testament of one of the students I shared a meal with and hand it to her, saying, “Read this whenever you think of it.” My hands were shaking violently during this first-time experience, but when the person accepted it with a smile, saying, “I’ll definitely read it!”—an indescribable sense of joy and emotion welled up within me, as if I had “taken my first step in mission work on my own two feet.” I truly realized that God is the One who dispels our fears and always grants us the strength to take the necessary steps and have the necessary encounters.

Toward the end of the trip, one phrase struck me most deeply. It was the words I received from Pastor Hideyoshi, who guided us on-site: “Don’t say you’re still young.”(From Jeremiah) Up until then, I had used the excuse, “I’m still young,” and had been putting certain things off. However, through these words, I realized the truth: “Being ‘young’ does not mean you have a grace period; it means you’ve been given the energy to start moving for God right now.” I learned that instead of using “I’m still young” as an excuse to run away, I should devote my full energy to “what I can do precisely because I am young right now.”

I am determined not to let the experiences and lessons of these 14 days end as mere memories. I will put into practice at my own church what I saw in San Diego: “building a church that is truly committed to engaging children and young people and is open to the community.” I will also serve in the church building project currently underway. I will continue to pray for the salvation and spiritual growth of the international students and local residents I met there. Thankfully, immediately after returning home, I was able to reunite with one of the international students I met in San Diego and spend time with him here in Japan.

Through this short-term mission trip, I learned a great deal from Pastor Hideyoshi’s strong leadership. While I was keenly aware of my own weaknesses and imperfections, I also experienced God’s grace and blessings that far surpassed them.

Makito Kasai

Report on the Short-Term Mission Trip to San Diego



We are deeply grateful for all the prayers and financial support we received for our short-term mission trip to San Diego. Although we were joined on this trip by participants from other denominations, we are truly grateful for the warm welcome we received and for the opportunity to share in this blessing together. Supported by your prayers, we truly felt the Holy Spirit at work, and these two weeks reaffirmed our conviction that God is powerfully alive and active in the church even today.

"and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." Acts 14:26-27 ESV

During this time, we received God's Word from the Book of Acts as part of our morning devotions. We learned how the work of the church expanded during the apostolic era. As we studied God's Word, it became a time when we were able to experience God's missionary work, which continues even today. What I felt most deeply through this short-term mission trip was that God is still alive and at work today. Even while in Japan, there are moments when I sense that God speaks to us daily through His Word, hears our prayers, and is at work. However, on this trip, I was given a passion for missions that I would never have noticed just going about my daily life in Japan. Through this experience, I was able to feel God's powerful presence—not just as theoretical knowledge, but through actual experience. To be honest, as a college student in Japan, when it came to sharing the gospel with my friends and those around me, I used to think things like, "As long as I can create the right environment, that's enough," or "Someone else will do it if not me." I would pray for my friends' salvation but couldn't bring myself to take concrete action; I often found myself thinking, "If only the right opportunity came along," or "Someday, eventually…"



Keiji Kaneko

Over the course of those two weeks in San Diego, my perspective changed. I saw Pastor Hideyoshi Kashiwagura's attitude toward prayer. I witnessed the work of mission on the ground. I saw God's family—people who, even in a distant land with different languages and cultures, were worshiping the same God and striving to follow His Word.

What struck me first was their attitude toward prayer. Even before the mission trip began—and after it started—calls to "pray" were made at every opportunity. Every morning in the car as we left the church, and before we began any activity. When one of our companions nearly got held up at immigration, I was startled when asked, "Have you prayed for that person?" Even though I personally value and make a conscious effort to pray daily, I have much to learn from the attitude toward prayer that is so deeply ingrained in Pastor Hideyoshi's life. Spending this time together and hearing about his journey in missionary work so far, I was struck by just how much of a powerful force this "prayer" had been in his ministry in San Diego. Whether it was the prayer he offered when he made the major decision to embark on missionary work or his small, daily morning prayers, he communicates with God every day, relies on Him, and surrenders himself to Him.

Through this, we came to understand the work of the Holy Spirit at work and to recognize God's mighty power. We were also able to witness God's work in answer to our prayers. Whether it was our encounter with a Japanese exchange student in the park, our subsequent fellowship with him, our interactions with local people, or the testimonies of our fellow travelers—everywhere we looked, we could clearly see the prayers that had been poured out behind the scenes. Above all, we are convinced that our journey was protected and richly blessed by God.

We also learned a great deal through witnessing the reality of missionary work firsthand. On one occasion, Pastor Hideyoshi shared something along these lines: "There was someone I had a chance to share the Gospel with before, but I didn't. I may never see that person again. That sense of regret still lingers." In that context, he told us, "We must always be prepared to speak the truth of the Gospel to anyone at any time," and "We must be prepared to declare that the Gospel is the truth." During this time, we saw Pastor Hideyoshi truly embodying these principles. Even in encounters that, in Japan, would typically end with a brief passing, he wouldn't let it end there—he would invite the person to a dinner gathering. The moment we heard Japanese being spoken, Pastor Hideyoshi—who we thought was far away—would already be right there with that person. Although we could only watch from a distance, we learned so much from his example of never wasting even a single fleeting opportunity and never missing a chance to share the Gospel.

During our stay, we were also given the opportunity to visit an American church (Bethany Church). Before the service, we were given a tour of the church facilities and an explanation of the activities taking place there, and after the service, we were able to have a Q&A session with the senior pastor and associate pastors. Compared to Japan, American churches differ significantly in terms of congregation size, facility scale, and financial resources. When I considered what we could bring back from American churches to Japanese churches, I realized it would be difficult to simply imitate their methods or approaches. However, I was struck by how their mindset serves as an excellent reference and is often a source of encouragement. This includes the mindset of striving to be a church open to the community, the way churches—as God's family—relate to one another, and, on a smaller scale, the practice of wholeheartedly welcoming those who come to church for the first time. I was made aware of—and was able to embrace—the mindset that is essential for carrying out missions and expanding the Kingdom of God. To actually see and experience—here on the other side of the globe, across the ocean, despite differences in language and culture—that people are worshiping the unchanging God based on His Word, loving one another, and that missionary work is still being carried out today has been a truly great source of encouragement for me personally.

Now that I have returned to Japan from the United States, I realize it will be difficult to carry out missionary work using the same methods and means. However, my passion for missions and the power and certainty of God at work there remain unchanged. Even if I were to give up on sharing the gospel with a friend, God is the One who will never give up on that one person being saved. I do not want this mission trip to simply end with my return; rather, I want to keep this passion alive and continue to reflect on the grace and lessons I have received. I pray earnestly that this experience will not remain confined within me alone, but that I may be used for the sake of the churches in Japan. I am grateful and trust that You will hear this prayer. I look forward with all my heart to what the Lord will do from here on out, and I desire to serve Him.







What I Learned from the Short-Term Mission Trip to San Diego



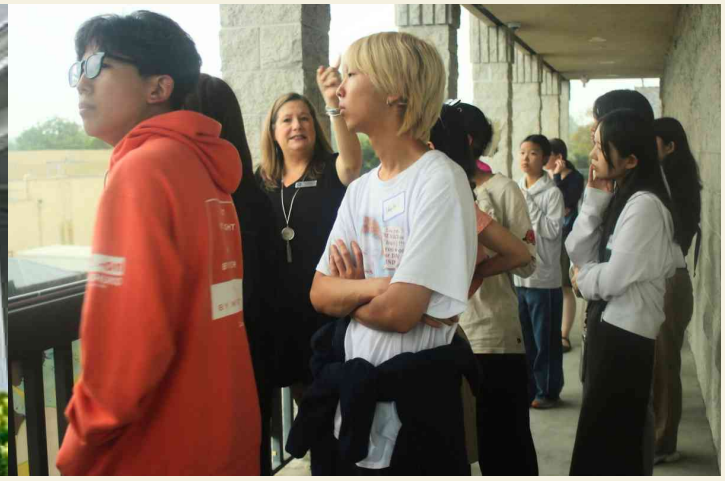




Even though I was participating in a mission trip, I felt that missions were something far removed from my own life. That was because I had never had the opportunity to engage in missionary work before. Living in Japan, I think there are cases where it is difficult to keep a church vibrant due to declining membership and an aging congregation. Even so, there were many events that made me realize we must respond to our calling as Christians—who make up just 1 percent of Japan's population.

On our second Sunday in San Diego, we had the opportunity to visit a local church called Bethany Church. The church operates a school on its grounds that serves students from kindergarten through middle school, and it was a large congregation with about 300 people attending regular services. During the tour, a woman who was showing us around said the following to us: "There are other churches around Bethany Church, as well as an airport, and you can see airplanes flying back and forth from the church. When I see that, I feel like the whole world is right here." I don't know to what extent she was involved in missionary work. However, her words made me imagine how a single church member could keep her eyes fixed on a global mission and feel that mission to be infinitely close to her.



At our first meeting in San Diego, Pastor Kashiwagura preached from Jeremiah chapter 1.

" "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."" Jeremiah 1:5 ESV

In the United States, where the Christian population is large, churches may be more familiar to people than they are to Japanese, yet there are still those whose faith is vague. At a luncheon at Bethany Church, the pastor remarked, "One of Japan's strengths is that there are no 'pretend Christians' there." I've heard that the Christian population in Japan is less than 1 percent. However, I've been blessed with many Christian friends, and most of us—myself included—were raised in Christian homes and live out our faith. When I read the Book of Jeremiah, I felt that my own upbringing—having been involved with Japan's less-than-1% Christian population even before I was born—was a calling given to me by God. Until now, I had felt that missions were somehow unrealistic and something that didn't really concern me. However, through every single experience on this trip, those feelings were transformed into thoughts like, "Even though I'm still immature, I want to keep my eyes on global missions," and "I want to seek God's calling."

I believe the team members who participated in this mission trip were truly called and gathered by God, trained as disciples in San Diego, and are being raised up for the next generation of missions. I pray that each team member will be given a place and role that suits them, and I hope we can all serve for the glory of God. I am grateful for the prayers and financial support of everyone who sent us on this mission.

May God bless you all!!!!!

Sou Sakuma

The Blessings I Received During the San Diego Mission Trip





To all the churches of the Conservative Baptist Alliance and the missionaries of the Missionary Society: Thank you for your prayers and financial support. We have been sent to the San Diego Japanese Christian Church, where Pastor Hideyoshi Kashiwakura and his family serve. I am the only team member who is almost twice the age of the college students. I departed from Haneda Airport hoping that, on this special occasion, I could serve as a behind-the-scenes supporter for them.

After I arrived, I was hit by the worst jet lag I'd ever experienced. I could only sleep about two to three hours a day, and combined with my chronic asthma, I constantly suffered from headaches and shortness of breath even during the day. If I let my guard down, I'd end up spending a lot of time with my eyes closed. I wanted to participate more in everyone's activities. I also wanted to give my all to the program. Even as I held onto those hopes, I felt frustrated that my body and mind wouldn't cooperate the way I wanted them to.

Amid all this, God has granted me a new gift: the gift of prayer. Until now, I had a tendency to judge how much I had served God and how much grace I had received based on what I could or could not do. But during this mission trip, that mindset was completely wiped clean. At that moment, I realized that just because I couldn't do anything didn't mean I was helpless—I could pray. Prayer holds great power. God always answers prayer. Even if the answer isn't exactly what I had in mind, He answers according to His will. I was able to experience this firsthand.

During the mission trip, even while struggling with poor health, I prayed fervently for two things. The first was: "May the gifts of each and every member be used abundantly. And if they haven't yet recognized their own gifts, may they be revealed to them." In fact, each person was filled with abundant gifts: heartfelt praise, the power of their words, leadership, a sincere attitude of learning through fellowship, the role of a facilitator who keeps a keen eye on those around them, the energy that brightens the atmosphere, the calmness that connects people, and the ability to remember even the smallest details. I believe God has equipped them with many more wonderful gifts that I have yet to recognize. A sister named Eriko, who joined us to provide support, shared a message with us at the end: "Each person is so unique, and their faith and sincere attitude are truly wonderful—I was taught and encouraged by them as well. I believe that our 'family'-like bond, where we love one another regardless of age or gender, surely shone brightly even to non-Christians and served as a powerful testimony. Everyone at the church also expressed their gratitude, saying, 'We were truly encouraged!'" Hearing this message, I was convinced that God had clearly answered my prayer: "Please use their gifts."

My second prayer was, "May they be filled with the Holy Spirit and feel God living and working within them." Most of the members were raised in Christian homes, have personally encountered God, and are walking in the faith with a firm foundation. However, just as I once was, it became clear as I listened to their testimonies that they had not yet experienced the intense, real-life experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit and driven by Him—rather than by their own strength—and that they were earnestly seeking this. Therefore, I prayed that through this mission trip, God would clearly answer their fervent longing, and that they would return home with a tangible sense that God is alive and at work within them. One member shared that God spoke directly to her through the Word regarding the future she had long been seeking, and that she felt the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although I was not able to hear everyone's testimony, I believe that through this mission trip, God lived and worked within each person and sent them out to serve in this world. I will continue to pray that, even after they return to their daily lives, each one will be used as a vessel that continues to be filled by the Holy Spirit and to grow.

Ai Shibamoto

Ai Shibamoto

I also had a personal expectation for this mission trip: to experience firsthand the hometowns of the missionaries who have always supported me. Pastor David, who is leading this trip, is the one currently overseeing the pioneering church where my family gathers, and it was a missionary from California who first started the café ministry where I currently work. When we actually arrived, I was surprised to find that everything I saw was on a massive, “American-sized” scale. The size of the church exceeded my expectations, and the level of infrastructure and material resources was on a completely different scale. I also sensed a powerful sense of manpower from the sheer number of people there. Miyako City in Iwate Prefecture, where I currently live, is a truly small rural town. Our church plant has been sustained by a small but dedicated group consisting of Pastor David’s family, the missionary family involved in the café ministry, and my own family. I was once again filled with gratitude, realizing just how great a commitment it must be for these pastors to come all the way from California—a completely different environment—and dedicate themselves to spreading the Gospel here in Miyako. I also felt that this is truly something that cannot be accomplished by human will alone. The words Pastor Kashiwakura spoke while we were there also left a deep impression on me. I believe he said something along the lines of, “Even when I felt like giving up because it seemed impossible, God pushed me forward and told me to go, so that’s why I’m serving here.”

In fact, I, too, was drawn back to Miyako after obeying that same voice of God. I had been wandering aimlessly across the country, and when I finally arrived in Okinawa, I liked it so much that I planned to settle there. However, contrary to my own will, God told me to return to Miyako, and in the end, I obeyed that calling and came back.

Participating in this mission trip has made that calling even clearer to me. When we think of world missions, we tend to imagine going out into the world, but I believe I am called to my hometown, the rural town of Miyako, where I am now. And it is a great source of encouragement to know that this is by no means a small, insignificant ministry—rather, it is a family that believes in the same God as the many Christians I saw in California and with whom I can pray together.

For the Kashiwakura family, everyone at the church, and the gospel ministry in San Diego—I want to use the gift of prayer that God has prepared for me on this trip without reservation. I want to be someone who continues to pray, trusting in and looking to God. It was a mission trip filled with grace, where I was constantly amazed by the magnitude of the blessings I received when I prayed with a still heart. I give thanks to God, who reveals His wonderful works!!





This mission trip, spent alongside the promising young people who will lead the next generation, was a truly precious time for me♪



A Note from San Diego:
Ai Shibamoto fell ill partway through the trip and looked like she was really suffering. We were praying there for her to recover, but even in the midst of it all, she kept praying for all of us.
I’m so glad she was able to return home with a smile on her face!