

The 2018 Yaegashi Annual (Year-End) Report

“And the priest of Zeus...brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.’....Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.” Acts 14:13-18

Even with the mighty work of God through Paul that healed a man crippled from birth (14:8-10), and even with the preaching of the gospel(Vs.15-17), Luke records that it took much painful effort by the apostles to persuade the crowd from the wrong doing of idle worship, for he tells us in V. 18 “Even with these words they **scarcely** restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.” Just as much as we in the mission field long for our friends and family members, who do not yet know Christ, to turn from their vain way of life to believing in the One True Living God, Jesus Christ, so would all of you ,who prayerfully support our ministries (of the OPC Japan Mission), long to see many of our contacts will soon come to believe in Christ. As I make the annual report on my ministry for 2018, I pray that the Lord will continue to work patiently through us as it is shown clearly that in some cases, especially where a society is strongly colored with polytheistic culture, it takes the Lord’s patience to persuade people to accept the gospel(II Pet.3:9), which was the case in the apostles’ ministry in Lystra.

Let me tell you some of the highlights of our ministry at Yamagata Reformed Church for 2018, beginning from December 2018, also covering some of the over-all ministry of 2018:

In December

We held a Christmas concert with two other evangelical churches in the city. We had a music team from Lee University, Cleveland, TN. Professor Arden Jensen, teacher of American Literature at Lee University, was an OPC missionary associate teaching English in Yamagata and Sendai in the early 1980’s. He organized the team of 12 students from the music department under the leadership of Dr. Austin Patty, professor in the music department. The concert, “Advent Now,” and the team first came in 2010 and then a second time in 2014. This is the third time we have had the privilege of inviting them to Yamagata. This kind of concert plays an important role in gospel ministry, for non-Christians usually won’t come to church to listen to the gospel message just because we invite them. But the Japanese love Christmas music and our friends are more willing to accept our invitation. Mr. Tada, who has been our long-time seeker, brought his wife who has hardly ever come to worship! Mrs. Yarimizu also brought her

husband, Haruhiko, who about twice a month comes to worship, leaving the church as soon as I finish my message. Especially wonderful was that two people whom the church has connection with through business came even though they were invited only a day or two before the concert. One is a man from the printer who supplies us our weekly church bulletin paper. The other is a lady to whom we pay our monthly copying machine fee. She brought her husband. While the situation for taking the gospel as close as possible is indeed “scarcely restricted,” yet we see the miraculous working hand of the Lord bringing people closer than ever we can imagine to hearing the gospel. I served as MC and Rev. Oka, a pastor of one of the two other churches that sponsored, brought a short Christmas message to about 70 people at the “Advent Now concert.”



Pastor Yaegashi at the center microphone

Also, in December we had our Ladies' Annual Christmas Luncheon, which has been held for 35 years since the early 1980's. We did not have a good turn-out this year, only 21 women while we usually have around 30. Mrs. Tsuruko Uomoto, our OPC missionary, came from Sendai and spoke to the ladies. She gave her own testimony of how she came to know the Lord and emphasized the importance of Christians' telling about Jesus to their friends for that was the way she was also introduced to the gospel and to the Lord! This year out of 21 attendees there were 11 Christians! This is the only meeting the church sponsors where only women are invited. I told our ladies that I wish they would invite me just once (as a speaker?) before I retire. Here is a picture from the gathering.



Mrs. Uomoto in the middle of the first row, and Katie, 3rd from the right in the back row
Also, the Christmas worship was certainly a blessed event. We had several seekers, who occasionally attend, along with our regular seekers like Mr. Tada, and our two sons' families from Tokyo come to celebrate the birth of our Lord. There were 34 people altogether in our small sanctuary which usually can seat 30 people and so, some folks were seated in the kitchen next to the sanctuary. The Christmas worship was indeed filled with God's blessing of having many people and sharing Christ's gospel with them.



Christmas Worship 2018

One sad and yet glorious news: one of the Yaegashis' closest family member, George Schuch, Tami's (our son James' wife) father was called home on Dec.6 after many months of struggle against illness, standing firm in love for and trust in his Savior till the end. We appreciate your prayers for the comfort and encouragement from the Lord upon Linda, George's wife, Tami and the rest of the family.

In November.

On the last Sunday after the service we held our congregational table-talk where almost all members gathered. We had lunch together first and then as I led the meeting, we talked about our three major topics: 1) how better to prepare for worship 2) how and what to do and expect for the future merging with another Reformed and Presbyterian body and 3) our church building project. Concerning the merger with another denomination, I explained the procedures that we need to walk step by step in carrying out our desire to merge with a particular denomination. We have a church in mind as a sound choice which we think would be a good partner to work with. More in detail when I talk about “in October” section. As for the new building project we have only less than half the funds we need. Therefore, we continue asking God to provide us with necessary funds as we prayerfully and generously give to the building fund.

On a personal note Katie was chosen by her alma mater, Belhaven College, for the World Service Award. So, for the first time Katie attended her Alumni reunion on Nov. 2 held on the campus of Belhaven College as all the family encouraged her and helped her to go.

In October

Mr. Sasaki, one of the elder-candidates, and a member of our Steering Committee, traveled with me to Tokyo to attend the Musashi Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Japan (PCJ). I have been in touch with its moderator Rev. Watanabe, who also is chairman of the Home Missions and Inter-Church Relation’s Committee of the PCJ (I reported my contact with him in last year’s report). At his invitation we decided to attend the presbytery meeting and make ourselves known to that presbytery. At the beginning of the meeting Mr. Watanabe introduced us both to the floor and I gave very short greetings together with why we were visiting. While I did not say “Yamagata wants to join you,” I told them our situation, explaining that we have been looking for a good partner to join in the gospel work in the near future, and that this visit was one way to let our brothers and sisters know where we are and what we are praying for. We were welcomed by the floor with warmth and Christian fellowship. This took place the last weekend of October. Mr. Sasaki and I were able to attend the PCJ church nearby where the presbytery meeting was held.

I also attended the 73th General Assembly of the RCJ as an observer. It was understood in the mission when the OPC severed its official cooperative relationship with the Reformed Church in Japan in 2016 that we would to some extent keep our brotherly relationship with it by occasional attendance as an observer at presbytery and G.A. meetings. Our intention is to assure these brethren in Christ, who went off on a different road in the important biblical issue of “Women in Office,” of our continued love. We also want to observe closely how the RCJ walks her path faith in obedience to the Word of God. As of 2018 the RCJ has six women officers (one pastor and five elders) and three as candidates for ministry who are presently under care of presbyteries.

The Women in the Yamagata Church held its Autumn church bazaar. Just like the December Christmas Luncheon there were fewer visitors than in past years, but some ten people outside the church came to the bazaar, including a few from the church's neighborhood. Last year we had the largest number of visitors ever. Nevertheless, this was a great opportunity to have people come to church who otherwise won't have a chance to meet us and see who we are and what we do. The proceeds from the bazaar were contributed to the International Food for the Hungry.

In September

We held our annual one-day retreat at a local hotel where we gathered and shared our time of fellowship together. This retreat has been held every year since 2010 on a national holiday, which means our members and seekers can get together other than Sunday worship time all at one place! In the past we had a "study" type of retreat, with either some outside speaker or me giving a talk or listening to a discourse in CD. Because many members took trips this year into distant places within Japan, and some even to foreign countries, we decided to have those who traveled share their discoveries with us and how their experiences were connected to "knowing and believing in God" as they traveled and saw various parts of Japan and of the world. One common testimony by those who traveled was the glory of God's world of creation. Mr. Sasaki, who travels abroad a lot due to his business, shared his sense of divine awe as he crossed the international date line remembering Psalm 19:5-6.

You may remember back in May Ms. Tomoko Ota's mother died, having confessed her thanks and trust in Jesus. I officiated at her funeral service, which was a blessed opportunity to preach the gospel to those family members and friend who gathered at the service.

This September I had another opportunity to share the gospel of hope in eternal life through Christ's resurrection when the Ota family held the burial service, for which I was asked to officiate. The Japanese custom of treating the deceased is to cremate, not burying in the ground as most families do in America. Thus, often the ashes are kept at home until a suitable time comes for burial. This is one reason why "the burial service" was postponed until fall. This time there were only five family members in attendance, but because of that I was able to share the gospel more closely to their hearts as they were literally close to me during the message.

Where there is one going away from here, there is another given a new life. Shio and Masato Yashima had their first baby, a boy, in September. His name is Michi, meaning the way. I am prayerfully talking with the young couple concerning infant baptism for Michi. His father, Masato, who is not of Reformed persuasion, does not know the biblical concept of God's covenant with His people. I am hoping to have some sessions with them soon about the infant baptism.

Other Items: Japan was hit badly in 2018 with series of heavy rains, several typhoons, and big earthquakes. Especially the heavy rains in July in the western part of Japan and a series of

strong earthquakes that hit Hokkaido Island in September caused much damage to some people with whom our church has connections in these areas. Shie Sasaki's family lives very near the area where the earthquakes hit. We began collecting donations to help those in need. Though our church is small, our people generously gave showing their Christian love and concern for the people afflicted. We are very thankful for several other opportunities where we shared the gospel and had close fellowship with whom we came in contact.

The VBS in July, while the number of children was small (7), was much blessed because not only the non-children but their non-Christian mothers had the opportunity to hear the simple message of the gospel through our Sunday School helpers. Weekly Bible Study and Sunday School for members were also blessed in terms of being able to meet on a regular basis and the amount and contents of studies we were able to digest. In the Weekly Bible Study where four people gather, one of them is our seeker, Mrs. Nakamura. We studied basic doctrines of the Scriptures rediscovered and brought to light by the Reformation leaders, Luther and Calvin, using a Book entitled "Five Sola." In the Sunday School class, which has been geared to helping our officers-elect to understand the biblical doctrines, we have been studying the Westminster Confession of Faith covering through chapter 21 on Religious Worship and Sabbath Day.

Concerning seekers, we are very grateful Mr. Tada continues in joining worship and fellowship opportunities more these last few months. One reason of Mr. Tada's persevering with worship with fellowshiping with us is found in a Japanese church tradition! Most of the Japanese Protestant churches have their annual theme Bible verse and an annual slogan. They are usually written in beautiful calligraphy. Mr. Tada is a highly trained student of calligraphy and we asked him to write out our annual Bible verse and slogan for 2019. He actually had done the same service in the past years. Thus, this "mission" of his writing the verse and slogan for 2019 has been prompting his coming to worship more often than before! Whatever the circumstance may be, the Lord certainly has a good grip on Mr. Tada's soul. Mrs. Nakamura and Mrs. Kanaya also regularly attend the service. Please continue to pray for these three seekers, who have been our dear friends under God's gracious leading, that the Lord would bring them closer to Himself for the year 2019 and that they would publicly profess faith in Christ.

Katie's Evening English Bible Class has been one opportunity to discuss living out our faith and doing evangelism. Miki Yarimizu is always looking for ways to lead people to the Lord. A lady from another English class, Mrs. Yokota, returned in the spring and Mrs. Yarimizu read to her from Genesis 1. "So that's how the world began!" she said in awe. These moments give us great encouragement, but also make us wonder why don't people want to follow the God Who made them? Katie's Friday "Spiritual Mothering" class has lovely mature Christian women from various churches sharing their faith and lives with non-Christians. It is a blessing and a reward to participate in fellowship with them.

Prayer Requests:

- 1) That Mr. Sasaki and Dr. Yamamoto grow in knowledge of their biblical faith for ordination as elders soon, and Mr. Inoue as a deacon.
- 2) That the church members be encouraged more in sharing the gospel with their families and friends, bringing people to the Lord through their ministries.
- 3) That the Lord continue encouraging us with a vision of re-modeling our old house-church and supply us necessary funds. We have about a half of what would cost the kind of church building we envision to build!
- 4) That the Lord give our church, represented by me, the pastor, and the five members of the Steering Committee, as well as the OPC Japan Mission which gives us encouragement and advice, wisdom and understanding concerning our direction and desire to look for a Presbyterian denomination to join in the near future. Pray that we may know specifically whether or not our brethren, the Presbyterian Church in Japan (PCJ), might be the one whom we should consider seriously for a new partner. Should the way to the PCJ become clearer, pray that we would know with regard to legal procedures how to go about joining the denomination in near future.
- 5) Pray that the Lord will also provide a pastor to take my place since my retirement is scheduled as late as December of 2022 or even earlier, depending on the church situation explained in prayer requests (4).
- 6) That our seekers, Mr. Tada, Mrs. Nakamura, Mrs. Kanaya, Mrs. Yokota may soon come to profession of faith.
- 7) That the Lord will grant us health for being able to continue as usual the gospel ministry, for both Katie and I seem to have fallen ill more often than before during the last three years or so. I suffered twice a light case of pneumonia due to the acid reflux in the last two years.

Your servant for Christ's sake in Yamagata Japan,
Kazuhiko (Kaz) Yaegashi
OPC Japan Mission Missionary & Ministerial Member of the PCA

Presenting the report to:

The Presbytery of MS Valley of the PCA
The Committee on Foreign Missions of the Ohio Presbytery of the OPC
The Committee for the Support of Japan Mission

Forwarding the report to:

The Committee on Foreign Missions of the OPC General Assembly

