

Dear friends,

November 13th, 2020

Thank you for participating in the Christmas Card Project this year. We have 44 US churches and one association writing to 80 churches and 2 relief centers in Japan. Please find the list of US churches below. This marks the eighth year that we have joined our efforts to lift up in prayer, all of the churches in the Northeastern Conference of the Kyodan - our partner churches in and around Fukushima. This project was started after the devastating triple disaster of 2011, especially in light of the nuclear disaster. (March 2021 will mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.) These churches have historic ties to our two denominations: the United Church of Christ (UCC), and the Disciples of Christ (DOC). The ties that go back 134 years. This Advent season, as you reach out globally through prayer and the sending of cards, I pray that God's Spirit will touch you with a renewed sense of what God's mission means in our world. I

Christians in Japan account for 1% of the population. Many churches are quite small. In rural settings where the culture is quite conservative, it is particularly difficult to witness to the Christian faith. I have included prayer concerns for each church. In many of the prayer requests you will find a deep concern for the future survival of the church. Some churches have kindergartens and nurseries that provide the church a vital connection with the wider society. Otherwise, the Christian community can be quite insular. Though the challenges facing the church in Japan are great, I want to emphasize that Christ brings us together in mutual relationship. I have found that we in the US have just as much to learn from them, as they do from us. What they need (and US churches as well) is not help but relationship. I hope that an annual relationship through prayer will be just as meaningful for churches in the US as it is for churches in Japan.

This past year the area has been repeatedly hit by terrible typhoons. The climate crisis has can be felt in a very real way as temperatures in the Pacific Ocean rise, causing stronger storms and an increase in the number of seasonal storms. This year Motomiya Church in Fukushima was completely submerged under water.

I have matched each of you with one or two churches. Please send your card/cards to the addresses that I have provided. Include a picture of your church or congregation, and a short introduction of yourselves. Also, tell them that you will be lifting them up in prayer this Advent season. Be reminded that the Japanese churches can be very small. Too many cards can be a bit overwhelming.

As you prepare to send the cards, I offer the following for your consideration:

- 1) Please look through my blog (<http://jeffreyfromjapan.blogspot.com/>) to see if any story captures your imagination as to what it might be like to be a Christian in Japan. (Because of the pandemic I haven't had the chance to visit the Tohoku area recently.)
- 2) Relationship is what this is all about. It is not a matter of helping, but rather continuing to love. The relationship is mutual. They are on the frontlines, as it were, facing issues and witnessing to Christ on our behalf.
- 3) Though some churches are not directly affected by the dangers of Fukushima, all churches have been feeling the aftereffects of the disaster. Radiation is an ever-present threatening reality.
- 4) Many churches have kindergartens and nurseries. Please do not forget to pray for the children who are in the care of these churches.

Please send your Christmas cards by the 10th of December if you want them to reach the churches by Christmas. (Confirm that the letters have international postage, and that the address is clearly made out to Japan.) I tried my best to match you with the same churches as last year. Also included is a translation of Rev. Kataoka's (World Mission Committee, chair) message to you.

Shalom

Rev. Jeffrey Mensendiek (CGMB mission coworker, Japan)

### **List of 44 US churches and 1 association writing cards this year**

Benton Christian Church DOC, Benton PA	Salem Church UCC, Catasauqua PA
Church of the Good Shephard UCC, Alburtis PA	First Church of Christ DOC, Williamsport PA
Sayre Christian Church DOC, Sayre PA	Trinity Great Swamp UCC, Quakertown PA
St. Paul's UCC, Shrewsbury PA	Union UCC, Neffs PA
First Congregational Church UCC, Harford PA	St. Paul's UCC, Somerset PA
Peace in Zion UCC, Zieglerville PA	New Creation UCC, Easton PA
St. John's UCC, Allentown PA	Trinity Reformed UCC, Collegeville PA
Christ Church UCC, Norristown PA	Trinity UCC, Telford PA
St. John's UCC, Emmaus PA	<u>Faith UCC, Hazelton PA</u>
St. Thomas UCC, Bethlehem PA	St. Luke's UCC, Ottsville PA
Orangeville United Church, Orangeville PA	First Reformed Church, UCC Berwick PA
Trinity UCC, East Petersburg PA	New Goshenhoppen, UCC PA
First Christian Church of Fullerton, DOC CA	Montebello Plymouth Cong. Church UCC CA
Altadena Community Church UCC CA	Sacred Place UCC, CA
Claremont UCC, Claremont CA	Pioneer Ocean View UCC, San Diego CA
First Church of Redwood City UCC CA	Forest Hill Christian Church DOC CA
South Joplin Christian DOC, MO	University Christian Church Fort Worth DOC, TX
Pleasant Hill Community Church UCC, TN	Memorial Christian Church DOC, Peoria IL
Glade UCC, Walkersville MD	Peace United Church, UCC Schofield WI
Desert Palm, UCC, Tempe AZ	Edwards Cong., UCC, Davenport IA
Allisonville Xn Church, Indianapolis IN	Trinity UCC, Wadsworth OH
Good Shephard UCC, Cary NC	First Christian Church, Bardstown KY
NAPAD (North American Pacific American Disciples), CCNCN	

#### **A Brief History of our Partner Church the United Church of Christ in Japan. (the Kyodan)**

Protestant missionaries first arrived in Japan in the 1860s and started churches, schools and hospitals throughout the country. However, the number of Christians did not grow as they did in other countries. Christians have always been a small minority of less than 1%. During the Asia Pacific War all Protestant churches were forced into one organization called "the Kyodan" because authorities felt the need to maintain a tight control over those who belonged to a foreign religion. After the war, the various denominations were free to leave the united church. The Lutherans, Anglicans and some Baptists left, but the majority of churches remained together in a united church believing that God works in wonderful ways to bring us together as one. The Kyodan represents the largest Protestant church in Japan.