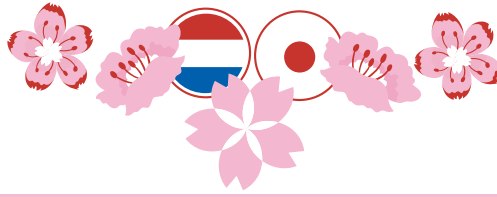


Project Dëshima

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GREETINGS FROM JAPAN!

It took many years, but I can finally write a newsletter FROM Japan, instead of writing about plans to go TO Japan. Here's a glimpse of the first few weeks.

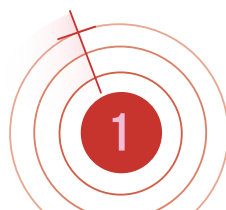
I had a smooth flight, but entering Japan was a bit of a challenge. I had to fill out forms that also asked about my profession. The customs officer didn't know the word "missionary" and asked for an explanation. When I did, his expression grew increasingly serious. When he also realized my trip had started in Amsterdam, he asked about drugs and I had to open my suitcase. In full view of all the other people who had just arrived, it was thoroughly searched.

Once in Japan itself, things went much more smoothly. I was met at the airport exit and taken to my apartment, which was quite spacious by Japanese standards. For the first few days, I struggled with the worst jet lag I've ever had, but on my fifth day school and "normal life" began. I have three hours of classroom lessons every



morning, in a group of five or six people, and three afternoons of private lessons. The level is particularly high in the private lessons. The rule is to speak Japanese as much as possible. That's the fastest way to learn the language. It takes a lot of energy, and sometimes I'm so tired in the evening that I just sit on the sofa like a zombie for an hour.

Being in Japan feels wonderfully familiar. I hardly needed any adjustment. Going to church with Japanese Christians is wonderful. I'm filled with immense gratitude that I'm finally here, and at the same time, I'm curious about what will follow these first three months in the land of the rising sun.



LIVING AMONG THE JAPANESE

Of course, I've spent the past few years studying the Japanese, but actually living among them is different. I've noticed that in many ways they seem much more conservative than Europeans: men and women dress very smartly, in suits and dresses, children in school uniforms. The streets are much quieter than I'm used to in the Netherlands.

Unfortunately, in Japan, the image of foreigners has become more negative in recent years due to increasing tourism, so I try my best not to offend. For example, running a red light at a zebra crossing is really inappropriate, so I politely join the often dozens of people waiting there.

I've also visited two Japanese churches. It's striking how small they are. The first church I visited, the oldest Baptist church in Japan, is even slated for closure because they haven't had a pastor for three years. The second church is much larger. It was wonderful to hear from a Japanese person about his faith. At both churches, at least half of the attendees were foreigners. Clearly, much remains to be done.



PRAISE AND PRAYER POINTS

Thank the Lord for the very successful first few weeks in Japan. I felt supported.

Give praise for the lovely students and teachers at the language school.

Also pray that I will find someone among them with whom I can connect more deeply.

Pray for the energy to continue studying as best as possible.

Pray also for my physical health. I have a pulled muscle in my rib cage that remains painful, especially when breathing deeply.

Pray for clarity about the next steps after these three months at the language school.