

# 2015 UK Prayer Team

## in Northern Hokkaido

1-10 June



**Reopening the wells  
that had been dug.**

**Genesis 26:12-18**

## Who?

Angelo Lebrato led the team (he was a member of the 2014 team), with Mélanie Dessouroux, Lok Sum Yang, and Arun Sahadeo. Angela Stevens, UK Serve Asia Intern, assisted Karen Viljoen, Serve Japan Hokkaido Rep.



## Why northern Hokkaido?

To quote Angelo Lebrato, "The team is here, and Christians in England are praying, because Japan is on God's heart."

Beginning last year, OMF Japan offered to host two prayer teams, one of which would be sent to pray specifically for the Nayoro church plant. For years, pastors of JECA (Japanese Evangelical Church Association) and OMF Japan had been praying about another joint church plant. Nayoro was chosen as it has few Christians and fewer churches, and could become a springboard to reach out to areas still further north. Tim and Miho Walker had been on home assignment in the UK until just before the opening of Nayoro Grace Church, so were able to help recruit for the 2014 UK Prayer Team.

The Nayoro Grace Church had a rocky start, as the Japanese leader assigned by JECA resigned just before the opening. Pastor Kitoh of the Kitami Grace Church stepped in to supervise the work for two years.

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The 2014 UK Prayer Team also visited Pastor Kitoh's churches in Kitami and Abashiri, and through that visit sensed the Lord leading them to join in this church's vision for northern Hokkaido, called **Vision 2020**.



### ***Vision 2020: [Be a Bridge Church]***

***Central Verse: Acts 1:8***

By 2020, Kitami Grace Church seeks to become a bridge connecting churches in Ohotsuku and northern regions of Hokkaido, for the proclamation of the Gospel revealing the glory of God.

The 7 cities Kitami Grace Church is seeking to bridge are: Kitami, Asahikawa (Nagayama area), Abashiri, Nayoro, Monbetsu, Rumoi, and Wakkanai.

The 2014 UK Prayer Team desired that they and others following them would also join in being a bridge, desiring to build a long-term relationship of prayer: **prayer for** the salvation of many in northern Hokkaido; and **prayer with** Japanese Christians for their strengthening and encouragement in their task of proclaiming Christ to the glory of God in northern Hokkaido. Angelo Lebrato committed to return the following year if it was the Lord's will.

One other note of interest: the Lord is continuing work that He began a hundred years ago in northern Hokkaido! Karen was moved by the prayer of two men last year, men from different countries who had come at different times to pray specifically for northern Hokkaido. **"Lord, reopen the wells that had been dug here."**

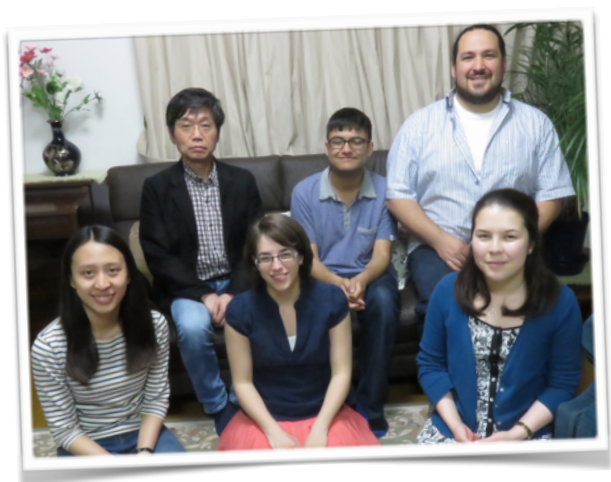
During the first UK Prayer Team visit, John & Sian Newton-Webb introduced the team to the Piersons, an American missionary couple who had an incredible impact in northern Hokkaido from 1888-1928. They moved to Kitami in 1914 and saw numerous people come to faith in Christ, and were instrumental in keeping the city free of a "red light district", protecting the daughters of the area. Though the church they planted has dwindled to 3 elderly ladies, the city has established the Pierson Memorial House in their honor. 2014 marked the 100-year anniversary of the Piersons' arrival in Kitami, and the city held celebrations commemorating their love and service.

During the 2015 UK Prayer Team visit, Pastor Kitoh also mentioned two other men who had significant impact in Hokkaido: William Clark ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_S.\\_Clark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_S._Clark)) and John Batchelor ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Batchelor\\_\(missionary\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Batchelor_(missionary))).

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The spiritual wells were opened up in Hokkaido over a hundred years ago. We believe the Lord is calling His people to pray for a mighty movement of His Spirit as He “reopens the wells” in northern Hokkaido.

Due to a scheduling conflict (Miho Walker translated for OMF International Director, Patrick Fung, at OMF Japan’s 50th anniversary celebrations during the team’s visit), the 2015 UK Prayer Team spent more of its time with the Kitami Grace Church, visiting Nayoro for just 2 days at the end of their trip.



**Where, for whom, and for what  
did we pray?**

**Praying with Japanese Christians**, our first meeting was with **Hiroto Kataoka**, currently a student at the Hokkaido Bible Institute in **Sapporo** who will **become the pastor of the Abashiri Grace Chapel from spring 2016**.

We joined **Kitami Grace Church’s** early morning prayer meetings (6:25-7:00), as well as its Wednesday mid-morning and evening prayer meetings. We prayed specifically for 2 seekers: **Mrs. Ogura** and **Riku Kakuto**.

Pastor Kitoh of **Kitami Grace Church** asked us to pray first and foremost for **the salvation of many in Kitami**, young and old throughout the area. In addition, he asked us to pray for:

- 1) the provision of a new church building** (the current building is old and cramped)
- 2) a pastor for the Nayoro Grace Church** (Pastor Kitoh is supervising until spring 2016)
- 3) new pastors** (half of the pastors in Kitami will retire within 15 years)





And in terms of **Vision 2020**, he asked us to pray for the city of **Monbetsu**. It is Kitami Grace Church's target city to begin their next church plant. He also asked us to pray for **unity regarding the vision**.

We came back to the church from lunch the first afternoon to a very excited woman who had been studying the Bible with **Mrs. Ogura** for months. **"She confessed Jesus as her Lord and wants to be baptised!"** What a privilege to have partnered in prayer with this woman, even if our part was merely at the end of her journey in submitting to Jesus, which was the beginning of her life with Him!



We also joined **Abashiri** Grace Chapel's (Kitami's church-plant) Thursday mid-morning prayer meeting. **Chizuru Kataoka** (whose husband is mentioned above) is currently overseeing the church activities. She expressed thanks for the prayers of last year's team, as the church has seen a number of new people come in the past year. And her elderly parents, **Mr & Mrs Morita**, who also live in the church building have been well.

Mrs. Kataoka asked us to pray for the area of the church, **Yobito**, with a population of 38,000. The **farmers and fisherman** are some of the hardest to **reach with the gospel**.

One thing that the Lord impressed the team to pray for was **creativity**. The gospel needs to be shared in creatively Japanese ways. Then the Lord opened our eyes to how the Japanese Christians are already doing that in many ways. One such creative activity is called **"Fumanetto"**, translated "Don't step on the net!" It is an exercise program developed for the elderly using a net-shaped mat of 50 cm squares. Stepping to the rhythm of familiar folk songs, it helps the elderly improve their balance and mental faculties. Japanese churches have started to use this program to reach the elderly in their areas. Instead of folk songs, they use praise songs! The team gave it a try one morning (2015-06-05 09.24.40.mov), then prayed for the church's contacts: **Uchida, Takahashi, Ozeki, Ujie, Kimata and Takeuchi**.



We were also amazed at Kitami Grace Church's desire to see more Japanese Christians **write their own praise songs**. Mrs. Hoshi has written many great ones over the years!

After Sunday service at Kitami Grace Church, the team was excited to meet **Riku Kakuto**, the young man we had been praying for since our arrival. The team spent their lunch time talking with him about the Lord Jesus. He said he would like to become a Christian but doesn't want his friends to know. **We are praying that he would come to care more about Jesus' opinion of him than others'.**

On the way to Nayoro, we stopped briefly in **Nishi-Okoppe** (a 2-hour drive from Nayoro) to meet and pray with **Mr. & Mrs. Nakayama**, who attend Nayoro Grace Church. They led the team in an abbreviated tea ceremony, pointing out ways that **they are able to share the gospel when doing a tea ceremony with guests.**

In **Nayoro**, we stayed at Grace Church, but enjoyed delicious homemade Japanese meals prepared by Miho Walker! Sharing time in the Walkers' home with their 3 children (Kento, Naomi and George) was a special treat. Since our time did not overlap with a church service or prayer meeting, the Walkers invited church members **Mr. & Mrs. Narayama** to join us one evening for fellowship and prayer.

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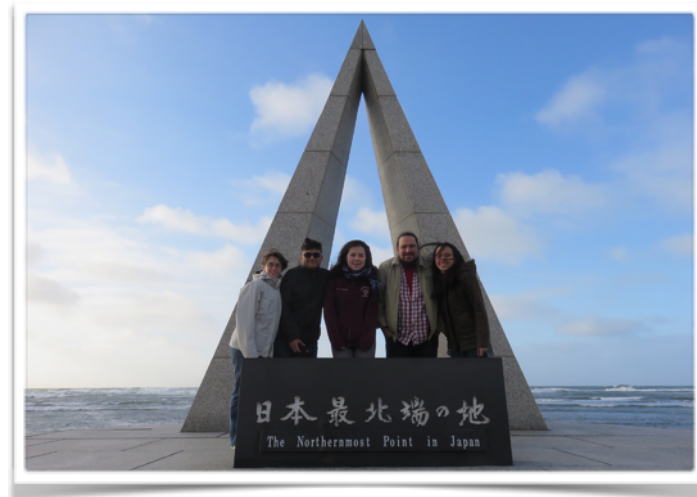
**Praying for the people of northern Hokkaido**, we went to several locations in Kitami: **the Pierson Memorial House, a cemetery, a hill overlooking the city, and a large bookstore** (Pastor Kito said, "It is places like this that people gather on Sunday mornings.").



The 2015 UK Prayer Team made the very first long drive north to visit **Monbetsu** and Wakkanai. Kitami Grace Church plans to plant its next church in Monbetsu, the next largest city about 95 km north. The drive gave us a feel for the commitment involved due to the distance. Once there, we prayed **in the port area** specifically for **the fisherman**, one group that is quite unreached with the Gospel, **that many would have opportunities to hear of and come to know Jesus.**

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We then drove another 215 km to the outskirts of **Wakkanai**, the northernmost city in Japan. It is too far (a total of 310 km) for KGC to plant a church there, but the vision is that Nayoro Grace Church, which is 170 km away would grow to the point of being able to plant and support the church in Wakkanai.



Staying in a traditional Japanese hotel was a wonderful cultural experience: taking baths together (men and women separate, of course!), chatting over a cup of green tea while in our yukatas (pictures of us on page 2), sleeping on futon (Japanese bed mat) and eating a typical breakfast of fish, rice, miso soup, pickles, etc. During our evening chat, as well as a walk in a neighbourhood the following morning, we prayed for **the people of Wakkanai** to be **exposed to the gospel of Christ and believe**.

While in Nayoro, we went to **the main Nayoro Shinto shrine** and **a Buddhist temple** (one dedicated to aborted babies). Mélanie in particular wanted to visit these locations in order to better understand the Japanese university students she has been sharing Christ with back in the UK, though also wary of the possible negative spiritual impact on herself by going to such idolatrous places. Angela suggested that listening to praise music while in these places would be helpful. It was!

We prayed for **those who come to the shrine or temple with real needs** that only their Creator God can meet, that **they might have the eyes of their heart opened to see Him, come to know Him and trust Him to be helped and saved**. We prayed for the **Japanese university students in the UK to meet Jesus while there, and to come back to Japan with their faith and joy to impact their society**.



The final morning in Nayoro was a special time of prayer with **Tim & Miho Walker**, to pray for **their contacts, such as Taku Sato**, a self-defence force officer with whom Tim is studying the Bible. And in a prayer of faith, Mélanie prayed **that the Lord would lead 10 new people to believe and be joined to the Nayoro Grace Church by 2016**. Lord, may it be!

Within an hour of leaving, the team was able to compose a song in Japanese with the Walkers! Writing such a song was on Angelo's heart last year, but it didn't quite get finished. The hope is to share this song with this network of churches within the coming year.

