

# 2015 USA Prayer Team

in Northern Hokkaido

June 17-26



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

Genesis 26:12-18

## Who?

Greg Brown and Josh Klink came to Hokkaido from Bethany Gospel Church in Swansea, Massachusetts. Angela Stevens, UK Serve Asia Intern, assisted Karen Viljoen, Serve Japan Hokkaido Rep.



## Why northern Hokkaido? A bit of history .....

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.

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 USA 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))).

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.

Where,

for whom,

and for what did we pray?



The USA Prayer Team’s arrival coincided with OMF Hokkaido’s mid-year Day of Prayer, held on June 18 in **Sapporo**. Greg & Josh joined missionaries from throughout Hokkaido to pray for **the needs of the international mission**.

On the 19th before driving north, Greg & Josh were able to join an already scheduled orientation given by Peter & Janet Dallman, Directors of OMF Japan’s Japanese Language & Culture Center. Josh commented: “I enjoyed the JLCC orientation, the quick class detail, and learning a little more about OMF.”

After driving north to **Nayoro** and settling in to our rooms at Nayoro Grace Church, we had supper with the Walker family in their home, just a few hundred meters away. Not only did we have a wonderful Japanese meal prepared by Miho, but we had a good first meeting with them to talk about the prayer needs of the church and the areas of outreach they are involved in.

The Walkers asked us to pray for God's blessing on their **Gospel opportunities**. **Taku Sato** is a Japan Self Defence Force worker. He often meets military personnel from other countries, some of whom have religious beliefs, so he said he wants to understand Christianity better. He has attended the church a few times and is open to studying the Bible with Tim, so thankfully his interest seems more than merely intellectual knowledge. Tim shared, "It's exciting to think of **how the Lord may use him to spread the gospel to others if it so pleases Him to save Taku.**"

**Mrs. Fukuzawa** has been attending the Nakayamas' home meeting and came to service once. We prayed that the Lord would give her **understanding of the gospel**.

A **local Gospel music group** (the majority are unbelievers) is now meeting monthly at the church. We prayed for many members **to come to other church activities, believe in Jesus, and join the Church**.

**Contacts from Naomi's kindergarten** are coming to a weekly kids' English class, sometimes with parents. Tim has enjoyed talking with a few of the fathers. We prayed for **further contact with fathers, and whole families, to share the gospel with them**.

We were also asked to pray that they and the church would **effectively encourage believers** in the area. **Mr. Kitajima** and **Mr. & Mrs. Narayama** are church members who live nearby. We prayed especially for **Mrs. Narayama's witness at the nearby university where she works, and that she would be a link between students and staff and the church**.



**Mr. & Mrs. Nakayama** live 2 hours away in **Nishi-Okoppe**. They come to service about twice a month and also hold a home meeting. They are key members of their community and keen **witnesses for Christ**.

**Miss Suzuki** is isolated geographically (living a 2 hour bus ride away) and spiritually (no Christian fellowship in her town), but she is a prayerful and active **witness for Jesus amongst her colleagues**. The Walkers plan to visit her monthly before the winter snow conditions make the journey too difficult. They desire to greet some of her colleagues, and then open the Bible and pray with her over coffee.

Finally, the Walkers asked us to pray for **the ongoing need of a full-time pastor**. Pastor Kitoh, the church's supervising pastor who comes to Nayoro twice a month, will pull back from spring 2016. The Walkers have had to take on more of the church leadership responsibilities during this time, which has been a good learning experience. However, they know it would be better for the long-term mission of the church if the Walkers had more time available to devote to outreach, while a pastor could concentrate on shepherding the believers.

Since Saturday was the Walkers' day off, the team headed out on our own to pray. First, we drove to the **Self-Defence Force base** and parked nearby. Breaking off into pairs, we walked around, praying for **Taku Sato**, for **his salvation, as well as for his fellow workers**.



Again in pairs, we walked around **the campus of Nayoro Municipal College** to pray for **Mrs. Narayama**, for **her spiritual influence on campus**. What a "God-moment" when we happened to see her with a group of athletes training for the special Olympics with whom she volunteers!

Then we went to **the main Nayoro Shinto shrine**. 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**.





On the way back to the parking area, we walked through **a park** with several bridges over parts of the lake and just sensed the Lord calling us to pray there. We worshiped the Lord, thanking Jesus for being "The Bridge" between mankind and the Father. And we continued to pray **that Nayoro Grace Church, as part of Vision 2020, would be used as a bridge between the people of the area and the Savior they need to hear of and believe in.**

On Sunday, we worshiped with the people of Nayoro Grace Church. Some Sundays, the Walker kids alone (Kento, Naomi and George) make up the Sunday School, with Mom (Miho) as teacher of the Bible lessons and leader of the praise songs, prayers, and games - which Josh readily joined!



The church members were pleased to hear the team sing a praise song in Japanese.

A highlight for the team was fellowshiping with the church members during lunch and then praying together. Mrs. Narayama's prayer for the American church was so heartfelt.

Later that Sunday afternoon, the Walkers led us on a drive about 2 hours north to **Otoineppu Village**. They have a couple of contacts here, particularly **the owner** of this Soba shop. We prayed **for Tim to have more opportunities to speak to this man of Jesus**.



Monday was wet and dreary as we set out with the Walkers for the **Furen area** south of Nayoro, praying in our vehicles in various locations **for the gospel of Christ to reach into the hearts and lives of the people**.



The rain lifted enough in the afternoon for the team to go out again in pairs to pray **in the neighborhood of the church**. Josh and Karen stopped in front of the guide to **the residents** of that neighborhood, and **we prayed by name for them to all to come into the hearing the gospel**.

On the way to Kitami, we stopped briefly in **Nishi-Okoppe** (a 2-hour drive from Nayoro), even though **Mr. & Mrs. Nakayama** were not able to meet with us. The team spent some time in the gardens where the tea house is located, praying for the Nakayamas as **they share the gospel when doing the tea ceremony with town guests**.



Since we also had to drive through the city of **Monbetsu**, we stopped for a few hours to pray into **Vision 2020**, Kitami Grace Church's **target city to begin their next church plant**.



We were warmly welcomed to Kitami Grace Church by Pastor and Mrs. Kitoh.



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.



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)

An highlight of our time with the people of Kitami Grace Church was summarized well by Greg: "One highlight was one of the prayer sessions in Kitami when the pastor paired us up with non-English speakers, and listening to the lady praying with me. While trying to listen, it occurred to me that I was in a heart place praying with Japanese, and God was so good to let me be in that moment."

Wednesday afternoon we visited the **Pierson Memorial House** (mentioned above), getting a guided tour by a city volunteer named **Mr. Ito**. Although he admires greatly what the Piersons did for his city, he has no interest in the Savior they proclaimed and served. After the tour, we spent some time outside praying for Mr. Ito's salvation, and for many who come through the doors of that place representing lives dedicated to serving Jesus.



Before joining up with Abashiri Grace Chapel's (Kitami's church-plant) Thursday mid-morning prayer meeting, Pastor Kitoh took us to a few key locations in the area to pray.

First he drove us up a hill behind the church to **a lookout point**. From there, we could see one side of **the city of Abashiri**, and we prayed **that the Gospel of Jesus might go out into the communities there**.



Then from **another vantage point** we could see the famous Abashiri Prison, a Meiji-era facility used for the incarceration of political prisoners. The old prison has been turned into a museum, but the city's new maximum security prison is still in use. "Seeker" **Mr. Igarashi** who works at the prison has been attending services and prayer meetings recently. Pastor Kitoh asked us to pray with the church **for Mr. Igarashi's salvation and future witness to co-workers and prisoners**.



Coming down the other side of the hill we could see the part of the city where **Hiroto Kataoka** used to work at the city office. After retirement, he was called into ministry and will become the pastor of the Abashiri Grace Chapel from spring 2016. **We prayed for his dissertation work, graduation, installation as pastor, and future influence on the people of this city.**



While Mr. Kataoka is in Sapporo finishing up his biblical studies, his wife, **Chizuru Kataoka**, is overseeing the church's activities. Her elderly parents, **Mr & Mrs Morita**, live in the church building as well, and both have come to faith in Jesus since moving in with the Kataokas.



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**.

