

## Lisa Ritenour

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**From:** The Lowther Family <roger@communityarts.jp>  
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MARCH 2019





Picture: Various kinds of tsukudani on a plate

At the mouth of the Sumida River on the edge of Tokyo Bay, we live on a famous island called Tsukuda. Tourists from around Japan often flood our area to taste its history. Around 400 years ago, fishermen on the island of Tsukuda in Osaka provided the famous shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa and his army with a large amount of fish. As a reward, Tokugawa invited these fisherman to move to Tokyo, where he ruled all of Japan, to supply the castle with fish. Leftovers were sold at nearby Nihonbashi, the “center” of Tokyo where all roads led. This elite group of fishermen settled on our island and renamed it Tsukuda in memory of their previous home. (The connection between these two cities is kept alive today: every year, students at Tsukuda Elementary in Tokyo, my sons’ school, and Tsukuda Elementary in Osaka visit each other on field trips.)

The legacy of these fisherman lasts today in a new kind of food they invented called *tsukudani* (literally “Tsukuda simmering”), made from simmering small fish, shellfish, or seaweed in salt and soy sauce (made from fermented soy beans). This process preserves the food, enabling it to last for over a month in the humid climate without rotting or losing nutritional value. It also provides tasty seasoning for a bland meal of rice. *Tsukudani* quickly became popular with all fishermen, travelers, military, and residents in the mountainous interior of Japan, and because of the heavy dependence on the sea and limited amounts of farmland, this new method of preserving seafood is essential to the diet of Japan. It joins a dizzying array of dried, salted, preserved, and fermented foods, which accompany every meal, including *umeboshi* pickled plums, *tsukemono* pickled vegetables, *nukazuke* pickled vegetables, *kiriboshi daikon* (small strips of dried radish), dried seaweed, dried fish, miso, *dashi* cooking stock, *natto* fermented soybeans, *mirin*, *sake*, plum wine, and many others. (Most of these words are in italics because they were invented here and have no English equivalent!)

*Tsukudani* is essentially made from salt and yeast. Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13), and, “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough” (Matthew 13:33). Like salt and yeast, grace works through us, preserving us and making us stronger. It saves us from the rot and stench of sin and invisibly transforms us from the inside out. “We...are being transformed into his image” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Little by little, grace helps us become “tasty” and attractive creatures who reflect the image of God and the kingdom of heaven in a world that is falling apart.

Through *tsukudani*, God provides yet another redemptive analogy that points to him in the best of Japanese culture. Every time I sit down to eat a meal, I am reminded of the presence of his grace continually at work in us to give a little taste of heaven to a hungry world.



## GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN AND AROUND THE WORLD

Evangelical Christianity is growing around the world at an average rate of 2.6%, with the average growth in Asia slightly higher at 3.0%. For comparison, consider these statistics for the United States and some countries in Asia.

	EVANGELICAL %	ANNUAL GROWTH %
USA	29%	+0.8%
CAMBODIA	1.6%	+8.8%
INDIA	2.2%	+3.9%
BANGLADESH	0.4%	+3.6%
THAILAND	0.5%	+3.6%
CHINA	5.7%	+2.9%
TAIWAN	2.8%	+2.2%
JAPAN	0.5%	-0.4%

Statistics provided by [operationworld.org](http://operationworld.org)

According to *Operation World*, Japan is the only country in all of Asia with negative growth in Christianity. The population of Japan is shrinking by 0.1% every year, a major crisis in Japan, but the churches of Japan are shrinking and dying even faster than the population! At the same time, God is blessing the country of Japan in extraordinary ways. Though the number of missionaries in Japan steadily declined since World War II, there has been a marked increase every year since the 2011 earthquake (according to the Japan Evangelical Missionary Association). We personally have experienced Christian growth in our organization Mission to the World (MTW) and especially in our network of churches in Tokyo, including Grace City Church Tokyo, where we serve on staff.

YEAR	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2014	2018
CHURCHES PLANTED (MTW)	1	3	5	9	13	15	19
AVERAGE WORSHIPERS	20	110	205	355	588	812	1123
MTW MISSIONARIES #	16	-	-	-	36	-	57

GRACE NETWORK NUMBER OF WORSHIPERS			
GRACE CITY CHURCH TOKYO (PLANTED IN 2010)		35	140
GRACE HARBOR CHURCH (2012)			70
DOUBLE OO CROSS (2013)			30
NEW COMMUNITY CHURCH (2014)			80
THE BRIDGE FELLOWSHIP (2017)			30
TOKYO INTERNATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (2017)			30
REDEEMER CHURCH OF ROPPONGI (2018)			30
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>556</b>

While the challenges of church planting in Japan are enormous, we believe God is growing his church in ways not seen since the 1500s. With unprecedented growth for Japan of 556 new worshipers in just eight years, we are already beginning to see it. Thank you for making this possible!

—Roger, Abi, Aidan (15), Eastin (13), Coen (9), and Kaizen (6)

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**mtw**  
 Mission to the World

## Dear Friends and Supporters...

Our March [newsletter](#) includes a short devotional on *tsukudani*, a food invented in our neighborhood in Tokyo. It is just one more example of the redemptive

analogies that point to God and the gospel at the heart of Japanese culture. Also included are some recent and exciting statistics on the growth of Christianity in Japan.

Thank you so much for your generous giving at the end of 2018! In December alone, we received a little over two times our monthly expenses! This is great news, but please do not stop giving. We still desperately need to find additional support to meet increasing needs of ministry in the months and years ahead.

Thank you for your partnership! We could not be here without you!

~Roger, Abi, Aidan (15), Eastin (13), Coen (9),  
Kaizen (6)



A poster for the International Arts Festival 2019. The background is a dark, textured, abstract image. On the left, there is a yellow circle containing the Japanese character '新' (Shin), followed by the text 'ALL THINGS NEW' and 'しいはじまり' (Shii hajimari). On the right, the text reads: '国際芸術祭2019', 'International Arts Festival', '2019.6.15.SAT | 1- 5PM', 'ワテラスコモンホール | 御茶ノ水', '東京都千代田区神田淡路町2丁目101', and 'www.communityarts.jp/festival2019'.

Preparations are underway for our next [arts conference](#) on June 15, 2019!



Kei Yamagami is one of the first artists to become a Christian through our ministry at Grace City Church Tokyo, planted in 2010. Over the years, he has become a leader both inside and outside the church, telling the gospel in unique ways through fashion design. (Video created January 2019 by MTW missionary Michael Allsbrook, taking a gap year before college to work with us in Tokyo.)

## Donate through Mission to the World

Financial activity January 1, 2019 through February 28, 2019  
*Giving: \$33,375 | Spending: \$30,507 | Variance: \$2,868*

Support us through [INTERCHANGE!](#)

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