

The Bencke Family in Japan



January 2020- 80 番



Rehearsing for “Joy Hallelujah.” Last year, we started a Christmas Gospel choir, inviting staff and faculty to participate alongside the chapel choir members. This year, participation from non-choir members doubled, and included our college president!

In the United States, January is the month of new beginnings. Resolutions. Fresh starts. Most colleges finish the semester in December, and January or February marks the start of a new semester.

Resolution is a funny word. Re-solution. Re-solve. As though the word itself knows that this is not the first go-around with trying something. Or perhaps it is a confirmation that the natural cycle of things means finishing one thing – a year, for example – should naturally point us into the start of something new.

January at Kyushu Lutheran College, where Patrick and I both work, is the last month of the school year. Today is the last day of classes for the semester. Final exams start tomorrow. Presentations, paper tests, research seminars, performances, will all be completed over the next couple of weeks. It is a period of time for completing things. Finishing. For many people, finishing something often happens simultaneously with resolutions. “*I know I can do better,*” is the thinking. At least it is for me. The new school year won’t begin until April 1st, so between now and then, we will simultaneously be bringing closure to this school year while preparing for next year. This will be a year of a couple of major changes for our school, and for our family.

Our college chaplain, who has been at KLC since 2009, will retire in April, and move to Nagasaki, and we will have a new leader at the college in that capacity. In March, our daughter, Emilie, will graduate from Luther High School – the first American citizen to go through the entire 6 year school system at a Japanese Lutheran school. She will move to the United States and start college, thousands of miles away from us. (The decision is still pending as to where she will land....) Patrick will return to the classroom full time, after a semester that warranted three heart surgeries, and many trips to the hospital for follow-up care, and then recovery. The forthcoming changes are in a context of positive momentum, but they are a little scary, nonetheless.

While I was in the U.S. to visit family at the beginning of the year, I had a chance to visit with a friend from college. She was telling me about a

Some of the prayers of our hearts...

Thank you, Lord, for Your mercy, poured upon our family these past several months. As our family faced challenges that seemed insurmountable at times, You moved in our lives through the words, wisdom, and compassion of Your people.

Thank you, Lord, for your servants in Japan. We ask for your hand of compassion and peace to be upon each of them as placements and assignments change over the next months. May their transitions be smooth, and may they be received in their new homes with grace and warm hospitality.

Thank you, Lord, for our partners in mission - for those who serve alongside of us in international capacities, and for those whose mission service is closer to home or within their passport country. We ask you to sustain each of us, and remind us of the bigger picture of your mission for our world.

Our current mailing address:

BENCKE FAMILY
KUMAMOTO SHI
KITA-KU
SHIMIZU MANGOKU 5-17-17
861-8068
JAPAN

Phone from U.S.
011-81-96-344-2642

Email:

jacqueline.bencke@gmail.com

ELCA— Global Mission

If you are interested in learning more about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's global mission and/or opportunities to serve, please visit:
www.elca.org/globalmission



The Kyushu Lutheran College handbell team made several off-campus appearances this year. Normally our performances are in venues associated with the Lutheran Church. However, one performance was for a “kimono store” Christmas party. It was a fun venue, but a bit challenging to describe the setting of “Breath of Heaven” for folks who likely had absolutely no idea of who Jesus’ mother, Mary, was. Fortunately, my 11-year-old was there to help translate and transliterate!



This actual sculpture is called “Homeless Jesus.” I used this picture in an Advanced English conversation class to teach the vocabulary word “provocative.”

situation with her child, who was facing some significant challenges in her young adult life. We both agreed that it seems like when big changes are on the horizon, and then they don't turn out as we expect them to, that we have to experience a kind of grief. Perhaps we question God's goodness. We experience unbelief. We have to re-solve and resolve something that we thought was already solved. We have to find new solutions. Re-solutions. Sometimes we have to dig deep to find the energy and courage to get on that path.

I think it is often when we reach across to our neighbors, our partners, our friends and family, our brothers and sisters in Christ, when we are able to draw strength from the Lord. And once our cups have been filled, usually there is plenty more to share. Our Lord is so full of grace and strength, and we can be those vessels to pour out His goodness onto those around us. He is the source, and we are blessed to be the tributaries to carry His grace to the outer reaches of our lives.

On December 18th, we held the Christmas Worship service at Kyushu Lutheran College. We had almost 75 students who participated directly in the service this year. We held a rehearsal for this service a few days before, and after the rehearsal, I gave students their “pep talk.” In that little speech, I told them how very special each of them was to me, how each of them in their own way, helped me and our family walk those difficult weeks over the semester, either in their quiet nod of understanding when I told them about Patrick's condition, or in their hard work while I was absent, and how they became Christ-like for me. How their words were often warm and consoling, how in their music they nourished the ache of my soul with beauty, and how in their quiet presence, they were embodying “Immanuel,” “God with us,” about whom they were going to be singing and who they would be worshiping during the service. My Japanese was probably pretty lame, but they understood. Some cried. Some looked down. Some clapped. And a few days later, we all worshipped together. And it was beautiful. It was like an end and a beginning, all in one. It seemed to mark the end of a “period of pain,” and the beginning of a “period of healing.” May this year be one of beauty and healing for each of you.

Breath of Heaven (handbells)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=takChLckUG4>

Joy Hallelujah (choir)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRWj29Cjxug>

Fum, fum, fum (handbells)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rzpl_sM1Ds8

Angels we have heard on high (combined)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fd0flyVYqs>