

# The Bencke Family in Japan



January 2018- 67 番



**(Left)** Plastic bottle Christmas tree in the dense shopping arcade downtown. The whole tree is made up of plastic beverage bottles.



**(Right)** Japan student culture trivia: According to Emilie, the kids in the class with the shortest pencils are the “coolest.”

## When “work” is fun...

After my last newsletter in late November or early December, I received quite a bit of feedback about how many of you were able to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. Concerts that combined the choirs of Lutheran and Catholic churches, picnics, luncheons, children’s festivals, “Taste of Germany” (including beer!!!!), and other activities were held. I was not just impressed but a little envious of how much fun was had in the spirit of reflecting on that singular event that changed the trajectory of history.

For some reason, “fun” is not a word that is associated with missionaries. Instead, words like ‘blessed,’ ‘complex,’ ‘meaningful,’ ‘interesting,’ and other words that convey the depth of the global mission experience are used. I’m here to tell you that sometimes, being a missionary can be downright fun. And funny.

This past Christmas season, our music groups at the college were on the run. Annual events such as the illumination event and Christmas service were held, as usual. Additionally, our handbell team participated in a regional festival in Kagoshima (southern tip of our island, where the very first missionaries set foot in Japan!) in the fall, and in December played for an event called “Kumamoto Christmas.” As is usually the case for these events, I am asked to prepare my team for the performance but know very little else about the event, so there is an incredible amount of guesswork when deciding repertoire and programming.

The “Kumamoto Christmas” was not a small event, contrary to what I had subtly been led to believe. I thought it would be a small gathering of local Lutherans coming together to enjoy a little music and short lecture for an evening. Thinking that, I programed several selections that I thought would fit the bill. One selection I chose would offer the (supposedly Lutheran) attendees an opportunity to sing a few Christmas carols together. Instead, there were about 500 people in attendance, and it was a very public (and apparently a well-established) event. This is where I tip my hat to the singing traditions of Lutherans – even Japanese Lutherans. Many Lutherans were, in fact, present, and their robust voices came through the crowds and led all 500 people in singing carols that most American Lutherans could sing in their sleep, despite it possibly being the first time some folks had ever heard any of those hymns.

At the time, I was somewhere on the continuum of completely and totally freaked out, gut-busting laughter, and rolling my eyes in yet another example of “My life as the movie ‘Lost in Translation’”. Rolling with the punches is a skill that I learned as a teacher in the public schools in Wisconsin, and that skill serves me

Some of the prayers of our hearts...

♥  
We are forever grateful for those who provide support for our mission here – churches, family members, friends, and individuals who just have a special place in their heart for mission in Japan. We are honored to partner with you in our intention to serve God in this country. We welcome your prayers, your stories, and your prayer requests as we do this work together.

♥  
We continue to pray for Patrick’s family, as we feel the sting of the loss of Matthew, Patrick’s brother. The holidays, combined with a wedding anniversary, and many cold, gray days, made for a tough season. We are, of course, held close by the promise of God’s faithful and abiding love.

♥  
May the KLC’s vision for mission continue to grow and may KLC continue to be a beacon of love and light in Kumamoto.

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### 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](http://www.elca.org/globalmission)

### Missionary Sponsorship

For more information on ELCA missionary sponsorship, please contact Nathan Berkas at

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### Earthquake Support

**(Updated: January 2018)**

It has only been in the past few months that private homes have been able to retain the services of building contractors to repair or rebuild their homes. Now that the public buildings and structures have been dealt with, many more homes in our immediate neighborhood have recently been demolished and in most cases either the land will be sold or a home will be built on the existing lot.

If you are interested in providing financial assistance toward earthquake recovery efforts, please consider contributing cash donations. Donations are used for building and repairing Lutheran churches, Lutheran schools, the Lutheran orphanage, the Lutheran nursing home, and scholarships for students of Lutheran schools who lost their homes in the 7.3 magnitude earthquake on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Many students who lost their homes and who attend the junior high, senior high, and college rely heavily on these scholarships. Contact me for further details if you are interested in providing such specific support.

very well in the mission field. When the stress of not knowing what you are getting yourself into (probably a common experience in global missions!), best just to laugh at both the situation and oneself, and enjoy the ride.

As it turned out, people \*loved\* doing the carols, even those who were singing them for the first time. One well-dressed lady said she had heard those songs in the fancy department store but never knew they were associated with Christmas.

In other news related to family and fun, Hannah and Patrick enjoyed some time preparing for and participating in the regional kimono festival. This is a competition where people compete in different categories in putting on traditional Japanese kimono. Patrick and Hannah both competed in the "foreigners" category. The contestants are ranked based on the speed and precision of putting on the kimono, which is a very exact process, replete with specific steps and postures.

One of our neighbors wanted to refine her kimono teaching skills, so she spent two or three Saturdays a month working with Hannah and Patrick on the how-to's of kimono. They established a lovely rapport and to this day enjoy a delightful friendship. In the competition, Patrick placed third in his category. Hannah didn't place, but enjoyed showing everyone her hair after the competition was over. Priorities.



**Above:** Hannah's hair, and Patrick in traditional 'hakama.' **Below:** Jackie, conducting "Kumamoto Christmas," wondering how in the world 500 people are going to sing Christmas carols with handbell accompaniment when they had never even heard of the hymns. Praise God for Power Point and strong Japanese Lutheran singing!

