

SHORT-TERM MISSIONS: BLESSING OR BOTHER?

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“It’s not worth the money to send short-term missionaries!” some have said. “Send career missionaries or give it to indigenous church planters.” Others have said, “Send only those who are fully trained and committed for the long haul.”

We hear these concerns. However, as MTW church-planting missionaries working with many two-week and two-year short-term missionaries, we could not be more enthusiastic about their role in kingdom advancement. Sure, there is a cost—to the career team receiving them, to the ones coming, and to the sending church. But the great benefits to the ministry, to the receiving team, to the sending church, and to the short-term missionary himself far outweigh the cost.

A GREAT BLESSING TO THE MINISTRY

From the beginning of our Japan ministry, one- and two-year missionaries have been helping us throw wide the evangelistic net, making hundreds of contacts through our English school, hospitality, concerts, and college ministry. They have also been the workhorses on the field, carrying strategic support roles in finances and in teaching missionary children. Short-term teams have helped us in broad sowing of the gospel and making new contacts through everything from concerts to English, sports, fun, and friendship. As Mr. Seima Aoyagi, our team’s director for the Chiba college ministry, has said: “Since Japanese students love to meet and talk to Americans, the short-term missionaries and teams bring us many, many contacts that we Japanese staff could never gather ourselves. They also model a commitment to Christ and His ministry that impacts the new Christian students deeply.”

From darkness to light through short-term workers

Mr. Katsuya Shina came to learn English, but instead got the gospel from MTW two-year worker Dave. Katsuya had never been to church in his life, like most Japanese people. He says, “I endured the Bible time for several years at the end of each English class, studying it as literature.” But God’s Word did not return void in Katsuya’s life. He testifies now with great thanksgiving how God used Dave’s love, hospitality, and witness to bring him to Christ. Katsuya now leads worship at one church plant. And Dave went on to seminary. He is now the MTW team leader in Thailand.

Follow-up by email: Hudson Taylor could have never imagined!

“I am so thankful for Bart and Judy from Orlando,” says Mrs. Harumi Soneda, who came to Christ through our team. “They came on a two-week mission trip, and did a ‘home-stay’ at our house. I was the only Christian in my family then, but they showed such warmth and love to my husband, my two college daughters, and to me. They invited my daughters to visit them in America the next year. While there, God really opened the eyes of my older daughter, Yoriko, to the gospel through Bart and Judy and the love they experienced at Orangewood Church.” Harumi tells with great joy how Yoriko came back to Japan eager to study the Bible. For months, Yoriko emailed questions about the gospel to Bart and Judy in Florida, and they sent answers bathed in prayer. She joined a Japanese Bible study, began

coming to worship, and professed faith some months later. These are Yoriko's words to Bart and Judy:

God heard your prayers. Thank you so much. I am very, very thankful....My confirmation to live with Him is getting stronger each day. Isn't it great? He is really working in me. It is so thankful. I know now that He is with me throughout my life (and even more), no matter what happens and no matter what I do....I just wanted share this joy with you two. I cannot wait to see you in June!! YORIKO

By the way, Bart and Judy were reluctant ten-day missionaries, "dragged" to Japan the first time. Half way through the trip, God gave them a heart for missions as they saw the false worship in the Buddhist temples, and so many towns with no church of any kind. They now bring a team every year to help share the gospel. They are passionate mobilizers of people, money, and prayer, all because of that first ten-day trip.

Out of the mouths of babes—or sixteen-year-olds!

Who would have ever imagined, in this culture where age is so highly venerated, that the life of a sixteen-year-old short-term worker would model the believer's use of the means of grace for a late-forties Japanese believer? Toshiko, the first believer in our team's history, was three years into her new faith when 16-year-old Laura came to do a two-week home-stay toward the end of her year in Japan. Toshiko had already observed from a distance the maturity and wisdom of this covenant child. She saw "up close and personal" Laura's daily walk with Christ that including prayer, undivided time in God's Word, and uncompromising commitment to make worship joyfully central to her week. Toshiko began to experience the joy and value of appropriating those same means of grace in her own life, and she continues to walk with Christ, mentoring others in the disciplines of grace.

SHORT-TERM MISSIONS RAISES UP CAREER MISSIONARIES

Eighteen-year-old Judith was our first short-term missionary 13 years ago. Right out of high school, Judith helped home-school our children while Carol met with Japanese ladies. As she also did outreach with Japanese high school girls and helped Dan with team administrative chores, Judith developed a heart for Japan. During college she managed the team's prayer mobilization ministry. She returned to Japan after college for two years, stayed for three, and now is back as a proven, able career missionary with a passion to reach Japan—and with great language ability since she started young!

Two-week to two-year to long-term (and a sprinkling of romance)

- **Daniel** came to Japan for a year, came back for two more to teach missionary children, and later to help run our team's English outreach ministry to 300 non-Christian Japanese. He married Mako, one of our first Japanese church members, and recently graduated from seminary.
- **Robert** came for a year at **Daniel's** invitation to teach our team's missionary children, stayed for two years, and now is long-term.

- **Lisa** came for ten days with **Bart and Judy** on their second trip, came back two months later for two years to teach MKs, and is now married to **Robert**. They have a child and now serve together as long-term missionaries.
- **Roberta** came on a short-term trip for ten days, came back for two years, but stayed for three. She ran the team finances as the church-planting budget grew by more than 25% every year, and did evangelism through our English outreach ministry. She is now in her second term as a career missionary.
- **Sally** came to Japan for a summer, returned for a year with another mission, and now is a second-term MTW team member.
- **Craig and Ree** came for a summer, then back for two years, but stayed for three. They are now serving long-term with Rev. Hirohashi in the Makuhari church plant, and Craig serves as our assistant team leader.
- **Jon** came for a summer, returned for two years of college ministry, and now is raising support for long-term in order to start our MTW college ministry on another campus.
- **Anne Marie** joined our team for a year at age 66 and stayed four years.

There just isn't space to tell all the stories and their impact for the gospel in Japan. Investment in short-term workers is an investment in long-term kingdom work because many return to the field and the others return to their home churches aflame with a mission vision.

STRENGTHENS THE MISSIONS VISION OF THE SENDING CHURCH

America may be spiritually needy, but it is one of the most gospel-rich countries on earth. So many who serve short-term with our team are gripped by the lostness of Japan and become passionate mobilizers of prayer, finances, and new workers for the harvest.

Short-term trips mobilize prayer

One short-term team came to help with pre-church plant outreach activities in a new Tokyo suburb with no church of any kind. The team was a great help, and we made many new friends and contacts through the special music, English, and outreach events. The team was especially impacted through their participation in our team's monthly four-hour concert of prayer in which we plead with God to pour out His Spirit, "...that the desert (of Japan) would become a fertile field, and the fertile field a forest" (Isa. 32:15). We told them about other teams that had gone back to the USA with a new vision to pray, and challenged them to do the same. God worked in their hearts. For several years they have gathered monthly to pray for an hour for our team and for Japan. We have seen this over and over again as God uses the two-week or two-year experience to mobilize fervent, informed prayer for kingdom advancement.

GREAT SPIRITUAL BENEFIT TO THE MISSIONARIES' FAMILIES

We are eternally grateful for the friendship and blessing that so many short-term missionaries have brought to us. We are especially thankful for the impact on our children.

Raising children on the mission field has been a great blessing. Much of that blessing has come from God via these precious short-term partners in ministry. Often in their late teens or in their twenties, the short-term workers have loved our children and been godly models who were also “cooler” than dad and mom. They talked to them of Christ, ministry, and purity. They have given much to our children.

THE COST OF SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

Worker bees that take more work?

The cost of short-term missions is much greater than dollars and cents. The sending church, the short-term missionary, and the receiving team each expend time, energy, and effort, and have expectations and commitments to one another. Our needs encompass the physical, emotional/mental, and spiritual “whole people” we are. It goes without saying that smooth transition into another culture requires tremendous logistical help, as well as training, ongoing spiritual stimulation, and consistent emotional and mental encouragement. This adjustment period and the more important continuing nurture takes varying amounts of patience, energy, and time on the expatriate members’ part. Our experience, overall, has been well worth any investment that's been made! The amount of kingdom fruit may only be known in eternity. But we would be dishonest if we stopped here. There have been cases where the cost to our team has outweighed the benefit of the worker, sadly necessitating their being sent back earlier than expected. There have been times when their needs have far exceeded our capacities, or where we, as a team, have failed to give the necessary time and energy to these brothers and sisters because of ever-increasing ministry demands. Those times have stretched us to develop greater dependence on Christ, as well as to model for the new Japanese believers the power of the gospel in broken lives.

THE ONGOING BENEFIT OF SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS

It has been said that World War II was the greatest short-term missions trip in Church history. Thousands of soldiers, sailors, and Marines returned to the places they had gone on their “short-term trip,” armed the second time as long-term workers with the sword of the Spirit. They led a great wave of new mission efforts to the end that God be worshiped in every tongue and tribe.

The growing wave today of short-term missions zeal will certainly have even more impact on the world as tens of thousands of short-termers fan out in missions service around the world. They help move the work forward, doing frontline evangelism and discipleship, serving in support roles behind the scenes, and teaching missionary children. God often does much *through* them, but even more *to* them through the struggles and blessings they experience. God often uses the experience to call many of them to return long-term in the places where they served short-term. And God sends most back to their homes deeply affected by what they experienced, much more ready in heart and head than most other Christians to mobilize the Church to pray, give, and partner with the work on the field.

Rev. Dan Iverson and his wife Carol are MTW long-term missionaries to Japan, having served more than twelve years. Dan serves as team leader for the Chiba/Tokyo church-planting team.