

# TOKYO TIMES

ALEX, KATHRYN, ISABELLA &amp; GABRIELLA HUMPHREYS

MISSIONARIES TO JAPAN

## Death in Japan

In our previous newsletter I mentioned the tragic happening that befell one of our church members. I referred to her as “J” and I will do so here as well. Her younger sister, “S”, who was only 28 years old ended her life on Thursday the 6th of June.

Since that time, as a support to our church member “J”, I performed the funeral address as well as an anniversary service on Sunday July the 28th. The funeral especially was an eye opening spiritual and cultural experience for me since this was my first time ever in Japan to take part in some of the most common funerary rituals. It was to say the least, “A baptism by fire” (pun intended, the Japanese cremate).

The service was a little under an hour long and since I was a pastor had a more “Christian” atmosphere. The deceased woman’s favorite songs were playing in the back ground as everyone arrived and settled down. Then I opened with a short message from the Word which took about ten minutes. This was followed by a brief eulogy by “J”.

After the eulogy was the “presentation of flowers”. This is

This is an example of a standard multi chamber crematorium. The family and friends watch as the casket is slid into a incinerator.



After incineration, everyone takes turns gathering up the bones with chopsticks and placing them in the urn in preparation for burial.

common at Japanese Christian funerals. In a traditional Japanese Buddhist funeral, attendees go one by one and sprinkle incense in front of the casket. In a Christian funeral white carnations are laid, one by one, in front of the casket. At the end of the service these flowers are then placed into the casket with the corpse by the attendees. Did I mention that they usually don’t embalm corpses in Japan!

At the end of the service, before heading off to the crematorium, everyone directly placed all of the flowers and bouquets into the casket, completely covering the body and leaving only the head visible. The family cried, kissed and caressed the corpses face knowing that it was the last that they would see of her. Then, it was off to the crematorium!

This too was a new and eye opening experience. We all watched as the casket was inserted into the crematorium, then we retired to a side room for refreshments while the body was incinerated. Just as I was

thinking, "Surely we are finished," they called us back down to the crematorium. The attendant had us gather around a large table and then placed a tray of "S's" bones and an urn on the table. We each took turns using chopsticks to pick up the bones and fill the urn with them!

The Japanese, and Asians in general, seem to have a very different perspective than the average Westerner when it comes to death and the dead. This holds true for both the Christian and the non-Christian. There is clearly more of an emphasis on physical connection with the dead (eg. looking, touching, caressing). There is also a much more communal aspect in the one that everyone present participates in the various rituals. This demanded me to overcome a number of inhibitions that I felt but was a great experience overall.

The fact that this woman took her own life was extremely tragic and made everything more complicated but it is an apt portrait of the situation in Japan. The Japanese are hopeless. Even with jobs and families and houses, they feel as though they have nothing to live for. So it was my main purpose at "S's" funeral to express that there IS hope, and that hope is found in Christ alone. A number of the attendees at the funeral had and possibly would never set foot in a church but on that day they heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. The truth that surrendering our lives to Jesus Christ brings true and lasting hope!

I will probably not see any of these people again on this side of heaven and so I ask that you would pray that the seed that was planted in their hearts would bear fruit.

### **ATTENTION: Itineration 2014!!**

It is hard to believe that we have been in Japan for over 3 years on our second term. We arrived in early July of 2010 and hit the ground running. Our hope is to return to the States in June of 2014 for our third itineration.

So, we have two requests for all our supporters:

- 1) PRAY! We need a safe return to America and safe travels as we itenerate.

Also, please pray that we have a full schedule.

- 2) Speaking of schedules, we are asking all of our supporting churches as well as churches that would like to know more about our ministry to please contact us sooner than later so that we can get you on the calendar! Please use the email listed below.

*Thank You!!*

### **Current Prayer Needs**

**Appropriate spouses for the many single Christian women**

**Salvation for the lost youth**

**Refreshing for the senior pastors of our Japanese church**

**Tokyo City Church's finances**

**Wisdom for the leaders of the Bible school**

*Three new members to Tokyo City Church. Please pray that God strengthens and encourages them.*



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*Family fun day during Tokyo area pastor's retreat. We're not afraid of heights!*



*Don't ask me how she got up in there.*



 **ASSEMBLIES of GOD  
WORLD MISSIONS**