

Japan

BELIEVERS FROM CALIFORNIA AND JAPAN DANCE, SKATE TO SHARE GOSPEL IN TOKYO

“I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.”
1 Corinthians 9:22b–23

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In the heart of Tokyo, Pastor Chizuo Sakurai walked home past the train station. His heart was heavy for the teenagers he saw there late every night. Tonight a group clothed in gangster attire was dancing hip-hop style in the station. He knew they would never listen to him—an old man in their eyes—about the love of Jesus Christ. Less than one percent of his countrymen were born-again Christians. Japanese youth, leaving behind Japanese traditions along with Buddhism and Shintoism, seemed to have no interest in religion of any kind.

How could he reach them? He prayed again that God would make a way. The next January, he met a youth pastor from Calvary Chapel Montebello, CA, whose youth group had honed their hip-hop dance skills as a means to reach Japanese teens for Christ.

Divine Appointment

“I felt God was putting Tokyo on my heart,” recalled Joseph Totsis, youth pastor of CC Montebello, CA. “It didn’t make sense. We knew people in Okinawa, but not in Tokyo.” Through his pastor and another missionary, Joseph met Chizuo at the Calvary Chapel Missions Conference in Murrieta, CA, in January of 2006. Chizuo knew little about Montebello’s earlier trips to Okinawa, where they had learned of Japanese teenagers’ enthusiasm for hip-hop music.

Sitting down with Chizuo, Joseph asked, “What’s your heart for Tokyo?”

Chizuo told Joseph about the train station and the hip-hop dancers: “I wish I could reach them; I just don’t know how.”



Working together to share the Gospel message in Tokyo, Rebecca Mendoza, right, of CC Montebello, CA, passes out flyers with Naomi Honma from CC Kokubunji, Japan.



For VBS, children’s pictures adorned take-home crafts that said ‘Jesus loves me.’



Pastor Chizuo Sakurai, center, of CC Kokubunji and Joseph Totsis of Montebello share the Gospel.



CC Montebello team members practice hip-hop moves with local children at a VBS in Kokowozawa, Japan.



Hisako Kimura, left, of Kokubunji performs a skit with Steve Johnson of Montebello.

Joseph was stunned. “Do you realize we have a hip-hop team, and we have been preparing for the last two years to reach Japan?” The two men rejoiced in God’s amazing providence. More than a year later, CC Montebello and Calvary Chapel Kokubunji joined forces to reach out in the world’s largest mega-city, Tokyo.

A Little Light in Tokyo

Calvary Chapel Kokubunji lies in the heart of the Tokyo Prefecture—which contains nearly 12 million people while the Greater Tokyo Area holds 30 to 35 million people. Nearly 50 born-again Japanese believers call CC Kokubunji their church home. The August outreach with CC Montebello helped build relationships with nearly 80 nonbelievers in the Tokyo area.

Believers at CC Kokubunji, a.k.a the Jesus Community, are following up with those who heard the Gospel. “Groups have been praying for these 80 individuals that God brought our way,” said missionary George Austin, sent from CC La Habra, CA, three years ago to oversee CC School of Ministry in Tokyo. Nearly 40 home visits are planned, where Japanese believers will encourage seeds of faith that were planted.

One seed has already blossomed. Drawn by the hip-hop classes during the outreach, a young lady named Ikue began coming to the youth Bible studies at CC Kokubunji and accepted Christ after a few months. Another young woman named Kanako visits regularly to teach the young people dance steps and is learning more about Jesus through one-on-one relationships.

Another amazing testimony concerned a young college student named Rioko. While an exchange student to the U.S., Rioko was invited to CC Montebello. Befriended by believers, Rioko began hanging out with the Montebello young people and attending Bible studies. “It was hard for her to understand the Gospel,” Joseph recalled. When the CC Montebello team came to Tokyo, they contacted Rioko who was back home in nearby Kyoto. She joined them during the August outreach and, for the first time, heard the Gospel in her own language through Pastor Chizuo. She eagerly asked Japanese believers to tell her more. Praying with believers in her own language, she made a firm commitment to Christ.



Pastor Chizuo, center, and Joseph, right, share Christ with a young man who was drawn to the church’s skate shop.

‘Patient Evangelism’

Building relationships is key in a country where most adults are still steeped in Buddhist and Shinto religions and young people are quickly embracing Western trends in fashion, entertainment, and amorality. “Patient evangelism is what we do here,” Chizuo said. “To impact our community, we need to build relationships.”

He explained that many Japanese cling to their religious traditions but may agree with Christianity out of politeness. “As we build relationships, I pray that the Lord will inspire us with His Spirit,” Chizuo said. He was encouraged to see relationships with nonbelievers formed during the outreach.

Forming relationships with the lost was one desire of CC Montebello’s missions team of mostly teenagers—including a girls’ hip-hop dance team and a boys’ skateboarding team. When the American team arrived, Chizuo said, “We worshiped together, had fellowship, and broke bread together; then we were ready to reach out to the people.”

CC Kokubunji’s hip-hop contest drew several unbelievers who now attend the church. Using hand gestures and smiles to communicate, American teens danced and skated with local youth, sharing the Word of God. The girls’ hip-hop dance team performed near the train station. In another part of town, the boy’s skateboarding team performed tricks for passersby and teens.

Encouraging the Church

Japanese men and women who give their lives to Christ are often kicked out of the family home and disowned. Since CC Montebello has made frequent trips to Japan for the past several years, believers at CC Kokubunji savored the fellowship with like-minded believers.

“At first, our vision was to go there and fellowship with the non-Christians and bring them to church,” explained Bianca Juarez of CC Montebello. “We didn’t realize until we got there that these believers are so hungry for fellowship. Because so few people believe in Jesus Christ, there’s no fellowship. They have no friends.” The American and Japanese believers prayed together every morning before going out together to share Christ in the cities and neighborhoods.

Chizuo, who came to Christ in 1986 and studied at CC Costa Mesa, welcomes fellowship with other believers for himself and his congregation. “Joseph came to fellowship before he brought his team. We had sushi and hung out and talked about the Lord. He really has a heart to build relationships. I’m so thankful for that.”

Praying for Revival

Pastor Pancho Juarez of CC Montebello has been to Japan several times. “We have gone regularly to Japan since the Kobe earthquake in 1995,” he explained. “I find



Amy Sandoval, left, of Montebello works with children at VBS.

it a joy that our church has had the opportunity to travel across the world to share the Gospel. ... We don’t know what the future holds, but we know that our past and present are intertwined with those from the Land of the Rising Son!”

He added, “CCM will continue to send teams to Japan as long as the Lord continues to provide the resources and—most importantly—the vision. ... Our youth leaders have been praying for the country, the people, the continuing work, and revival in Japan.”

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Japan’s capital, Tokyo, is the largest city in the world.