

*'Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. [Haggai 2:4]*

We greet you from Tokyo, Japan, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. First of all, we want to thank you from our hearts for praying for and contributing to this new venture in the heart of Tokyo! Grace City Church Tokyo was presented to a big audience on Christmas Eve 2008 with members of the launch team and a lot of their non-Christian friends attending. Fifty people enjoyed the party at an awesome setting with a night view over Tokyo Bay and a live mini concert. We praise the Lord for this wonderful kick off.

**vision >** Grace City Church Tokyo's vision is to saturate the city center of Tokyo with the Gospel of Jesus Christ through a church-planting movement, showing God's glory and building His Kingdom by the renewal of people's lives and the transformation of the city socially, culturally and spiritually. When thinking about planting a gospel centered church in this area, looking at a task so vast, we can be paralyzed by the thought how a few insignificant people can make a difference. But God has sent us out in the grace of his Son Jesus Christ and equips us with his strength: 'Be strong and work. For I am with you' (Haggai 2:4).

**global effort >** The new church will be a Japanese speaking church reaching out to Japanese young professionals in central Tokyo between 20 and 40 years old, but it came about by the support of many people of different cultures and age groups around the world. Churches in the United States are very much involved; in particular Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York. Support is also being raised in the Netherlands for this project. The Reformed Mission League (GZB) of the major Protestant denomination is investing by sending a missionary couple and donations for evangelism efforts.

**the USA travels >** Thanks to a big gift from the members of the Fukudas' former church in Yokohama, the rest of the family was able to join Reverend Fukuda in New York after the intensive church planting course. They spent three weeks traveling around in Maryland, Washington DC, Virginia, Georgia and Texas, sharing their vision and passion for starting a Gospel centered church planting movement in central Tokyo. Mission To the World's (MTW) Japan field leader, Dan Iverson, was on home assignment at this time and he



Christmas Eve 08 Party was the first event Grace City Church Tokyo organized as part of our strategy to build relationships with our non-Christian fellow urbanites. We believe such events serve to build the launch team and strengthen our city-focused 'DNA'.



Early December the launch team had its first prayer walk in the area around Tokyo station.

introduced the Fukudas and their vision to many churches and friends. We are very grateful for the support of many Christians to church planting in Tokyo. We hope and trust that God will continue to use these relationships to raise up much prayer and financial support to build up Grace City Church.

**board >** As Grace City Church was just 'born' in the late Fall/early Winter of 2008, a session or board of elders and deacons is not yet in place. In order to provide a temporarily legal framework, biblical accountability structure and advisory panel, a board (in Japanese 'rijikai') has been created. This board is made up of two representatives of the Redeemer Church Planting Center, Jay Kyle and Gary Watanabe, two representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Japan, Rev. Hata and Rev. Watanabe, two representatives of the Japan

**Tokyo facts >** Only 0.55% of the Japanese are Christian, and only 0.22% attends church regularly. Even though only 360,000 people have their residence in Central Tokyo's three major wards' (Chiyoda, Chuo and Minato), the day population is 2,460,000 people. Only 41 churches can be found there, of which 5 can be considered evangelical. Behind the shiny facades of prosperity in Tokyo hides a dark and empty existence. Where the neon signs of big companies like Toyota and Sony are screaming 'more, more', the hearts of the masses of Japanese young urban professionals echo 'empty, empty'. Sooner or later they find that neither stuff nor religious trends can fill this emptiness. Christ can fill their hearts and renew their lives. Not temporarily, but forever. That's why Gospel centered churches are needed to tell the Gospel.

**New York >** Rev. Makoto Fukuda, the church planter with a strong sense of calling from God, which was confirmed by being selected by the Redeemer Church Planting Center, started preparing for this monumental change in ministry while still pastoring his church in another major city just south of Tokyo, Yokohama. After he turned this healthy church over to another pastor in August 2008, he attended a church planting training course in New York for 6 weeks. Rev. Fukuda said of this experience: "Even though Grace City Church Tokyo is the first of its kind in Japan, the Church Planting Center supports many church planting efforts around the world. Nineteen church planters participated in this intensive course, coming from South-Korea, Malaysia, China, Japan, the Philippines, India, Germany, England, Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, Greece, South-Africa and Mexico. With so many cultures represented, not only the studies became more interesting and lively, the fellowship with one another was exciting, too! Fundamentals of church planting in an urban setting, theology of the city, Gospel centeredness, contextualization, and spiritual formation were just some of the things studied. The information was not only presented through lectures, but learning was also done through discussions, role plays, interviews, presentations, preaching exercises, visiting church plants and experiencing various ministries of Redeemer. I was challenged in many ways and am very grateful for this learning opportunity."

A historical happening for the Fukuda family; Motoki, Satoshi, and Yukiho (eldest son Yuya had to stay in Tokyo because of work) joined their parents in traveling the USA to share the vision for the new church planting movement. Manhattan (background) was "kakko-ii", cool!

Presbyterian Mission (MTW), Dan Iverson and Bruce Young and Rev. Fukuda himself.

**staff >** At this point Rev. Makoto Fukuda and his wife Michiru are assisted by a Dutch missionary couple, Geert and Eline de Boo. Before being called and trained for overseas ministry, the de Boos worked as young professionals in urban settings themselves, so they can identify with the target group. Together they form the full time staff of Grace City Church Tokyo and provide leadership on a daily basis. In the summer of 2009 MTW-missionaries Roger and Abi Lowther will be added to this team. They will assist the church in reaching

Leadership training will start soon as well. So let's pray for Kaori, Makiko, Peter, Satoko, Shio, Steve, Takeshi, Tomoko O., Tomoko S. and Ju Young.

**small groups >** At this point two small groups have been formed, meeting on Friday night after work and on Sunday late afternoon. Dr. Tim Keller's course 'Gospel Christianity' is used as a study text. These community groups are conducted in Japanese and open to anyone.

**networking >** As Sunday worship services have not started yet, Rev. Fukuda spends many Sundays preaching and sharing about his vision for a Gospel centered church planting movement in central Tokyo in different churches. We are thankful that more and more Japanese churches are moved by his efforts and are supporting this project through prayer and finances. At the same time, the staff is exploring the 'church environment' by visiting and networking with other churches and Christian organizations in the wider area.

**events >** Grace City Church wants to be an open, easily accessible community from the beginning. Insider/outsider distinction must be avoided, which is a big challenge in the group oriented Japanese society. High quality, but low key events seem to set a perfect stage for building relationships with the young professionals working and living in central Tokyo. As mentioned above, the Christmas Eve party brought a lot of new contacts, some of them returning at recent *nabe*-parties (*nabe* is sharing food boiled in a ceramic pot, like a fondue). Other contacts are being followed up one-to-one. The next big event coming up is a Valentine Party at sunset in the sky lounge at the 54<sup>th</sup> floor of a high rise building in central Tokyo. The meetings breathe a relaxed atmosphere, with complimentary food and live, jazzy music by professional musicians and a simple, but Gospel centered Bible talk. In that context we can get to know the people attending and we hope they will be able to taste some of the warmth of the community in Christ.

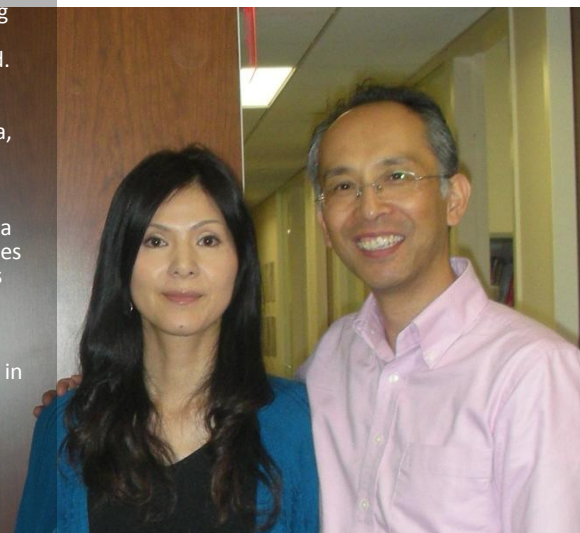
**praise and prayer >** Please, join us in prayer as we praise God for:

- **grace, in more ways than we could imagine!**
- **a wonderful kick off of the church and high attendance at the Christmas Party**
- **providing the human resources needed to launch the church: church planter, board, staff and launch team**
- **prayer and financial support from around the world**

We pray if God would grant the church:

- **grace, to work through our weakness**
- **a solid base of sound theology, unity and organizational structure**
- **openness towards people needing God and community in Tokyo**
- **growing leadership able to follow up new contacts and transfer the vision and DNA of the church**
- **new contacts through the Valentine party and other events**
- **our role as a catalyst in renewing people's lives and the culture**

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Tokyo culture through the arts of the city. Their skills as professional musicians will be a great asset of the new church.

**launch team >** Following the Redeemer Church Planting Center advice, Rev. Fukuda interviewed Christians living in Tokyo who showed an interest in starting the new church with him. He formed a so-called 'launch team', a group of ten evangelistic 'bringers' who have been selected and are trained by the church planter to assist in the first stage of the founding of the church. Through vision meetings, prayer walks in the target area and pre-evangelistic events Rev. Fukuda is now putting a lot of effort in team building and discovering gifts, transferring the vision and DNA of the church and building relationships with the non-Christians friends that the launch team introduces.

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