

# Expected & Unexpected

## Expecting Children?

Listening to Japanese text loaded with statistics exercises your ears. Yesterday I heard Japan's decreasing birth rate continues for the 28th year. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, as of 1 April 2009, the number of children under 15 years of age hit a record-low of 17.14 million (13.4% of population). Compared with thirty-one countries whose population exceeds 30 million, Japan has the lowest percentage of children.

It is hard to imagine the 'record-low', since this figure more than quadruples Singapore's population. But the truth is, fewer and fewer children are born in Japan. A trend expected to continue.

## What's School like for Children?

Recently, for our orientation on Japanese children's education, we visited a nearby Elementary School, talking to children. I joined a Primary 6 class and observed the form teacher teach Social Studies, Mathematics and Japanese Language. The children were responsive, well-mannered and "zi-dong" (initiates readily). How quickly and quietly they lined up or grouped without the teacher reminding them.

For lunch, I joined the Primary Two children in their classrooms. Each day, lunch is served to each classroom and form teachers eat with the children. The children are expected to arrange tables, serve each other and wash up. They do everything themselves; well-trained!

The 'Primary Two's were an excited bunch. Not as shy, they taught this foreigner what to do before lunch, how to wash her hands, what to eat first, etc. They asked so many questions, "Are you older than my mum/sister/cousin? Are you eighteen? Do you know when is my birthday? What is the number on your

milk carton?" (a game they play daily). I spent time replying their questions than asking my own, but it was nice to be with them. An unexpected arrangement by my Language Centre, but a day to give a sense how elementary school children spend their time in school.

## An Unexpected Friend from Tokyo

The visit to Tokyo and Sendai in April and May was fruitful. Thank you for praying for me. I visited a few churches, a Home for the Aged and a University. While visiting churches, the need for strong Christian discipleship and help for the depressed was felt. My time with my nephews was specially memorable. How much they have grown! What a joy to play and pray with them, hear their thoughts on "the words on the stone" (The Ten Commandments), as we read the Bible.

Visiting different churches on three Sundays, I was doubtful that I could relate with anyone deep. One day in Tokyo, I asked God to direct me to whom He wants me to relate with. Unexpectedly, after a morning service, a Japanese senior lady asked me many questions and shared her problems. We prayed, then parted. The next day, she asked to meet again. So we did. After my return to Sapporo, she called me daily. God has indeed led me to one I can talk with, not superficially but deeply. Soon though, I had to convey sensitively that I cannot talk with her at length daily. I had to learn how to say it.

It is humbling to receive my friend's calls as I do not understand her every word and express my thoughts with difficulty. Yet, she says she likes to talk with me. Through our talks, I realized I need to listen as I would in English: to clarify, paraphrase or summarize. It is also humbling to hear a Christian single share her struggles in Japan.



## Expecting a Roommate

An unexpected request came 3 weeks ago. A new OMF missionary, a Canadian, who will arrive in August, requested to share a flat with another. Asked to pray about her request, God led me to say 'Yes' to sharing, after reading Acts 2. So this room I am now in will soon be her bedroom and other changes. Different as we are, we will soon live under the same roof God has provided.