

LBIM (Lutheran Brethren International Mission Japan)

Lutheran Brethren International Mission Japan (LBIM) was God's idea from the beginning. The Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLBA), is a small evangelical (in the traditional sense of the word) denomination headquartered in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, US. The denomination's overseas missions program began in 1902, when the first missionaries were sent to China. Soon afterwards missionaries began work in Cameroon and Chad and later in Taiwan.

There were no plans in place for sending anyone to Japan, but after WW2, God placed a strong burden on the heart of a Midwestern farmer in the US. He shared his vision with the treasurer of the denomination, stating that he felt God had called him to fully support a missionary in Japan. At the time, however, no one in the CLBA had any thoughts of going.

Months later God spoke to another man, who went to the board sharing what he felt was a call to go to Japan. The leaders told him about the farmer's visit, and, in God's perfect timing, LBIM began its work in Japan in 1949. This first church plant was located in Sakata, in Yamagata Prefecture.

After the war, missionaries from a variety of denominations flooded Japan, and LBIM decided to concentrate its work in the northern region of Tohoku—not exactly a popular spot at the time. Those early church-planting efforts took place in Yamagata and Akita, on the west side of the mountains along the Sea of Japan—a rural area where Christian workers were few and far between.

Although these missionaries faced many hardships, they saw a steady rate of church growth during the post-war recovery years. The denomination remains small, however, currently with 27 churches. The number of missionaries peaked in the 1950s and 60s, and at present we (Dean and Linda Bengtson) are the only full-time missionaries in Japan with LBIM.

We spent our first number of years in Akita city, and moved to Sendai for our children's education several years before 3.11. As God arranged things ac-



ording to his plan, we were in the early preparation stages of a new ministry when the disasters struck, and were able to begin relief work almost immediately. Through a series of circumstances and connections, we began volunteering in Ishinomaki city and later moved there.

God has continued to supply in amazing ways over the last five years. Our volunteer work has progressed through many stages including: delivering emergency supplies, mudding out houses, and working with Samaritan's Purse to rebuild them. We've also held

outdoor barbecues and Christian concerts for people living in the area. God has sent volunteers from all over Japan and the world to help with physical relief work and heart care.

As the area has gradually recovered, we have moved primarily into music evangelism and small group gatherings, with an emphasis on friendship evangelism. Amazingly, we still have a steady stream of volunteers from a variety of places. Many Christian artists still donate their time and talent, and our sister

church in Taiwan also sends a large team every year. With their assistance, we recently held our third annual English day camp for the neighborhood children. As more young families move into the area, we hope to find more ways to share Jesus with the kids and their parents.

Last year God provided a ministry house for us to rent, and the donations to furnish it. We hold many of the events there and have room for the musicians and volunteers to stay. Our current ministry is called Ishinomaki House of Hope (石巻希望の家), which we see as a most fitting name for the work God has led us into and continues to provide for. **JH**

