



January 2024



In true Japanese fashion, we're sending out a New Year letter. The end of 2023 was so eventful that we missed all opportunities to tell you of our journey, and greet you with a Merry Christmas. This is a recap of our lives from the second half of 2023, and how we are moving forward into 2024.

In our most recent newsletter, we mentioned several big events that were to take place in September and October in Kansas. There are two separate-but-connected groups that we are involved with that had annual meetings, Companions of Christ, which is a private order mostly of lay ministers, and our home church, which had its international convocation this year. Cathy and I are so glad to participate with each of these groups, for we find ourselves knit together well with them in love and service. As ordained deacons, we've been able to use our personal gifts to provide behind the scenes support for the gatherings, as well as benefiting tremendously from the encouragement and teaching that both groups give. During the convocation, a thing happened. I (Kurt) have been further ordained as a Presbyter within our Communion. Once a deacon always a deacon is a mindset that most traditions hold, so that will always be our first calling. The deacons' role is to fill spaces that exist, between the pastor and congregation, or between the church and the community. They are to have both arms outstretched, grasping and pulling inward, so that those things which divide are diminished. As Presbyter, there is the added responsibility to carry Word to other believers, that they, too, might carry the Word to the world. This ordination gives me opportunities yet unseen, though what is tangible is that I am now available for a broader service.



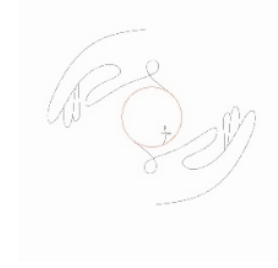
Later in October, two bits of news came our way which defined both what the rest of our year would look like and what our movements would be for this present year. The Japanese visa we had applied for was denied. Unbeknownst to us, it was the hardest category to gain approval, that as a foreign food specialist in Japan. It seems to be identified as such in a British tea house, I needed to be British! Had we known this a year ago, our movements would definitely have been different. Upon a lawyer's guidance, we won't apply for another visa until later this year. However, having graduated college in June (finally) and been ordained in October, I am now more than qualified for the visa we wanted in the first place, as a religious worker. That has been our intent all along, so this denial merely served to direct us back to that. In the meantime, we will be spending 180 days total in Japan this year in three separate blocks of time. This will be the most beneficial to the tea house. Toward the end of the year we will submit the new application.

We have had such loving support from both Gary and Shary Carr, and Lynn and Lanny Hood over the past three years. That said, we are now transitioning to be more permanently settled in Kansas by our home church. It was prompted by the second bit of news I mentioned, life changes happening with those lovely couples. No longer is it feasible for us to store our personal belongings in California, so they have now been relocated to Kansas. While those possessions are modest, it is still hard to fathom how we accumulated so much stuff. There will come a day when we are able to use those things, each item comes with a bit of a promise. For now, we remain nomads.

We have had so many reasons to celebrate this fall. Birthdays in August and November, our anniversary late December, right along with all the holiday offerings of the season. One of our days of celebration took the form of a scavenger hunt date day, during which we were challenged to celebrate and evaluate our love for each other. In the summer of 2020, five months into Covid, we re-evaluated what we felt our



calling to be, and found it easy to summarize it into the process of loving God by loving other people. From that was born our ministry model, H.E.L.P.S., and acronym for Hands Extended in Loving Personal Service. During our



date day, we identified a necessary foundation to that, gratitude. Though we know little detail of how, where, and when we will serve, it is in a spirit of thankfulness that we move forward into each new day. Here we are, beginning a new year, standing with open hands and ready feet.

Please pray for our finances, our safety in movement, and always that we might keep our eyes on God's horizon. Pray for Japan, the earthquake victims, as well as that the Light of Christ might shine brightly there. Thank you to all those who have allowed us to serve and who have financially supported us. Knowing that we can participate with others in being the light to the world is always encouraging. Thank you to all who do. If you have interest in supporting our ongoing work, please reach out to us and we'll let you know how that can best be done. The QR Code below will take you to our website, where you can find our daily devotions, most recent newsletters, and further happenings about our ministry. Additionally, there is information about giving available there.

We can be reached at:

Phone (in US) and Text (anywhere): (805)205-0251
Email: purucker51@gmail.com - or - helpsjapan@gmail.com
Web: www.helpsjapan.com

mailing address in US:
c/o Shary & Gary Carr
2560 Peninsula Rd.
Oxnard, CA 93035

Japan mailing address:
1-3-1 Futamatao
Ome-Shi, Tokyo 198-0171 Japan

