Tokyo's Challenge is Our Challenge

Dear Friends and Partners,

A few weeks ago I enjoyed a stroll beneath clouds of pink cherry blossoms at Ueno Park in Tokyo. I was sharing the late afternoon walk with a childhood friend I'd known while in church school on Cape Cod, Massachusetts and I hadn't seen my friend since college, 20 years ago. The walkways were crowded with young couples enjoying nature's romantic inspiration. Families were snapping poses in front of the trees. An elderly Buddhist nun walked slowly with a friend or perhaps a sister. Street performers and food hawkers added to the festive spirit and I was quickly drawn to purchase a snack. I selected sakura dango (cherry blossom-flavored rice flour balls roasted over a charcoal fire) and a serving of fried yakisoba noodles with pickled ginger garnish.

As I waited for my friend to join with his snack, I took a closer look at the individual cherry blossoms on a tree next to the still pond. Each flower was at a different stage of the bloom cycle and the flowers were as numerous as the people swarming below them.

Modern Tokyo is the world's largest metropolis, home to over 31 million people and is one of the most advanced societies in the world. Japanese values and worldview beliefs have been melded into a secular, materialistic lifestyle. But the Adventist church here is struggling to make the impact they are desperately working and praying to have in their city. In a word, discipling new believers here is challenging. It challenges us as a people...
because what works well elsewhere hasn't been successful here. What appeals to people in other cultures and cities, doesn't arrest the attention here.

A few days earlier, I met with the leaders of the Japanese Union and the Northern Asia Pacific Division. Together we discussed the various creative and traditional approaches being employed in the outreach work. All agreed that success remains to be seen. I learned that 8,332 Japanese people for each Japanese SDA church member. Also, 43% of the current Church membership is 65 years of age or older. The new members added are keeping up with the loss of aging members. So not only from a mission perspective but also from a business perspective, the Church is facing some major challenges.

In the decades since World War II, Japan amazed the world with its profound economic growth. Many foreign investors flocked to the country. Many failed to succeed. Those who have succeeded have learned that when doing business in Japan, one needs to understand "the Japanese Way", or shikata. To expect success one must learn to adapt one's practices. Paul talks about becoming all things to all people (1 Corinthians 9:18-22). It is easy to talk about differences of culture and enjoy the beauties of foreign lands. It's quite another to step out of one's comfortable living room or favorite Bible studies, and seek to join people where they are. Ellen White prescribes Christ's method of sharing life with those around us and to have a wholistic Gospel (see Ministry of Healing, p. 143). All too often "fear of compromise" replaces faith in God's outreach methods! As a people we are limiting ourselves and God.

The Tokyo statistics may be outstanding, but the entire world field faces similar challenges. Buddhists, Shintos, Taoists, and other followers of East Asian traditions are drawing to metropolises where the hyper-pace of materialism combines with Asian worldviews to create populations highly resistant to Gospel outreach.

I can think of no greater mission challenge today than learning to adapt our last day message of judgment and the soon return of Jesus Christ to fit the local situation as found in the cities most of us live in or near. We need to move beyond simply translating and interpreting the message prepared for receptive audiences and do the difficult but effective work of tailoring our methods and message to the people we are seeking to bless.

CEART exists to encourage and support ministries and people who are willing to do things in a new way while staying true to the end time message we have inherited from our Church pioneers. In the coming months we plan to roll out networking and communication services to better connect ministries and workers across the globe who are doing this type of work.

Tokyo's challenge is a global challenge that is every member's challenge. Will you join me in ministry?

For Christ,
2013 CEART Mission Issues Leadership Conference

Dates: May 21-23
Theme: "The Unfinished Task: It Can Be Done"
Pre-Registration Date: April 20
Location: Asia Pacific International University, Saraburi, Thailand
Conference Fee: US$ 125 (includes room & food)

This year CEART's annual meeting departs from its traditional training focus for leaders
and pastors and will instead be a working meeting to discuss the challenging mission issues in discipling new believers among peoples who follow the teachings of Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto, Chinese folk religion, etc. The meetings will focus on the following are:

1. Who are the followers of East Asian religions and traditions?
2. What success have we had in reaching these people?
3. How do we define success in reaching these people?
4. What methods and projects are working/not working?
5. What projects are planned for these people in your field in the coming year?
6. How can we best cooperate to finish the task?

The goal for these meetings is not simply for more information. Rather, the goal is to consider a better way forward to achieve that great goal found in Jesus' prophecy, "And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come." Matthew 24:14. We have an unfinished task but it can be done!

**Requesting Papers and Presentations:**

Representatives from each field are asked to submit papers to CEART by April 30 based on the theme and the six areas listed above. Added to these, mission project leaders who are working with East Asians are invited to do the same. The CEART team will review the papers for relevance to the topic and will make the papers available to all attendees during the meetings and the author will be invited to present a summary of their paper during out time together. Note: your report may focus on a specific project, your mission’s strategy, the needs or challenges you are facing, or suggestions for how to better meet this needs in the future.

The report can be as long as you desire but the oral presentation will be limited to in order to allow all to present. More information on the length of your presentation time will be communicated once we have received the reports on April 30.

**Schedule:**

- **Monday, May 20:** Vans will shuttle participants from Suvarnabhumi Airport to APIU from 2:00-6:00pm. Registration at APIU will be from 5:00 to 8:00pm.
- **Tuesday-Wednesday, May 21-22:** Meetings will begin at 8:00am and end at 5:00pm. Enjoy listening to a variety of presentations and share your thoughts and experiences in round table discussions.
- **Thursday, May 23:** Meetings will begin at 8:00am and end at noon. Following lunch, vans will be shuttle participants back to Suvarnabhumi Airport.

**Transportation:**

If you are flying to Thailand, we will provide roundtrip transportation between Suvarnabhumi Airport and APIU. Please pre register to reserve a seat. Failure to do so may cause travel delays due to full vehicles. Also, please book travel to arrive Monday before 6pm and depart Thursday after 4pm. If you flights can't match these parameters, please correspond with us and we will try to do our best to accommodate your itinerary.
Pre-Registration:

Please send your name, title/position, and travel itinerary by April 20 for pre-registration. This is required to ensure we have a room and ground transportation arranged for you.

Registration Fees:

This year's conference is being offered for 125 USD (3,750 THB) per person. Payment should be made by cash in US dollars or Thai baht upon arrival at APIU. One payment is made you will receive room keys, meal tickets, and seminar materials. This subsidized registration fee includes all costs for conference materials, round trip ground transportation to and from Suvarnabhumi Airport, private dorm room, meals, and snacks during breaks.

Contact Us:

For further information please contact us!

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Meet Our Staff

**Pastor Greg Whitsett**
CEART Director

Pastor Whitsett has been serving as the director of CEART since September 2012. Before joining CEART he served as a church planter and field director with Adventist Frontier Missions in Southeast Asia for ten years. He completed his Masters of Divinity at Andrews University with an emphasis in world mission. He enjoys living in Thailand with his beautiful wife, Amy, and their two wonderful sons, Tyler and Ryan.

**Jubilant Arora**
Secretary

Mrs. Arora has been serving as a secretary for CEART for over five years. A native of India, Mrs. Arora has been serving the Church in Thailand in various capacities for 26 years. She shares life with her outreached-minded husband, Virendra. Together they
have two grown children, Dollie and Pappu, who both work nearby at Ekamai International School in Bangkok.

**Dr. Samuel Wang**  
Contextualized Resource Developer

Dr. Wang has been serving CEART in Taiwan since 2010. Dr. Wang has been well-received for his contributions to outreach methods to the Chinese and is perhaps best known for his book, God and the Ancient Chinese. He is accompanied by his lovely wife, Esther, and has two sons, Houpu and Enlai.