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In Season and Out: Overcoming Barriers

August. It is the month of summer holidays in Japan, normally full of festivals and travel. But this was not a typical August. Festival gatherings were canceled. Tokyo residents especially, who would normally travel to ancestral homes to visit relatives and family gravesites, were discouraged from doing so. Despite COVID challenges, however, Japanese worked hard to overcome barriers in order to maintain their long-held Buddhist traditions. For example, because the Japanese Obon holidays are for both the living and the dead, some entrepreneurs stepped forward and offered gravesite visitation services to bring prayers and offerings on behalf of distant family members unable to travel this year. An online video of their gravesite visitation on behalf of distant relatives helped to overcome this pandemic travel barrier.

I thought I had spotted another barrier on a recent walk with Dan. We were approaching the three-

hundred-year-old neighborhood Shinto shrine when my gaze landed on the bamboo “X” appearing to block entry to the shrine. “COVID-related” was the first thought to cross my mind. Dan had me cast my vision a little higher to quickly dispel that notion. “Oh, the Japanese flags! I see. . .,” slapping my forehead with the palm of my hand. It was a



Japanese national holiday at the beginning of the holiday season, and—because the Shinto religion with its Shinto customs is inextricably woven into the Japanese culture and identity—they would, of course, be flying the Japanese flag on this national holiday. For the Japanese woman walking in front of us, it came naturally for her to momentarily pause, turn, and bow in front of this shrine before continuing on her errand.

But the Shinto shrine itself, along with Buddhist temples and gravesites, is a barrier for the spread of the Christian Gospel in Japan. Why?

(continued on page 2)

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- *God's blessings of His clear teaching as witnessed in our Catechism.*
- *Concord in doctrine and practice as we work with various partner church bodies.*

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- *The continuing diligent work of St. Louis Executive Director Daniel McMiller and his staff in LCMS Missionary Support, and Asia Regional Director Charles Ferry.*
- *Patience and strength for long-term goals for Asia Lutheran resources.*

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(continued from page 1)

It is because the thought of giving up Japanese ancestral traditions, including the custom of worshipping or venerating the dead, is virtually equivalent to asking a Japanese to give up their "Japanese-ness," a huge barrier to overcome, indeed.

Besides the deeply embedded cultural and religious barriers that the Christian faith encounters in Asia, your LCMS missionaries are also facing new COVID-related barriers. Presently, access to project funds, including those for translation work that Dan is eager to coordinate, will not be available, if at all, until September at the very earliest. As for missionaries carrying out congregational responsibilities, just today I heard that South Korea has once again banned public church worship services because of a surge in infections. We pray for Pastor Carl Hanson serving a congregation in Seoul as he negotiates this challenge.

Furthermore, we recently heard the sad news of nineteen positions eliminated at the LCMS International Center, three of which were in Missionary Support. We sorrow along with all those affected. It is only by God's grace that, because LCMS missionaries rely on a network of partner churches and individuals like you who generously and specifically designate their support for our specific mission work, that no LCMS missionaries have had to leave the field. In the midst of numerous barriers, we continue to ask for your prayers, even as we continue to hold you in our prayers as well.



Another Good-Bye

This August our older daughter's family sold the family home in St Paul, MN. Dan and I had a little farewell party with our children (online, of course) to say our good-byes to the place where we raised these precious children. A few tears have been shed!

