

# today

SPRING 2012

IN COVENANT WORLD MISSION

## A Changed Perspective

*Covenant missionary Jim Peterson shares how God continues to change people's lives in areas affected by a devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan one year later.*

We woke up to a bright sunny morning in Miyako and it was cold! But a warm breakfast got us going for a full day. Our team would be hosting a mobile cafe in a temporary housing area for those affected by the tsunami.

When we arrived at the temporary housing area, our team went door to door, letting the residents know we would be hosting the cafe. It was interesting to see the reactions of residents when they saw a tall, gray haired, man standing in their doorway. But as soon as I mentioned the mobile cafe every one of them had a smile and thanked us.

About thirty people showed up and everyone seemed eager to visit, laugh, enjoy tea and snacks, and even play with balloons. Tim Johnson (another Covenant missionary) brought his guitar and performed several songs that really gripped everyone's attention. The organizer and leader of this event, Pastor Iwatsuka, had a look of surprise and delight on his face when Tim began to play the music.

After the event, the other volunteers and I sat and had a conversation with Pastor Iwatsuka to hear about concerns and burdens as well the possibilities for future ministry. We were all moved by the



*Tim Johnson plays at the cafe*

pastor's story of how his entire paradigm for church work had drastically changed.

He had been pastoring a small, struggling congregation of fewer than twenty people for many years and always thought his main task was to gather more people in the church. It was not until a few months ago that he found his perspective being altered in ways that even surprised him.

He began to see his primary task as one of taking Christ's message to those in need rather than bringing them to his church. Instead of having a big event at the church, he realized it makes far more sense to go to temporary housing areas. The result has been profound. Pastor Iwatsuka now shares the message of our savior with several hundred hurting souls all along the coast.

When individuals have expressed an interest in coming to his church, he has surprised himself by telling them they do

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not need to make that journey. He is happy to come to them wherever they are and share the good news with them!

This change has come from experiencing this disaster. We can only praise God for what he is doing in people's lives and pray that more will come to share Pastor Iwatsuka's view.

## Hope for a Brighter Future

*Covenant World Mission is partnering with the Evangelical Covenant Church of South Sudan (ECCSS), seeking to impact the lives of people who are healing and rebuilding following 50 years of conflict.*

**T**he Covenant Church in South Sudan is vibrant and growing! The ECCSS is known for addressing both the spiritual and physical needs of those they seek to minister to and serve. They do this while dealing with economic uncertainty and lack of infrastructure within the country, as the Sudanese people begin rebuilding and healing.

Over 50 years of civil war came to an end in 2005, when a peace accord was signed. During the conflict, 2.5 million people were killed and 4.5 million people were forced to leave the country. In the midst of this conflict, the ECCSS began its ministry.

Today, there are 300 ECCSS churches with over 19,100 members. Over 50 ordained ministers and 973 volunteer preachers and evangelists are proclaiming the gospel. In the last two years, the church has also established 23 new churches and baptized 780 new believers.

There are a number of ways the ECCSS is sharing the good news, giving a powerful witness through word and deed.

The ECCSS is involved in food distribution to internally displaced people

returning to South Sudan. They often have no place to go, and stay in soccer stadiums and makeshift camps.

Church members have taken the initiative to distribute sacks of maize, gallons of oil, powdered milk for children, water, and other items like tents and bed sheets. The most vulnerable are impacted by this ministry, including new mothers, children, the disabled, and the elderly.



The church also aspires to bring peace among ethnic and tribal groups and further communication among neighbors. South Sudan has seen tribal clashes, affecting many communities. The national church is an active participant in peace dialogs and conferences, making the ECCSS a recognized leader in reconciliation efforts.

Educational opportunities for children have also been a priority. The church has taken the initiative to start two well-known schools, considered some of the best in the area. These schools are unique because they offer an education to children who might not receive one. Many of the other schools in the area are militant and do not enroll girls. The ECCSS offers a Christian education to both boys and girls.

There is hope for a brighter future among the people of South Sudan. Praise God that the ECCSS is giving witness to our hope in Jesus Christ.

*Please consider how you might engage in international mission. There are many opportunities to serve and partner globally.*



COVENANT WORLD MISSION

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