

SFFC - Japan

Japan is a nation of affluence. However, despite its affluence, Japan's efforts to take adequate care for the 39,000 children who are in need of placement outside of the home is among the lowest in the world. Japan only places 15% of children in need of alternative care into foster families. Alternative care for children around the world is largely moving towards foster care and small-scale (1~20 children) institutions. Japan does just the opposite as it places children mostly in large institutions. Decisions on where children go to alternative care in Japan is decided through the 210 governmental offices called Child Guidance Centers. These Centers decide where a child should be placed.

The reason for Japan's poor decisions on where to place children in need of alternative care is mostly due to a government that looks at these children as a silent minority so they do not matter. Their laws for placing children entering care at aged two or under directly contradicts all policy advice from the United Nations, World Health Organization, World Bank, and European Union, as well as The International Association for Residential Care (FICE) who all state that children under 3 should never be institutionalized. All children two and under in Japan are mandatorily placed into baby and infant institutions. Despite being confronted by these organizations, Japan has no policy plans to change this. The Japanese Red Cross is the largest provider of these baby and infant institutions, and runs a facility that can house 70 babies and infants under 2 years old.

The UN Guideline for the Alternative Care of Children says that if a child should be in need of alternative care the child should be placed with direct relatives. If that is not possible then adoption should be pursued. If that is not possible then the child should be placed in a foster home. If that is not available then the child should be placed in an institution. Currently Japan's Child Guidance Centers place 85% of all children in institutions. In the US the rate is at 13%.

Japan has not developed any supports or organizations to encourage foster care or foster parents. There are no supporting systems in Japan's Foster Care system so the Government Child Guidance Centers simply make the decision to send the child to an institution. The utilization of foster parents as an alternative care is not usually pursued by the Child Guidance Centers as they usually take the easy route by sending children to institutions where they know they will be taken in and cared for with basic necessities. Also, another difficulty is that parent's rights are not terminated so they usually tell the Child Guidance Centers to place the child in an institution so that they will not attach to a foster family.

What about adoption? There is very little adoption of children in Japan. In fact adoption was illegal in Japan until 1989. Last year around 300 children, all under six years old due to legal limitations, were adopted in Japan. The reason Japan has such little adoption is the result of a legal system which almost never cuts parental rights and a national religion that believes crossing blood lines of children who are in need brings bad luck from their ancestors into one's home. A parent can take their child to the orphanage and tell them that they cannot afford to

take care of them and the orphanage will take the child. The parent can do this and still keep their rights over the child. Parental rights are never severed. The parents can then dictate that their child stay in an institution instead of going into foster care. While there has been an increase in the temporary suspension of parental rights in cases of extreme abuse or neglect, on average fewer than ten cases per year of abuse lead to the cutting of parental rights. Some practitioners have described the courts role here as very conservative, favoring parental rights over children's rights. Whether this is true or not, the result is that only children who have been given up by their parents can be adopted.

In 2015, with outside pressure from organizations like the UN and Human Rights Watch, Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare recently launched a plan to increase foster care from 14% to 33% within the next 15 years. This is still well below the rate of most countries in the world. Presently the UK places 71% of its foster children in foster homes. In the US the rate is 77% and in Australia it is 93%. One of the key reasons why Japan has a low foster care rate is that parents have to consent for their child being fostered. Many parents prefer institutional care as they perceive it to pose less of a threat to their identity as parents than foster care. In addition there is a lack of consciousness about foster care in the general public, and a great need for many families to register to become foster families.

The opportunity for the Church in Japan and SFFC/Lydia Home to help with the orphan crisis is tremendous. There are more than 125 million people living in Japan today. The Japanese people face numerous societal pressures and internal struggles that threaten their daily wellbeing. The effects may be illustrated by a few broad-scale social disorders (suicide epidemic, *hikikomori*, etc.) and human rights abuses (i.e. orphan crisis and legal loopholes protecting those who exploit children sexually). The church is small in Japan and has struggled to find a voice to speak hope in the midst of these challenges. Of that number no more than 0.3% of them may be identified as evangelical, despite ongoing missionary efforts over the last 100 years. An effort by the Church to help with this orphan crisis by educating believers of our responsibility to be involved in remedying social issues is crucial. One way this can happen is through those that make up the Church to open their own homes to the children in crisis through SFFC or becoming Foster Parents. That would be a bold proclamation of how God loves us unconditionally and is excited to adopt us into His family with great care and forgiveness.

Presently there is one Christian agency in Japan called *Bare Hope* (<https://www.facebook.com/barehope/?pnref=story>) just outside of Tokyo that is at work with expecting mothers to navigate them through the adoption process. They also find families who are willing to adopt and foster and they take them through the appropriate training and approval process. The four women of *Bare Hope*, who all work other jobs to make this ministry happen, are integral in navigating the Church in Japan through the opportunity of helping orphans in need. They have great knowledge of the government system, offices and the proper credentials.

Cynthia Ruble of Life Hope Network in Nagoya (<http://www.reachequip.com/life-hope-network/>) would also play a key role in navigating a ministry in Japan like SFFC/Lydia Home to be established. Cynthia is already established in Japan practicing biblical hospitality with

expecting single mothers. Through Life Hope Network Cynthia invites expecting mothers to stay in her home as they go through their pregnancy. They continue to stay at LHN after the delivery and as their child is being adopted or as the mother is in need of finding employment and housing after the pregnancy.

There are several pastors of churches that I was able to meet with throughout Japan that were very excited about the possibility of the Japanese church gathering together to meet the needs of these children in crisis who are in the orphan care system. In Osaka, Japan, Pastor Jay Greer, who has been in ministry for ten years in that region has led his church to open their doors to hospitality. They have invited children of Buddhist family members who have no support a place to stay in their homes. He is excited to see the Church meet the needs of the Japanese society. There is also Sean Radke, of the Tokyo, Grace Harbor Project, and Redemmer's City to City Church planting effort who sees great value in SFFC meeting the needs that arise within their ministries in Tokyo. Another pastor, Robert Flaherty at Kobe Bible Fellowship in Kobe, has been a missionary/pastor to Japan for the last thirty years. He has taken in several foster children and is very well thought of across Japan for his work with orphans. Flaherty sees the greatest need in Japan being Christians becoming foster parents and Christian foster care agencies leading the way in child welfare reform. He says that the Japanese Christians need much teaching and discipleship in understanding the second great commandment of loving your neighbor as yourself. Another church, All Nations Fellowship Church in Nagoya has a heart for meeting the needs of orphans and they are also wanting leadership in how to go about doing this.

The church has not been challenged consistently to fulfill the second great commandment that Jesus gave us "to love our neighbor as our self." The outward love of the church being gathered and empowered to strategically remedy social issues like Japan's orphan crisis is very rare. The believers need to be educated and challenged to be involved in crisis and issues that are affecting society. They need to be reminded that they have the answer and the Church can be a powerful change agent there as it has been throughout history. This is where Christ Bible Institute would be invaluable. Christ Bible Institute (CBI) is a ministry in Nagoya, Japan, founded by Dr. Michael Oh. CBI's mission is to engage Japanese society with the Gospel, expand the Kingdom of God through church planting, and equip Christian leaders for ministry. Towards those ends, CBI has three corresponding branches of ministry including a café outreach, a church planting work, and a seminary. Christ Bible Seminary (CBS) has an immediate platform to train and educate pastors and church planters to fulfill the great commission through the practice of loving our neighbor, especially through the practice of spiritual disciplines life biblical hospitality.

CBI also has a Christian Counseling for Japan Project (CCFJ Project) that is getting started. This is an effort to equip believers to provide quality care for those struggling emotionally and spiritually in Japan. This would be a great ministry for SFFC/Lydia Home to come along side and provide help for families and children in crisis that are in need of hospitality and are being counseled through CCFJ.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/signs-spiritual-awakening-japan>