

Texas Baptist couple helps in ongoing recovery efforts in Japan PRINT

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SENDEI, Japan—After an earthquake and tsunami hit Japan last year, a family with Texas Baptist ties found themselves in a unique position to help residents of the nation they love rebuild.



Dallas Baptist University graduate Gracie Ha (middle left), along with her husband and daughter; April Mick (DBU graduate, middle right), Erik Palmarchuk (DBU graduate, right) help host Yu (far left) and Michael (far right) Towery during their stay in South Korea after the earthquake. (PHOTOS/Courtesy of Yu Towery)

Yu Ito Towery, a graduate of **Dallas Baptist University**, and her husband Michael, an East Texas Baptist University graduate, moved November 2010 to the portside city of Sendai, Japan, where she had grown up. In January 2011, their first child, Luke Kai Towery, was born. Two months later, the disaster occurred.

The earthquake's epicenter hit 80 miles from the Towerys' new Japanese home. Immediately, they lost power, water and all phone service. It was snowing outside, and they tried to stay warm inside while the dangerous tremors of aftershocks continued for hours. Their only source of outside communication was a little radio in their house, where they heard shocking reports of the devastation.

After their water came back on 24 hours later, the Towerys stood in line at the grocery store for hours, trying to buy food that could be sent

to the disaster areas. With the manpower and resources they had available, they tried to do everything possible to help. But soon the situation in the Fukushima prefecture became too dangerous for them to stay.

Radiation was leaking into the air and water, and the U.S. Embassy urged all Americans in the area to leave. The rest of Yu Towery's family chose to remain behind, but the couple knew getting baby Luke out of dangerous air was imperative.

"Before we left the city, we stopped at my dad's office," she explained. "My dad has been so supportive from the beginning, and he kept reminding us that God would take care of us. ... He wanted to pray for us, and he cried as he asked our Father to protect us. He held our baby boy one more time, and we left with such heavy hearts."

Their final destination was set to be Seoul, South Korea, but they couldn't leave the country until they had obtained an emergency passport for Luke. Rushing to get out of harm's way, they flew from the west coast to Okinawa in southern Japan where they would be able to visit the U.S. Consulate.

One of their first stops while waiting was to see friend and fellow DBU alumna, Noriko Wada. She became a Christian while studying at DBU and now teaches at a Christian school.

"We attended the chapel service at her school," Yu Towery wrote on her blog. "We had an awesome time of worship, and God reminded us how great he is. When we sang, our hearts were filled with prayers for the people of Japan. We want them to know our God who is greater, stronger and higher than any other."

Once the Towerys were able to fly to Seoul, the staff of the Far East Broadcasting Company, a ministry of Baptist leader Billy Kim greeted them and took them to a church where they were housed. There, they saw

more familiar faces from DBU—friends Gracie Ha, Daniel Park, Erik Palmarchuk, brothers Max and Marty Lee, and April Mick. But the Towerys grieved for the people they left behind in Japan.

"There was not a single day when we did not think about Japan during our evacuation period in South Korea. We felt like we left our heart in Japan," Yu Towery said. "We were certain that God had called us to Japan to share his love and hope, but we thought about the Japanese people who were hurting and grieving without knowing him."



Yu Towery distributes mittens and socks to a family who lives temporary housing in northern Japan.

When it was safe to return to Japan, the Towerys went back with the prayers and support of many Korean Christians whose aid helped them fund the ongoing disaster relief.



Yu and Michael Towery, accompanied by their son Luke, prepare to distribute fresh fruits and vegetables to people in temporary housing areas in northern Japan.

Michael and Yu Towery now travel several times a month to the devastated area, delivering fresh fruits and vegetables, other food items, medicine, heaters, furniture, clothes, children's toys and Bibles. Their relief work is made possible through donations of items like vans from the Baptist General Convention of Texas to the **Japan Baptist Convention**; boxes of clothing from their home church, **First Baptist Church in Arlington**; and volunteer teams who have given up their time and money to come help plant seeds of faith and rebuild lives.

"When we first took boxes of clothing to the temporary housing areas, we wondered how they would share everything," Yu said.

"We were amazed to see the people only take what they needed, not what they wanted. Many told us that they were OK, and they wanted us to give what we brought to others who might need more than them."

Looking back over the past year as rebuilding efforts in Northern Japan continue, it is clear God has been moving and working in the hearts of those who have lost so much, Yu Towery noted.

She and her husband are encouraged by people they have seen turn to faith in Christ, and also by the constant prayers, love and support they have received from Texas Baptists. As the next year of rebuilding begins, the Towerys continue to pray they will be used as faithful messengers of Christ's hope and love for the Japanese people.



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