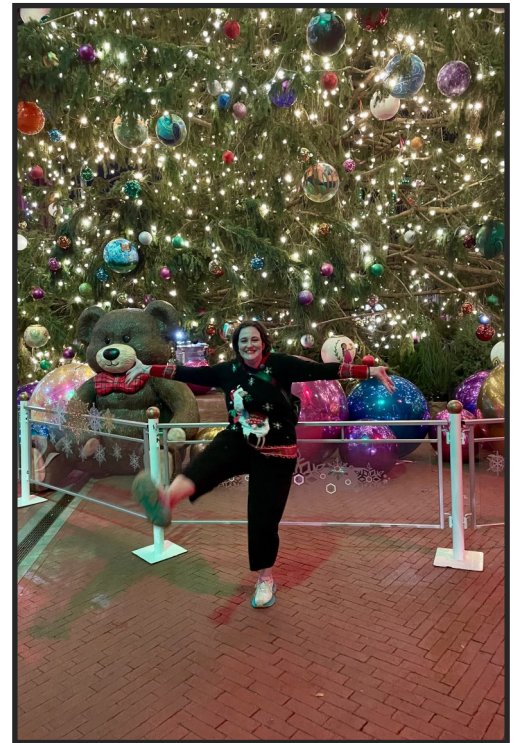


# News from Nihon\*

\*Nihon or Nippon is the Japanese way of saying Japan.

I hope the start to your 2024 has treated you well. I know that it has been a number of months since I have written. Last summer, one of my colleagues moved back to his home country for family reasons and I found myself with roughly double the workload I had previously handled. My workload is returning to normal with my third year students having finished their classwork prior to graduation and I will do my best to resume writing this newsletter on a regular basis. I hope I did not worry any of you too much, but I had to manage my time and something had to give, which in this case, was the newsletter. I am going to do my best to share bits and pieces of life either recently, or something you might have missed. Thanks for reading and supporting my work!

One of my favorite pieces of news is that all of my third year students will be able to graduate. In fact, the entire third year will be able to graduate, which is wonderful! Very excited for them and what's to come.



I was able to see some of you in person when I traveled to the U.S. over my winter vacation. It was a very jam-packed season full of lots of time with family and traditions. The picture above is from Sundance Square in downtown Fort Worth. I have shown this picture to several people in Japan and they have all been impressed with the size of the tree. The Bass family really knows how to choose impressive Christmas décor.

Some highlights from my trip include getting to see all three of my parents' sisters, all three of my grandparents, a handful of cousins, and my new baby cousin. It was quite the age range as my new cousin is only four months old and my grandmother will be 94 this year. I was also delighted to have the chance to connect with some friends, get lots of dog cuddles, and eat my fill of Tex-Mex and barbecue. I think I might have eaten enchiladas as many as three times.

There is one story that makes me laugh from my time in the U.S. that I think you would enjoy. I was getting on a shuttle bus to the airport and trying to communicate with an unknown woman when she started speaking to me in Spanish. I thought to myself, 'Great! I know some Spanish. Communicating with her shouldn't be too difficult.' Well, I was dead wrong. I opened my mouth and all that started coming out was Japanese. She looked at me strangely and so I tried again. I started by apologizing and then realized, again, I had started speaking in Japanese, including the apology. We both sat down and I wracked my brain for the words 'I'm sorry' in Spanish. A full five minutes later, they finally came to me and I still couldn't remember how to say 'here.' Every time I have related this story to someone, I can't help but laugh at the transition in the languages in my brain. It took a friend who also speaks Spanish to tell me a full month later the Spanish word for 'here,' which of course I have learned and used many times in the past.



#### Prayer Requests:

- ◇ I am doing my best to make it through the winter doldrums. Prayers for inspiration to keep up beneficial mental health habits.
- ◇ My students are in the middle of their final term for the year. Prayers that they might remain motivated and finish strong.
- ◇ I am dealing with paperwork and planning and taxes and the usual upkeep of being an adult in modern society. Prayers that it might all go smoothly and that everything will work out as needed.

Please forgive me if I am repeating myself (highly possible) but I want to give you a brief update on the English conversation group I lead as a volunteer at my church. When I first started there were three consistent members. One of them moved back to Tokyo and for a short while it was just three of us.

Shortly thereafter, a mix of people have started coming to the group, where we can have as many as 9 people in attendance if everyone is present, including a woman who splits time between Japan and the U.S. and helps me lead. Most of my students in this group are interested in traveling when they retire and see a better ability to speak English as a necessary skill for such endeavors. There is also a mother and her two elementary school children who regularly attend. Her son is quite possibly the most natural Japanese English speaker I have met thus far and I think he also has fun sometimes explaining things to the other members if they don't understand.

For Thanksgiving, we were able to get a turkey from Costco and we had a feast. It was delightful. We were able to include an Oe church member who used to live in the U.S. and misses the chance to eat turkey at the holidays.