

Flourishing for Fifty

Hope and Meiji Gakuin celebrate their first half century By Greg Olgers '87

In the summer of 1968, Hope and Meiji Gakuin University of Japan planted a young cherry tree on the north side of Lubbers Hall in commemoration of their budding friendship, then just three years old.

In 2015, that tree is a spectacular part of campus, blooming with breathtaking beauty each spring and not only a reminder of the relationship but a symbol of its vitality as the two schools celebrate their 50 years of partnership. Just as the tree has matured and flourished, so, too, has the relationship grown from an initial summer program for Meiji Gakuin students to a mix of opportunities across the year for students and faculty at both institutions, the program enduringly rooted in the positive experience of hundreds of students across generations, the friendships formed among faculty and staff, and a mutual commitment to building understanding in an increasingly shrinking world.

Lubbers

English History
Political Science



“We’re extremely grateful for our relationship with Meiji Gakuin University,” said President Dr. John C. Knapp. “Today, many see the importance of fostering international awareness as an essential component of an outstanding college education, but 50 years ago the idea was much less common. That our friends at Meiji Gakuin and our forerunners here at Hope made it a priority and have nurtured the relationship across all the years since has left us a gift that we treasure.”

While each institution now has a variety of international partnerships (and Hope’s Vienna Summer School began in 1956), the Hope-Meiji Gakuin exchange is the longest-running such association at each.

“Meiji Gakuin has relationships with 37 different schools all over the world. However, for us at Meiji Gakuin, the relationship with Hope is of the utmost importance to us,” said Hiroyoshi Udono, president of Meiji Gakuin, who led a delegation from Japan to Hope for a two-day celebration of the anniversary in November. “I hope and pray that God will continue to bless our relationship so that we can continue to flourish together as part of the body of Christ.”

The Nov. 3-4 anniversary events at Hope included a ceremony during which Presidents Udono and Knapp signed a formal institutional agreement as a pledge to continue their relationship that was followed by the planting of a Kwanzan cherry tree at the Martha Miller Center for Global Communication. Additional events included a commemorative Chapel celebration with Presidents Udono and Knapp speaking, and lectures by Andy Nakajima, associate professor of Japanese at Hope, who shared the story of Hope’s first Japanese students in the 1870s with a particular focus on Kumaji Kimura (Class of 1879), and Margaret Matsumoto, whose father Toru Matsumoto had been ordained in the Reformed Church in America and had been a member of the Meiji Gakuin faculty.

Meiji Gakuin organized celebration events in May, with guests from Hope including President Knapp and his wife Kelly. Meiji Gakuin also commemorated the relationship in its magazine in April and with a website in both Japanese and English.

Meiji Gakuin University is a Christian university with campuses in both Tokyo and Yokohama. Meiji Gakuin traces its origins to the establishment of an English academy in Yokohama in 1863 by American medical missionaries serving through the Presbyterian Church of America.

Hope alumni had been engaged with Meiji Gakuin as missionaries since the early part of the 20th century. One of those alumni, the Rev. Gordon Van Wyk ’41, was among those who played a leadership role in establishing the relationship with Hope while he was on the faculty at Meiji Gakuin (1953-85), where he taught Bible, American literature and history.

Hope’s and Meiji Gakuin’s relationship began in 1965 with a summer program that brought Japanese students to the Hope campus. It became a bilateral exchange in 1980, with Hope students traveling to Japan through a May Term course. The two institutions added long-term study abroad in 1989 and a faculty exchange in 1994, with Hope also hosting a Global Management Seminar for students since 2007 and a Faculty Development Workshop since 2013. Also since 2013, Hope has hosted junior high school students in the summer through a partnership between Meiji Gakuin and Komoro City of Japan.

Hope’s ties to Japan go back nearly a century earlier than the anniversary. At one point in the 19th century, as many as 14 students from Japan were studying at the college. The first two Hope graduates from Japan—who comprised one third of the graduating class in 1879—were Kumaji Kimura and Motoichiro Oghimi, who subsequently attended New Brunswick Theological Seminary and returned to Japan to serve as educators and pastors. Kimura was originally from Komoro City, a connection that helped inspire the 2013 junior high program. Many Hope alumni were involved with Meiji Gakuin itself for decades before 1965.

The 50-year relationship with Meiji Gakuin University is among five important partnerships that Hope has today with universities in Japan, which include Ferris University, Seigakuin University Technos College and Waseda University.

s Hall

Philosophy
Religion

A moment from the college's May Term in Japan this past spring.

Shigeri Hayashi, a third-year Meiji Gakuin student who is spending 2015-16 at Hope, has made the journey to the college twice through the partnership. "I came here last year in the summer, and was so impressed with the experience that I wanted to take more classes here," she said. "The people were very nice and the professors were very kind, so I decided to come back to study for a year."

A pre-law student, she has valued the chance to compare Japanese and U.S. constitutional law, but she has equally appreciated the opportunity to experience another culture, not as an exercise, but through life, often in ways as everyday as talking late into the night with her roommate, or connecting with other students—not least of all those who are studying Japanese.

"We talk about Japanese culture and American culture," Hayashi said. "And sometimes I help them with Japanese homework and they help me with my American homework."

For Hope senior Tony Byrne of Big Rapids, Michigan, participation in the exchange program might have seemed a foregone conclusion. His mother's family had hosted Meiji Gakuin students in the 1970s and 1980s, positive experiences that were a fond part of family lore.

He notes, though, that he hadn't recalled that history as he began his Hope experience. And so it was coincidental that he enrolled in Japanese courses at Hope as an intriguing way of fulfilling his language requirement, and subsequently found himself encouraged to participate in the May Term by faculty involved.

"At that point I hadn't really thought about studying abroad, but I figured I should have an experience if that was available," he said. "So I went and it was one of the greatest experiences of my life."

The experience was also transformational. Byrne admits that (like many students) he enrolled as a freshman without a clear career path in mind, but the opportunities he's found since have provided direction. He was so inspired by the May Term that he decided to pursue a Japanese studies composite major and, mirroring Hayashi's journey, opted to spend his junior year at Meiji Gakuin.

"The professors there were fantastic," Byrne said. "I think I've worked pretty hard the past few years studying Japanese, but they definitely pushed me further than I thought possible at the time. I definitely owe them a debt of gratitude."

"Not once did I feel like an outsider in the classroom," he said. "That was really nice."

Byrne, who is also majoring in philosophy, is now hoping to return to Japan after graduation, perhaps to teach English.

"I feel really blessed and I'm really thankful for the opportunity to go to Meiji Gakuin," Byrne said. "Just that I came to Hope without any preconception of what I want to do, and I happened to find this language major and happened to meet all these wonderful professors that made me open to the idea of going to this entirely new place, and then going there and opening my eyes in ways I never thought. I have a lot of people to thank for where I'm at."

"I think it's so great that 50 years ago they started this relationship, and it's been maintained," he said.

More about the program is on the college's website, including a link to Meiji Gakuin University's online commemoration of the relationship, which is available in both Japanese and English. hope.edu/meijigakuinanniversary

*10th
Anniversary*



*50th
Anniversary*

