

# CAJ Chronicle

Christian Academy in Japan

Spring 2024



continuing to  
**GROW**



CHRONICLE

**EDITOR**

Marie Wahl

**SUB-EDITORS**

Jared Johnson

Alecia May

**PHOTO EDITOR**

Nate Rudd

**PHOTO CONTRIBUTORS**

Nate Rudd

**GRAPHIC DESIGN**

Juliana Barker

**CHRISTIAN ACADEMY IN JAPAN**

1-2-14 Shinkawa-cho  
Higashi Kurume-shi  
Tokyo, Japan 203-0013  
+81-42-471-0022  
[www.caj.ac.jp](http://www.caj.ac.jp)



# Message from Head of School

## God Makes Things Grow

It is spring and there are signs of growth everywhere in the world around us. Flowers are blooming and trees are blossoming, including the beautiful cherry blossoms that adorn our campus. And while we have a wonderful maintenance team who takes good care of our school, including the shrubbery, the flowers and trees are growing not primarily because of their work, but because something deeper is going on.

There are signs of growth throughout our student body too, growth that has not been limited to the spring season but has been evident all year long. It can be seen in any of the classrooms, in the art displayed on the walls, in the musical performances in concerts, in the games taking place on the field or court, or in student presentations and projects. And while we have a wonderful group of teachers who are dedicated to serving our students in their learning, ultimately the students are growing not primarily because of the teachers' work, but because something deeper is going on.

We might like to take the credit, but ultimately it is God who makes things grow and God who makes us grow. The apostle Paul reminded us of this when writing to the church in Corinth. He was seeking to defuse a squabble among the church members when he said, "I [Paul] planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.... God...makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

Sometimes plants or trees don't grow despite being well cared for, and we don't know why. We had a tree on campus last year that did not thrive for reasons that remain mysterious. Sometimes students don't grow despite being well taught and well cared for, while others in the same class do grow, and we don't know why. All teachers are familiar with this situation.

As a school, working to promote student growth in mind, heart, body, and spirit is our daily focus. We may not always understand the hows and whys of growth, especially student growth, but we do understand that we have a role to facilitate growth and to foster an environment in which growth becomes possible. It was gratifying

to see that, in their report to our accreditation body, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) team who recently spent almost a week on campus observed, "CAJ has qualified, experienced, and dedicated staff that ensure all students grow and reach their full potential." That is a welcome endorsement of what we are here to do.

But in the end, it is God who makes things, and people, grow. And so we ask together that He brings about growth in every student and adult at CAJ, in every aspect of who He created each of us to be. Above all, as the apostle Peter encouraged us, we ask Him to help us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). There is no better growth than that.

I hope you enjoy reading about how the CAJ community is growing in this edition of the CAJ Chronicle.

David Mawhinney | HEAD OF SCHOOL

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**4** | Room to Grow

**6** | Growing Through Change

**10** | Unforeseen Growth

**14** | God is Moving at CAJ

**17** | Wall of Honor

**18** | Growing in Seasons

**21** | Alumni Updates



# room to GROW



**CHRISTINE IJIMA | Kindergarten Teacher**

**We all** have challenges or personal hang-ups on something. As a quiet, shy child, I never raised my hand in class. I was the type of person who didn't want to stand out or be in the spotlight. Even when I knew the answer, I didn't speak because I didn't want to say the wrong thing. In college, I was terrified of public speaking and never volunteered answers or responses in a classroom setting. For example, in speech class, I shook as I gave a short speech — about angora sweaters, of all things! Overwhelmed, I talked too fast and too quietly, just wanting the moment to be over.

The times I did enjoy being on stage were when I was singing. I loved being in the kids' choir and eventually my college's choir. It was a safe way to be on stage with lots of people and not have the whole focus on me. Secretly, I wanted to be a singer like Amy Grant, but that was not meant to be.

Since my young teen years, I've constantly been working with children. At my church, Kurume Bible Fellowship, after teaching Sunday school for several years, I was asked to take turns giving kids messages. Somehow I thought that was safe. I could focus on the children, not on the larger audience. When I received compliments from the adults, saying that I had helped them understand the sermon by teaching the children, God affirmed in me that this was something I was good at and capable of. Eventually, I was asked to do other things on stage, such as delivering the announcements or leading ministry activities.

God prompted me more than once, affirming that I was capable of doing some of these challenging presentations. I still get nervous before presenting before large groups, but I have also found that CAJ has been a place for me to grow and feel safe. Recently, I shared with my colleagues during an all-staff meeting and walked away with a strong sense of pride in having revealed a part of myself.

When I began teaching at CAJ, I noticed how students deliver speeches to their peers from an early age. From fifth graders researching and presenting a topic of interest to them to kindergarteners retelling the story of Moses and the plagues, students develop their presentation skills even in elementary. I watched my own daughters go through preparations for their Senior Comprehensive presentations. Even though it was nerve-racking for them, they were both successful thanks to their many years of training.

Encouraging students to present their knowledge from a young age helps many to get used to being in front of others—something I did not experience when I was young. In the kindergarten class, we celebrate this type of learning experience regularly. Although presentations are still extremely challenging for some students, my colleagues and I remind them to breathe deeply and remember that the audience is interested in what they have learned. Although some students still get stage fright, we actively encourage, high-five, and affirm that presenting can be a significant place of growth—and that idea applies to both students and teachers alike. 🙌





# growing through CHANGE

ANITA AUNG | Grade 8 Teacher & Test Coordinator

**I came to Japan** on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program in the summer of 2014, lined up with a job as an Assistant Language Teacher at a public high school in Tokyo. After a week of what was referred to as “Professional Development and Training,” I walked away with the acronym that I would apply to every situation I would encounter for the next five years: ESID, which stands for “every situation is in fact different.”

After my role with JET ended, I was hired to work part-time at CAJ, filling in a role for someone who would be back within the year. I knew the role was temporary and likely to change, so I was happy to be flexible.

“Growth” is the theme for CAJ staff this year, and it’s been a catalyst for me to reflect on the ways

I’ve grown personally, professionally, and spiritually over the last five years. I have learned a great deal across various aspects of my life. And while I have enjoyed the journey overall, teaching new and different things has been particularly rewarding.

The middle school division has recently

started incorporating EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers into more classes than simply English Language Arts. We have done this in an effort to create opportunities for students to grow in their language skills and make connections across subjects. This means that a few of us have been joining science and social studies classes as co-teachers to support English language growth.

The timing of this endeavor lined up perfectly with the science department's decision to change curriculum. So after I had been co-teaching in science for two years and had begun to feel comfortable with the content, of course everything changed.

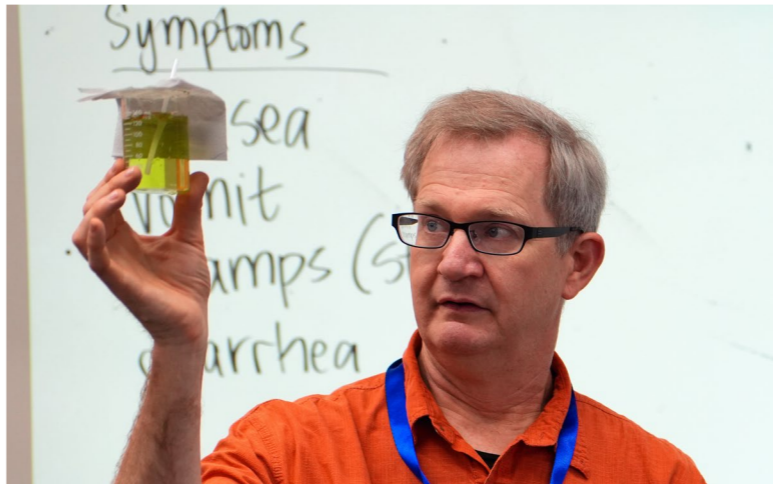
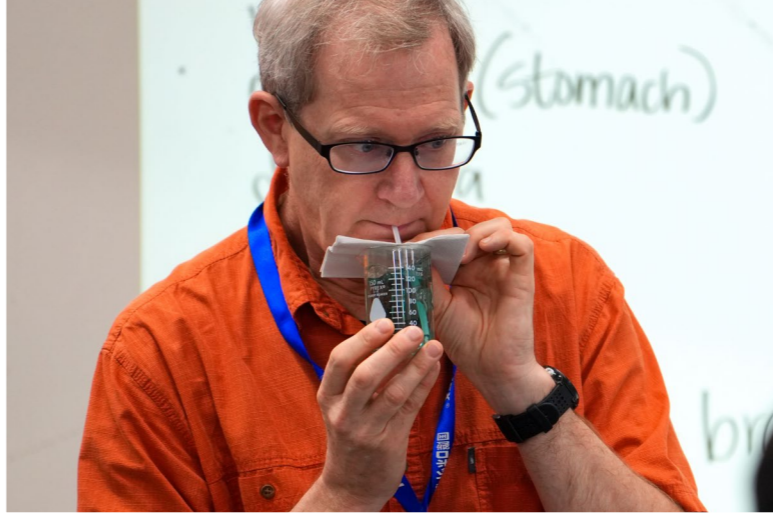
This year, the middle school science department has switched to a more exploratory, hands-on science program that encourages students to ask questions and build the skills necessary to answer those questions. With these skills, they can apply their knowledge to challenges even beyond the curriculum. It makes sense that this is the direction the classes would take, since teachers and students have noticed over the last few years that students need more opportunities to think critically and grapple with problems. For example, recently students have reflected that they have difficulty remembering specific terms and concepts from year to year yet recall processes and situations that required critical thinking with more clarity.

Although we have appreciated this new type of curriculum in concept, it has been more challenging to actually implement. This is because in order to be more hands-off in the students' learning, we have had to be more hands-on with the lessons and activities. We need to break down learning processes step-by-step so that the students can then engage with and understand the concepts on their own.

The sixth grade team bravely took on this new curriculum last year, and the older grades have followed their lead this year. Although the curriculum is still very new, we have seen growth in the students. They are asking good questions and exploring new concepts. Meanwhile, we as teachers have more opportunities to observe and challenge the students to further experiment and connect science to the world they interact with.

Mr. Van Dam, a middle school science teacher, shared that seventh grade students recently learned about natural disasters and how to communicate with people before the disaster. "We focused on tsunamis, but the final assessment required them to develop their own system for a different disaster, such as earthquakes, wildfires, etc."

The teachers have grown as we think through every question, every student, and every class, but there is more learning and growing ahead



as we explore our new curriculum. How can we better provide students with an education that truly equips them to question, experiment, and understand the world around them?

ESID, in my early JET days, used to mean "Every Situation is Different," and was a polite way of saying 'I don't know,' or more likely, 'I don't know how to make the rules fit this situation.'

In my five years here, however, I've been fortunate enough to step into different roles and jobs. Every year I finish with a greater understanding that every situation is, in fact, different. Rather than being a phrase simply meaning 'I don't know,' ESID has now taken on an air of opportunity — every situation is different, so we can give up, or we can grow up! 🙌





# UNFORSEEN

# growth

BETHANY HETTINGER | Grade 6 Teacher

**Tears** almost ran down my face as I read, "This class cured my depression." Wait, what? Really? I was shocked, and even in a state of disbelief. I continued to read another student's comment.

**This class cured my depression.**

"It has helped me know about God."

"I started to see how everything connects to Jesus."

"I want to become more like Jesus, which means becoming kinder and sharing my faith."

**It has helped me know about God.**

"This class made me more positive. Whenever I am in a bad situation, I learn to stay positive, find the good things and ask God for help and comfort."

Do Bible classes at CAJ really make a difference in our students' lives? As a sixth grade middle school teacher who has dealt with anything from deodorant talks to bandaids and counseling sessions, this question has often lingered in my head at the end of a school day.

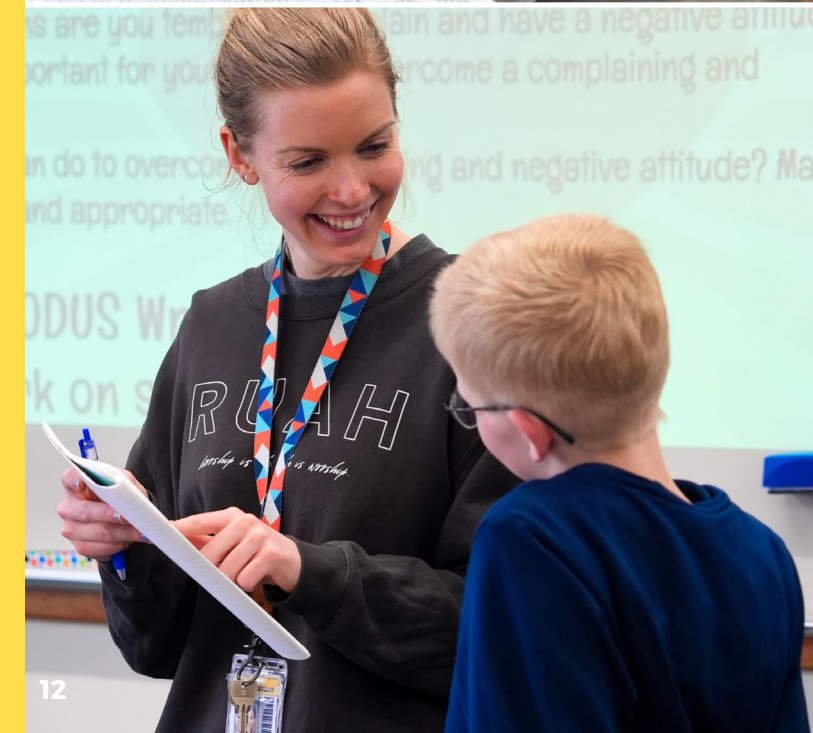
**I started to see how everything connects to Jesus.**

A typical Bible class for me includes a time of prayer requests and praise reports, a devotional, and a time to study the Bible. Each grade level focuses on different topics or books of the Bible.

For instance, sixth grade primarily focuses on the Old Testament all the way up to the book of Joshua. At the end of 12th grade, students at CAJ should have covered a wide variety of topics and learned about most of the books of the Bible.

**I want to become more like Jesus...**

I often use the devotional times in class to accommodate specific student needs and concerns. If I notice students are struggling with friendships, I will choose devotionals or Bible verses to encourage them. I



often play worship songs that have been encouraging to me.

Last year, the Bible department head asked me to have students take an anonymous class survey on how my Bible classes were going.

I was nervous. Would students nitpick me to the fullest degree? If you know middle schoolers, you know they can be brutally honest. When it comes to anonymity, I was bound to a flood of complaints—or so I thought.

I started to become uneasy while I waited for the survey results. I was not uneasy because I did not believe in my ability to teach, but I was nervous to see if my Bible classes were really making an impact.

I have always desired for my Bible classes to cause a deep, long-lasting impact in which students truly know more about God and love His Word. I also pray that my students really encounter the Lord on their own and decide on their own how amazing He is. As I teach day in and day out, I wonder if I am truly making a difference.

“This class cured my depression.” This one sentence brought me goosebumps. This one sentence answered all of my questions and calmed my fears. Yes, our prayers are working — God is using us at CAJ to make a difference in the lives of these kids. 🙏

**God is using us at CAJ...**





YUKIKO HOWARD | Academic Counselor & Child Safety Coordinator  
 KADE LOOMIS | CAJ Student

**AS AN ACADEMIC COUNSELOR**, designated safeguarding lead, and high school student council advisor, my job allows me to witness the growth of students from a unique perspective. I get to help them apply their classroom learning to challenging situations outside the classroom and, as some of my students say, see them move from “survivors to thrivers.”

One strong piece of evidence of students thriving came during the student leadership retreat last August. Several seniors approached me and said that they wanted to see spiritual growth on campus and that they were going to pray for a spiritual revival at CAJ. After hearing how God has made himself known to them, I knew they were serious. My first thought was, “Help me, Lord.” I held my breath because I knew that when there is growth, there are growing pains. For a revival to happen, the students would have to come face to face with the challenges in their lives. But more importantly, they would have to come face to face with the Lord. And that is what these seniors, who included Kade Loomis, intended to do. Here is his story:

“

When reflecting on the spiritual growth of CAJ this year, I first considered my own spiritual growth in previous years. I

struggled to think of any examples I might have seen throughout my freshmen, sophomore, and junior years. Despite being a

*Christian school, there seemed to be a lack of spirituality outside of my Bible classes, chapel, and Christmas concerts where we sang Christian music. This left me wanting a deeper, more varied spiritual experience that could be found outside of these three areas.*

*Looking at this year, I see a significant difference – a refreshing change, actually. In previous years, attending chapel felt more like an obligation, and it was not uncommon to see someone asleep. In contrast, this year, CAJ chapels feel more alive. They have variety and feel as if they connect to the students better. A volunteer student group has given valuable input into what chapel will look like. There is also a passionate administration that actively listens to said group, applies its suggestions for chapel, and wants to share Jesus better.*

*But it's not just the chapel group. I have seen more students openly talk about their faith and relationship with God this year than all previous*

*years combined. I have seen more people curious about Christ and wanting to actively seek him this year. And, let me tell you, I'm all here for it. Perhaps it's partly my own spiritual growth influencing my perception. After an impactful encounter with the Lord last summer, I've become more passionate about Him than ever before. Yet it can't be a coincidence that at least four other seniors had an encounter over the same summer, and that we all came to school ready to do more for God and to bring revival at CAJ.*

*It's not just the seniors either. Underclassmen are also stepping forward, making their faith known and wanting revival. All four grades of high school are represented in the new, weekly student-led Bible study that meets during lunch on Mondays. It's a small group, yes. But it's there. There are students who, unprompted, want to do stuff for God. And it's growing – slowly, but surely.*



God doesn't need half of the student body to make Himself known. All He needs is a small group of believers who are passionate for holy change and He will work through them. And boy, oh boy, is He working. The emphasis on the spiritual lives of the students has increased significantly and I believe that students are more interested.

Also, with numerous visible role models, people are remembering that CAJ is, at its core, a Christian school. For instance, the student council president has been very vocal about his faith and has voiced his desire for revival. Everyone on the Chapel Committee are also believers who are actively pursuing change. And then there are upperclassmen

in the National Honor Society who love God deeply and tell others about it.

Everywhere students look, there is an increasing presence of Christians. From the student council, to sports teams, to even during lunch, there is a revival happening. It's happening right now. It's happening quietly. You may not really see it now, but in a few years when people look back on this school year, they'll recognize it. They'll see how different it was compared to previous years and how it changed all the years since. And then they'll see one more thing – that this change wasn't a student thing, it wasn't a teacher, or even administrative thing. It was, and currently is, a God thing.



There has been a lot of pruning in the lives of our students this year. But when they fell on their knees in full recognition of their weakness, they sought for God's strength. The Lord met them. I have been blessed to have Kade and so many other students this year make an impact on my life. They have reminded me that a true revival challenges us not only to face ourselves, but to stand face to face with our Lord, our Creator, and our Redeemer. 🙏



# WALL OF HONOR





# GROWING IN SEASONS

KAIDA ALTENA | Grade 3 Teacher

**IN OUR THIRD GRADE CLASSROOM** this year, the Teaching for Transformation (TfT) storyline is *Rooted and Built Up*. This theme comes from Colossians 2:6-8, which says,

*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

As I created my classroom's bulletin board, I displayed a tree that had bright green leaves and bore fruit, with the focus on the roots of the tree. The roots spelled out the word "Christ" in twine. When school started in August, the tree was full of green leaves, with each student's name written on them as a representation of the summer season.

Summer is a time when nature is full of growth and abundance. Many plants are bearing fruit after the farmers and gardeners have worked so hard to tend to them. Back home in Iowa, I enjoy the delicious sweet corn every summer.

Similarly, in our personal and spiritual life, we may experience a "summer season." It may be a season where we feel most in tune with God and his presence. Maybe it's a time where we are aware of the abundant blessings of God and are bearing the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

As you might expect, the tree did not stay in the lush green "summer" season. After October break, the leaves changed colors to mark the changing seasons. The students decorated leaves, acorns, and mushrooms to add to the bulletin board with words of what they were thankful for. Autumn is a season when crops are harvested and workers reap the rewards of their labor, preparing for the colder, quieter months. In our spiritual and personal life, autumn is a time to express our gratitude to God as we prepare for the next season.

When the students came back to the classroom after winter break, the tree had no leaves. We had a discussion about what happens to trees in winter as well as in other seasons, recalling the transformation of our very own classroom bulletin board tree.

We then discussed what connections we could make between a tree going through seasons and our personal and spiritual growth. At first, they noted the physical growth that happened during an individual's life: people grow taller, maybe wider, and their feet may change. As different ideas popped



up, the students recognized how we also go through metaphorical seasons of life.

Winter is a time when the days are shorter and the nights are longer. In the natural world, plants go into a state of dormancy and rest to stay protected from adverse weather conditions. Although they may not look like they are thriving and growing, they are strengthening their root systems.

One "winter" season in my own life was during the majority of my college experience. Because of the natural uncertainty of that stage of life paired with grief, I found myself in a season marked with anxiety and depression. I remember feeling like I was in a never-ending nighttime. I just wanted to skip forward.

If I could speak to myself during that time, what would I say? I would whisper so compassionately the things that many mentors said to me: "Oh dear, little Kaida. I know it is hard. I know it is dark. Lean into God. He is growing you."

If you are going through a difficult season of life, remember that, similarly to a dormant plant, your roots are also being strengthened. You are being refined and pruned by God. These are growing pains. Light will shine again. You will feel abundant joy again. You are not alone.

As spring approaches, the winter snowflakes in our classroom will turn into beautiful cherry blossoms. The new life and growth that is experienced in the springtime is what God offers to us every day. Chris Renzema beautifully describes this truth in his song *Springtime*:

You're the living water  
 God, we thirst for you  
 The dry and the Barren  
 Will flower and bloom  
 You're the sun that's shining  
 You restore my Soul  
 The deeper you call us  
 Oh, the deeper we'll go.

God has given us new life through Jesus Christ. Although he allows winters and trials, He remains faithful and is indeed at work. He invites us into a relationship with Him. And as we allow Him to tend the garden of our souls, we will indeed grow. 🌸



# Alumni Updates

**Noah Millard | CLASS OF 2000**  
**Davy Millard | CLASS OF 2002**

"We would like to introduce you to our home-grown business: TOKYO COFFEE. We are home-grown in the literal sense, since we started out of our house!"



"We have a nice little coffee shop tucked away amongst the old-fashioned streets of Takiyama, just 10 minutes by car from CAJ, and we're here to serve you and your community with delicious coffee and open hearts. Please come visit and share the joy of coffee with us!"  
 ~ Noah and Davy

**LUKE ELLISON | CLASS OF 2002**

Luke Ellison and Naomi Bogosian were married on September 16, 2023, in Virginia, USA. They currently live in the Washington DC metro area, preparing to go to the mission field together, Lord willing, in 2025. ▼



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Phil Ellison ('07), Ellen Shuster (Ellison '04), Mary Lou Ellison (Youngquist '73), Naomi Bogosian Ellison, Luke Ellison ('02), Tom Ellison, Peter Ellison ('06), Grace Ellison ('11), Erick Ellison ('09)"

**Christina Epley | CLASS OF 2003**

Christina Epley Moreau visited the CAJ campus at the end of November 2023 with her husband, Chul. During her visit, she said, "I enjoyed seeing the vibrant fall colors on campus. But I was especially amazed to see the new building with the cafeteria and the fancy turf on the sports field!"



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Jacquie Willson (DeBoer '84), Julie Johnson ('06), Christina Epley Moreau ('03), Chul Moreau

**CHRIS POSTEMA | CLASS OF 2006**

Chris Postema and his wife Kelley were in Japan on a belated honeymoon. They were married in 2020 and live in Washington, D.C. where Chris is a governmental affairs professional with Southwest Airlines.



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Julie Johnson ('06), Chris Postema ('06), Kelley Postema, Principal Jean Hino

**Victor and Heidi Eby | CLASS OF 2007 AND 2013**



Victor Eby ('07) and Heidi Eby (Barkman '13) welcomed their daughter, Ella Hased Eby, in April of 2023. Victor says, "We are blessed and thankful to God for her."

**Bobby Sakamaki | CLASS OF 2009**

In February, Bobby Sakamaki and his new wife, Laura, visited campus. They recently got married this past September. This visit was also particularly special as it was Laura's first trip to Japan. They enjoyed a campus tour, met with former teachers, and were introduced to the second-grade class taught by Bobby's sister, Ashley Nakamura (Sakamaki '08).



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Laura Sakamaki, Bobby Sakamaki ('09), Ashley Nakamura ('08), Yoshi Nakamura

**Zach Smoker | CLASS OF 2011**

On October 21, 2023, Zach Smoker ('11) married Kyoka at Okutama Bible Chalet in front of a small gathering of family and close friends. Paul Mori ('07, FAR RIGHT) officiated the wedding, Hanna Mori ('11, FAR LEFT) sang, and Taro Sawada ('11, NOT PICTURED) was the photographer.



**Christina Kumate | CLASS OF 2012**



The Kumate family at Christina's wedding in Arrowtown, NZ, on December 8, 2023. **LEFT TO RIGHT:** James ('09), Yoshiyuki, Christina ('12), Ramanen, Pam (staff), Callan (James's wife), Angus (17 months)

**Kyle Smoker | CLASS OF 2014**

"Hey everyone! In March 2023, I got married to my beautiful wife, Patricia. We live in Orlando, Florida, and enjoy the warm weather and theme parks. I manage the Donor Team at Wycliffe Associates, actively working to accelerate Bible translation while my wife is a project manager with NASA (whoa, space). Go Knights!" ~ Kyle Smoker ▼



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Patricia's family, Kyle Smoker ('14), Patricia Smoker, Ashley Smoker ('16), Kyoka Smoker, Zach Smoker ('11), Anne Marie Smoker (Deberdt '85), Charles Smoker



**Koji Matsuoka | CLASS OF 2022**

"I signed in September, 2023 with a team named Shinagawa City – which is in the B3 division of the Japanese professional basketball league, aka the B-League. I am a professional player and translator for the team. The team's average age is 27 years old, and still being 20, I lack a lot of experience and IQ as a professional, but I've been doing my best to catch up to my surroundings. I hope to work my way up and eventually be able to play consistent minutes at the professional level!" ~ Koji

**LEFT TO RIGHT CLOCKWISE:** Koji Matsuoka ('22), Izumi Matsuoka ('25), Jamie Matsuoka (Lucas, '90), Misaki Matsuoka ('27)



## Alumni Sports at CAJ

On January 6, 2024, dozens of alumni visited CAJ campus for a friendly alumni field hockey scrimmage and three different alumni basketball games. The alumni came away victorious over their younger counterparts in both the varsity girls' and JV boys' basketball games. However, the varsity boys' game versus alumni was the highlight of the evening – varsity escaped with a thrilling 59-57 overtime victory!



We would love to hear from you! Take a few minutes right now – email your update to [alumni@caj.ac.jp](mailto:alumni@caj.ac.jp)

CAJ Alumni Updates is a forum for updates from alumni, provided as a community service. The inclusion of any piece of alumni updates is not necessarily an endorsement by CAJ.

**EQUIPPING  
STUDENTS TO SERVE  
JAPAN  
AND THE WORLD  
FOR CHRIST.**

[www.caj.ac.jp](http://www.caj.ac.jp)



Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support making our mission possible.

**ACCREDITATION**

Western Association of Schools and Colleges since 1976

**GOVERNMENT STATUS**

Gakko Hojin (School)

