

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive

Gardner-Webb Publications

3-8-2016

Gardner-Webb Community Welcomes Japanese Family with Open Hearts

Office of University Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive>

Gardner-Webb Community Welcomes Japanese Family with Open Hearts

webpublish.gardner-webb.edu/newscenter/gardner-webb-community-welcomes-japanese-family-with-open-hearts/

Office of University
Communications

March 8, 2016

Yoko Shigemi ('16) Returns to School Where her Husband Received his Degree

Yoko Shigemi ('16) and her husband, Akihiko, moved to the United States from Yamaguchi, Japan, almost 20 years ago, so he could attend the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University.

“He had graduated from seminary in Japan and had experience as a pastor in Japan,” Shigemi related. “We arrived with two suitcases, bags and our son, Aisaku, who had just turned 3.”

Now mother and son are both students at Gardner-Webb. He is majoring in violin performance and music business, and she is pursuing a Master of Divinity in pastoral care and counseling. The family has moved to Anderson, S.C., where Akihiko pastors three separate Japanese congregations, but Shigemi remembers with gratitude how Gardner-Webb and the community welcomed them to Boiling Springs, N.C.

“Gardner-Webb family and friends helped us to settle down,” Shigemi elaborated. “Dr. Sheri Adams was concerned for our situation, especially for my son who did not bring books and toys with him. She shared her daughter’s toys. When my husband was stressed out at the divinity school, Dr. Adams and her husband, Dr. Bob, welcomed me and listened to my story kindly, and provided care like God’s care—like under the wings of the hen (Psalm 91:4).”

Growing up in Japan, Shigemi learned about many gods and religions, except one. “No one had ever told me about Christianity until age 18,” she recalled. “When I entered a Christian college in Nagasaki, which was far from my hometown, I encountered Jesus Christ during the messages at chapel. I began to think and to feel that Christianity is the ultimate truth, and that Jesus Christ is my savior.”

After she became a Christian, Shigemi met a Gardner-Webb alumna, the late Jean Teague Cabaniss. Cabaniss was a missionary in Japan, teaching English at Seinan Jo Gakuin University and leading a Bible study at the church where Shigemi worked as secretary. Cabaniss left the mission field, and when she became GWU Director of International Student Programs, she invited Shigemi to come visit Gardner-Webb. Shigemi stayed with

her for eight months and then returned to Japan. After Shigemi's husband graduated from seminary, he requested information from Cabaniss about the School of Divinity, which led to the couple's move to America.

"Many Christian friends, ministers, church members and missionaries have poured their lives and their teaching into me," Shigemi praised. "And now, I am blessed among Gardner-Webb divinity school families."

However, if she had to choose one professor who has influenced her the most, that would be Adams. "When I took her courses, such as Christian History and Women in Ministry, she taught not only academic knowledge, but also showed and shared her life as a Christian, a woman, a theologian, a mother, a wife, a missionary and a professor," Shigemi explained. "She talked about how she grew up among racists and discrimination in various forms. Through the study of Christian history, she taught me the importance of today's news connecting with the Bible and with Christian history. She is aware of women's ministry and how important it is to stand up as a woman who is called by God."

Shigemi also appreciates the diversity in the School of Divinity faculty and student population. "Dr. Terry Casino, Dr. Hebert Palomino, and Dr. Sophia Steibel are wonderful spiritual leaders who give me hope that I can do something for God, who leads me through grace and my wilderness," she assessed. "I believe that I am equipping myself at Gardner-Webb because of the excellent and caring professors."