

Transformed



Fall 2021

A newsletter of TMS Global



Members of the Crossroads of the Nations multi-cultural church in the Nashville area.

Reaching U.S. diaspora communities

At Crossroads of the Nations in Brentwood Tennessee, on most days and nights of the week, people from all over the world gather together to practice English and study the Bible. This multi-cultural, multi-ethnic worship center in a Nashville suburb serves a wide variety of ethnicities, including a large number of Japanese people.

Saying yes to God

Neal Hicks helped start the church. He now leads English classes, and the Bible studies that come

after, as well as prepares meals that accompany the meetings.

Hicks is no stranger to cross-cultural work. He served with TMS Global in Japan for three decades. But his story begins long before that.

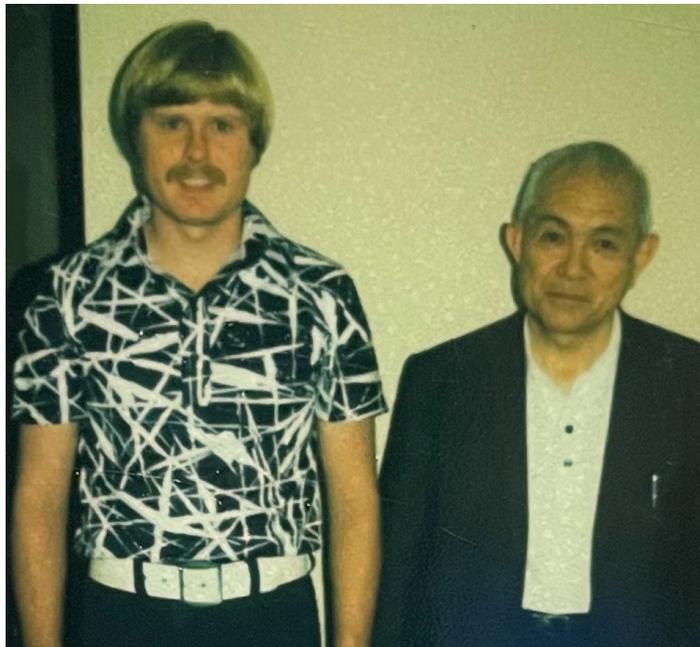
“My life is the result of missions,” Hicks says. “It’s the result of a group of Methodist churches in the late 1800s who said yes to God’s call to go to Japan.”

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Those U.S. churches sent cross-cultural workers who planted churches in Japan. In one of those churches in the 1920s, a young Japanese man heard the gospel and gave his life to Jesus. He attended seminary in the United States before returning to Japan to become a pastor.



Neal Hicks and his father-in-law, Mr. Akasaka, in Japan in 1977.

Meeting 'Jesus'

That man became Hicks's father-in-law,

Hicks describes his father-in-law, Mr. Akasaka, as "godly," even "holy."

"The first time I truly met Jesus," Hicks says, "he was in the form of a Japanese man."

After a visit from Mr. Akasaka, and a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit, Neal found himself on his knees, asking God for help. "I've ruined everything I've ever touched. God, is there any way you can make me like my father-in-law? That's the way I want to be."

Eventually God called Neal and his late-wife Mari to Japan, where they spent nearly three decades serving in a variety of ways.

In 2011, Neal and Mari returned to the United States, due to Mari's health. After Mari passed away in 2012, Neal wasn't sure what to do.

"Maybe 30 years' worth of cross-cultural work was enough," he thought to himself. "Maybe it's time to retire." Then he heard God say, "So you think 30-plus years is good enough? No, all of that was just preparation for now. I want you to relocate and minister to people here."

Then I heard God say, "...I want you to relocate and minister to people here."

Hicks was surprised to learn there was a large Japanese community in Nashville. There are currently more than 190 Japanese companies in Tennessee. "I didn't know this, but the Lord knew," Hicks says.

He was warned by some that if he relocated to the United States full time, he would lose support from churches since he would not be serving in overseas ministry. And that's what happened, says Hicks.

But God is still making a global impact through Hicks's obedience.

Not without risks

Hicks says it can be challenging for Japanese people to risk losing their identity in their company or family when they find their identity in Christ instead. But he is a witness that when people follow Christ, their freedom is immediate.

"When they hear they can be forgiven, and it's not based upon performance, that's very good news," Hicks says. "The Japanese are dangerous to the kingdom of hell. When they learn the truth, see who Jesus is, they'll turn the world upside down with the gospel!"

Many of the Japanese people who come to Crossroads of the Nations are only in Nashville for about three years, before their companies transfer them to another place or back home.



With more than 190 Japanese companies in Tennessee, Nashville is central to a significant Japanese diaspora community.

God drawing the nations

Our goal is to reach as many people as we can with the gospel before the company sends them to the next place,” Hicks says. “We see ourselves as a missionary sending agency,” he says.

People hear and respond to the gospel at Crossroads and then share the good news of Jesus back in Japan and other places. Hicks says when they return to Japan, he helps connect them with a church in their area.

In this life, Hicks has watched the gospel message travel back and forth from Japan to the United States over and over again. Hicks said *yes* to Jesus because of the witness of a Japanese man, who said *yes* to Jesus because of the witness of U.S. churches. And the good news keeps spreading.

“It’s really overwhelming for me to realize that my life is the result of a small group of churches praying that God would raise up missionaries from among them,” Hicks says. “Because they were obedient, trusting and following God, He made them fishers of men.”

Now Hicks is watching God bring the nations to his doorstep.

About 30 ethnic groups are represented at Crossroads. “Every time someone new walks through the front door, we don’t know what country they’re going to be from,” Hicks says. “We’re not doing it. We’re watching Him do it.”

By Jenifer Jones

Pioneering In ministry

We are so happy to share with you the story of Neal Hicks, one of our longest serving cross-cultural workers. As you have read, Neal had already had a remarkable life and ministry. He thought retirement might be next. Instead, what was next was another fruitful ministry serving among a Japanese community—this time, in Nashville!

Neal’s story highlights a ministry strategy he helped pioneer at TMS Global--ministry among diaspora (“scattered”) communities. Today some of our other cross-cultural workers in the U.S. are focused on outreach to Muslims, Hindus, and Chinese.

Neal’s story also highlights the impact of local churches who deeply commit to advancing God’s kingdom. (For this reason, TMS Global serves local churches in the U.S. and abroad, helping them more fully engage in God’s mission.)

Maybe mostly, Neals’s story reminds us that the message of Jesus is good news to *every human heart*. What an unspeakable privilege to share this good news with the world—with you!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Max A. Wilkins".

Max Wilkins
President & CEO

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It is your support that enables our cross-cultural workers to live and serve in communities around the world, sharing the love and message of Jesus with their neighbors.

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