

Chip Maupin was fond of the sushi served in Nagoya, Japan. He also enjoyed the local culture in the city of more than two million people. And, while sightseeing certainly was on tap during his recent eight-day trip to Japan's third-largest city, Maupin was there on a mission, one that utilized his counseling and his ministry skills.

Maupin, who is a licensed mental health practitioner with Ogallala Counseling and an ordained minister with the Independent Christian Church, was invited to Japan to counsel the staff of the Mustard Seed Global Fellowship, which, in late 2009, planted its first church at Nagoya, the Mustard Seed Christian Church.

The Mustard Seed Global Foundation is a church planting organization working to launch a network of Christ-centered churches among the largest unreached cities of the world.

Maupin was asked to travel to Japan so he could meet face-to-face with the missionaries and establish a relationship.

"I got to spend time with them as a group and as individuals," he said. "Some had personal issues, while others wanted to talk about leadership and theology."

If, in the future, any of the missionaries are in need of counseling services, they can contact Maupin via phone, e-mail or a Web cam system.

Maupin said the MSGF staff, consisting mainly of Americans, typically enters a community on a staggered schedule and spend nine months to a year at one site while "planting" a Christian church. During that time, the missionaries could be in need of counseling services for a variety of reasons, Maupin said.

Quite often, Maupin said, he worked with the group's leaders, educating them about the inner dynamics of groups.

The opportunity to utilize his counseling and ministry skills came through his brother, Rob Maupin, an assistant professor at Lincoln Christian University at Lincoln, Ill., who also a member of the MSGF board.

Rob Maupin had spent five years as a missionary at Mexico City, and twice Chip Maupin had gone to Mexico City to provide counseling services for missionaries.

“The first time there had been a crisis for the group. The second time they wanted outside encouragement and ideas,” Maupin said.

While in Japan, Mau-pin said he was encouraged and inspired by the work of the Mustard Seed Global Foundation group members. The group rents space in a dance studio to hold church services.

“Their first location was in a sports bar, because you know, they aren’t busy on a Sunday morning,” Maupin said

Maupin said because Christianity is one-half of one percent of the population, Japanese religious traditions do not include attending church on Sundays. Yet, during the Sunday service he attended in the recently planted church, more than 50 people, representing six different countries, were in attendance.

“It’s very much a cross-cultural congregation,” Maupin said.

While many in the Ogallala area know Maupin as a counselor, others know him as a minister. Maupin’s first post-secondary degree was in theology, which he earned from Platte Valley Bible College, where he was ordained a minister.

“I preached in churches and was a youth minister before I went for my master’s degree,” Maupin said.

Then, he earned a master’s degree in marriage, family and child counseling from Pacific Christian College. For the last 20-plus years, Maupin has been a mental health counselor while also ministering in area churches.

“I don’t consider myself a Christian counselor. I am a Christian who does counseling work,” he said.

Currently, Maupin is the minister in the Grainton Village Church, a non-denominational church, where he serves a small congregation.

“They don’t want their church to die and as long as they stay open, I’ll go,” he said.

Maupin said the trip not only was an opportunity for travel and excitement, but also an opportunity for spiritual fulfillment.

“It was a huge blessing,” Maupin said. “I look forward to going back next year.”

By Mary Pierce, Keith County News