

JAPAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN MISSION

from 1893



to 1993

EVANGELISM ENTERS JAPAN (ONE STEP BEHIND MODERNIZATION) 1887 - 1902

UNITED SYNOD SOUTH

A loose federation of area synods, made up of evangelical Lutheran churches of German immigrants, living along the mid-Atlantic seaboard, met in 1820 to form the General Synod. However, with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 America was split in to two, which in turn caused a division within the church. The southern half of General Synod broke away in 1863 forming the General Synod South. Minutes of the 1884 General Synod South convention indicate a strong emphasis on evangelism both at home and abroad. After securing suggestions from the General Synod North, a decision was made to support a missionary named Swartz who was working in India.



First Generation Missionaries and their Families

The Holston and Tennessee synods were added to the General Synod South in 1886, forming the United Synod South. The new mission board was given the task of continuing the work of evangelism at home and abroad. Overseas evangelism continued to center on the support of Swartz in India. This came to a sudden end in January 1887, when Swartz returned from India and questions were raised on the mission field concerning his faith and theology. As a result, in August, Swartz resigned in frustration. During this time the mission board carefully analyzed the world scene. The outcome of this examination was the presentation of a plan to the church convention in November to "open mission work in Japan" and "to appoint a permanent secretary to the board." These decisions indicate the board's willingness to launch out in an entirely new direction of mission.

FIRST LUTHERAN MISSIONARY TO JAPAN

However, the mission board ran into many difficulties in selecting a missionary. One candidate had health problems. Another candidate had to decline at the last moment because of family problems. At last, in November 1891, the board reached the final step in signing a contract with J.A.B. Scherer of the Southwest Virginia Synod. Also mentioned in the records of this meeting is an applicant by the name of R.B. Peery, who was studying at Gettysburg Seminary. From then on events moved quickly. Young Scherer, who was serving a church as a licentiate of the South Carolina Synod, passed his ministerial examination even though he had not completed his theological education. He was ordained, and set sail from San Francisco in February 1892. All of this took place in the short span of three months.



Dr. R. B. Peery



Dr. J. A. B. Scherer

JAPAN OF THAT PERIOD

The year 1892 was the 25th year of the Meiji era. Already a quarter of a century had passed since the Meiji Restoration. Modernization was nearly completed in government, education, industry and the military. The Imperial Constitution was established in 1889 (Meiji 22) and the Imperial Script for Education was established in 1890 (Meiji 23). These were said to be finishing touches to the process of modernizing Japan, and at the same time, they indicate the uniqueness of that process. The constitutional monarchy system, on which the Emperor system was established, clearly indicated both from within and without an inclination toward totalitarianism. Surely this was one of the reasons the United Synod South made the decision to send missionaries to Japan. As symbolized by the cliquish society that gathered at the "Rokumeikan" daily, movement away from the principles of western enlightenment had already begun in the second decade of Meiji.

Christianity in modern Japan had also covered a quarter of a century. Even though major denominations had entered Japan in an ecumenical spirit on the wave of western enlightenment, they had soon established their own bases. In many churches, leadership had already been handed over from veteran missionaries to national pastors.



First Finnish Missionaries - Shimosuwa

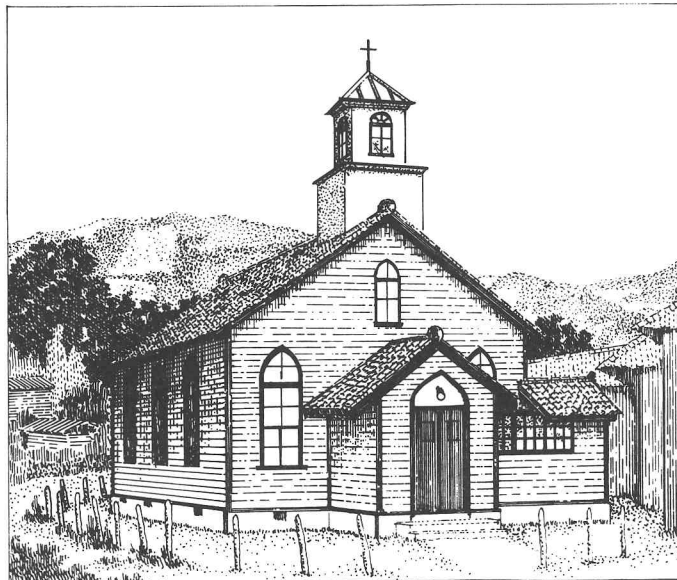
ARRIVAL IN TOKYO

Scherer arrived in Tokyo, February 1892, at a time when freedom of choice concerning residence or travel was not yet allowed in Japan. As a foreigner he lived briefly in the restricted area for foreigners in Tsukiji, where he studied the Japanese language. Surely he spent some of his time examining the overall situation in Japan and looking for possible places to begin mission work. In November of that same year Peery, who had finished his studies at Gettysburg Seminary and had been sent out from the same Virginia Synod, joined Scherer. These two young men were 23 years old and were paid an annual salary of \$750 (not unreasonably low when compared to the board secretary's salary of \$1,200).

SAGA THE FIRST MISSION AREA

We have no definite proof as to whether or not other established churches in Japan gave advice or directions to new missions concerning choice of areas in which to begin work. But if we look at the history of the Southern Presbyterian Church, which arrived at about the same time as the Lutheran church, we can see that a consultation of Presbyterians indicated three possible locations -in Sendai, Nagoya, and Kochi- for starting evangelism, and that Nagoya and Kochi were eventually chosen. The Lutheran church did not have related missions, and we can only wonder who or what kind of advice Scherer and Peery received.

The policy of the first mission board was very clear. It was to preach the gospel and build churches in areas where Christianity had not yet advanced. However, there were government rules regulating where foreigners could live, and people were not allow to travel freely. Thus, it is not surprising that Scherer's final decision was made with the help of an outside source. Scherer learned that a friend of an earlier unsuccessful mission candidate, a certain Dr. Bradbury, who was a teacher of English in the Saga Middle School, suddenly had to return to the states. Taking advantage of this opportunity, it is not surprising that Scherer made his decision to go to Saga. With the construction of iron furnaces and a railroad, Saga was surely not all that far behind the times. By inheriting the position as a teacher of English in the middle school, Scherer was able to immediately put down roots in Saga. Today when one stands on the spot near the remains of the Saga castle where Scherer lived briefly, one can not help wondering what this unmarried 23 year old youth thought about upon his arrival to this area.



Saga Lutheran Church - 1900



Mrs. and Rev. Ryohei Yamauchi

FIRST WORSHIP SERVICE EASTER 1893

Peery eventually joined Scherer in Saga, along with their teacher of Japanese language, Ryohei Yamauchi and his wife Mikie. After great difficulty they were able to rent a house and the first Lutheran worship service was held on Easter, April 2, 1893 (Meiji 26). We are told that the address was 78 Meijibashi-dori, but we can only guess at the location as we have no way of pinpointing it exactly. In spite of opposition and persecution in Saga, the mission front gradually widened as preaching places were opened in neighboring areas. Naomaru Suzuki joined in these evangelistic efforts, making up a team composed of two American missionaries and three national evangelists. The Small Catechism, which is necessary for baptismal preparation, was translated by 1895. One thing followed another, as theological education training was opened in 1896, and a worship liturgy was translated in 1897 with the help of a deacon of the local Anglican congregation. Unfortunately, Scherer had to return to America that year because of illness.

OTHER LUTHERAN MISSION GROUPS

In 1898, J.M.T. Winther of Denmark stopped over in Japan on his way to China from America. Joining C.L. Brown who arrived from Virginia at about the same time, he constructed a church on land purchased in Hanabusa-koji. The "Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church" was officially organized that same year. This was a prudent first step by the mission board in response to the request of missionaries on the local field. The second step occurred when the mission front expanded to Kumamoto (N. Yamauchi) and Kurume (J.M.T. Winther.) The third step was the ordination of Ryohei Yamauchi, and Naomaru who had been adopted by Ryohei. Kumamoto and Kurume soon became the center of the Lutheran church. Peery resigned as a missionary and returned to America in 1903. Winther gave his entire life to working in Japan. Brown, after putting a great deal of effort into establishing Kyushu Gakuin, became secretary of the foreign mission board. C.K. Lippard, who was added in 1900, played an important role in leadership of the Lutheran church. In 1905 and 1907 A.J. Stirewalt and L.S.G. Miller joined our church, providing dedicated service over many years. The growth of the Lutheran church was in large part due to this second wave of missionaries. Also in 1900, the Rev. A.R. Wellroos family and Esteri Kurvinen arrived by ship from the Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland (LEAF) to begin work in Nagasaki. They also cooperated in the work at Saga, but unfortunately the Wellroos family had to return home because of family illness. This left only the young sixteen year Miss Kurvinen to carry on cooperation in Saga. Later, with the arrival of missionaries from Finland, LEAF moved their mission to Shinshu (in the northern Japan Alps), where new evangelism was started.

One of the events we must take notice of is the opening of the Saga Kindergarten in October 1902. Not only was it just the tenth Christian kindergarten to be opened in Japan, it carried great weight in influencing the mission policy of adding educational and later social welfare institutions, to accompany evangelistic outreach and church formation.



Saga Kindergarten

POWER OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

From the start of overseas missions by major American denominations in 1812, it was the women of the church who supported the work with their offerings. Following the Civil War, women all over the country moved forward in forming a variety of organizations to meet particular needs of society. These efforts reached a national level in the formation of the Lutheran "Women's Missionary Society," which resulted in the sending of financial offerings and women missionaries to overseas mission fields.



Lutheran Church Women

It was only natural that the United Synod South, which had gotten off to a late start in foreign missions, would gradually put into practice what it learned from others. In 1881 women's missionary societies from five congregations of the Southwest Virginia Synod came together to form the synod's "Women's Missionary Society" for the specific purpose of supporting Missionary Swartz in India. Later, when mission work began in Japan, this society fully supported Missionary Brown. After the formation of women's mission societies in South Carolina and in North Carolina, these three organizations came together in 1906 as the "Women's Missionary Conference of the United Synod South." The one cent/one dollar offerings of these women, accompanied by their heartfelt prayers, organized a great ground-swell for overseas missions. As mergers took place on the American scene, this missionary movement spread through out the country, becoming one large organization. The omission of the word "missionary" in the 1956 organizational name change to the "Lutheran Church Women" was symbolic in that direct involvement of women in foreign missions through their own organization came to an end.

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WELFARE

It can be said that the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, in both its infant days and in its growing period, was heavily supported by these women's missionary organizations. Along with evangelism and congregational formation, the push of the "Women's Missionary Conference" brought Saga kindergarten into being, and this was the first step on the road to the establishment of other Lutheran educational and social welfare institutions. Without a doubt, these women were the real body of support behind the building of our educational and welfare facilities and their management. They also sent and supported women missionaries through their own organization. It can be said that the broadening of the church's basic policy of evangelism was due to their power.



Kyushu Gakuin - First Building

WIDENING THE CHURCH BASE AND VISION

The period of about twenty years from 1902 until 1920 was a time when the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, which had added various institutional facilities to its evangelism and congregation formation activity, built up its base in a variety of different ways. This period is marked as the formative period of our church.

From the viewpoint of the earlier church goals of evangelism and church formation, the widening of the front line to Hakata, Ogi, Tokyo, Hita, Moji, Shimonoseki, Nagoya, Amagi, Osaka, Omuta, Nogata, Kobe is worth noticing. The Finnish branch too, which had moved from Kyushu to the Shinshu area, rapidly opened churches in Shimo-suwa, Ikebukuro, Okaya, Kami-suwa, Iida, and Komagane. We can see that both of these missions, which had begun working together in Kyushu, had pushed outward with their vision until they had reached as far as Tokyo.

生誕	明治廿九年三月廿六日 （明治廿九年三月廿六日）	父母	産地	熊本縣能代郡白濱村	堅信	原籍	熊本縣能代郡白濱村	轉入	志水徳玄	事故								
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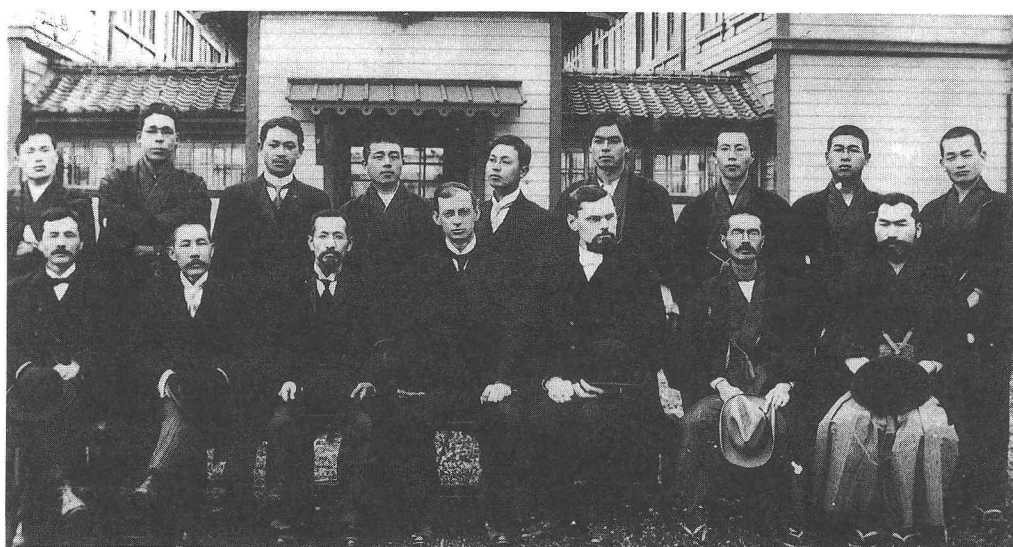
Record of First Baptism

BICAMERAL SYSTEM AND SHADAN (LEGAL HOLDING BODY)

Concerning church structure and cooperation between the Japanese church and the mission board, we should note that the joint ministerium which began in 1900 officially became the annual convention as of 1915. The missionary association, which had been formed in 1910, and the annual convention worked together through a bicameral form of government. In 1912 a national president and secretary were elected. As early as 1903, a ten year plan for self-support was adopted. A program of aid to further the education of young women was inaugurated in 1907. The first rules of the church, "regulations and by-laws," were decided in 1903, giving us a good picture of that period. In turn, these by-laws became the first church constitution (1919), which was based on the bicameral system. The Ruteru-Kyoho in 1900 which became the Ruteru-Shinpo in 1902 and developed into the Ruteru in 1911, also reveals the expansion of the church. The monthly church newsletter from Saga, which gives personal news concerning churches and members spread out across Japan, also presents a warm and personal picture of the church at that time. The missionary shadan was established in 1909 for the purpose of registering church property that had previously been listed in the names of individual church members. In 1910, a plan for financial independence was inaugurated. All of this indicates that the church was growing in this period.

TRAINING OF MINISTERIAL CANDIDATES

The training of pastors began in Saga in 1903. A full program of theological education was inaugurated in Kumamoto in 1909 under the name of the Lutheran Theological Seminary. It is said that the seminary began in the newly constructed A.J. Stirewalt residence. There is a stone inscribed with this fact at the base of a tree near the entry of an apartment building which is presently built on that site. It would be good for those visiting Kumamoto to stop at this site and to dwell a few minutes thinking about those pioneers. Finishing two years of preparatory courses and three years of theological courses for ministerial preparation, the first seminary class graduated in June 1915. This led to the second ordination of five persons in 1917: Tsunenari Wasa, Satoaki Matsumoto, Inoko Miura, Masato Kameyama, and Denki Honda.



Handwritten names in Japanese characters, likely identifying the individuals in the photograph. The names are written in a cursive style. Some names are circled, and there are some additional markings and dates like '1911' and 'M. 4-11'.

Professor and Students of First Seminary Class - Kumamoto

KYUSHU GAKUIN, JI AI EN

In 1911, two years after the founding of the seminary, Kyushu Gakuin was established largely through the efforts of C.L. Brown, and a fruitful mission policy of expanding institutional facilities. The seminary became the theological department of Kyushu Gakuin and in 1914 was recognized as a professional school under the professional school law. In the same year Kyushu Gakuin was recognized as a legal body. Some of the issues that still face the church today concerning legal bodies date to this time. The Finnish church also held seminary training in Iida in 1913 for a brief period of time.



Judo and Kendo Club - Kyushu Gakuin

The policy of establishing church institutions continued to expand in scope. From church related kindergartens, to the establishment of large independent schools such as Kyushu Gakuin, this development was mainly seen in the educational field. Later, this trend broadened to include social work institutions. The actual decision to open social welfare work was made in 1919, and Ji Ai En was built in 1920 in Kumamoto.

RETROSPECT AND EVALUATION

The widening of educational and social ministry was greatly influenced by the dedicated efforts of the “Women’s Missionary Conference of the United Synod South.” Perhaps it could even be said that it was entirely due to their efforts. However, the consolidation of materials covering “the participation and dedication of women in mission in Japan” has lagged behind times, and in the Sixty Years of JELC History commemorative booklet, the contribution of women in mission is not even touched upon. Challenging research topics concerning women in mission that still await us today, even if the resource materials are poor, include such topics as the women’s missionary society’s support of C.L. Brown in the early days, contributions to the building of Kyushu Gakuin, the sending of initial female missionaries Martha Akard and Mary Lou Bowers in 1914, followed by the two Powlas sisters Maude and Annie, the establishment of Ji Ai En, and the 1926 founding of Kyushu Jogakuin. Each one of these topics indicates the power of the women’s movement at that particular time. We must also never forget the earnest prayer and zeal that stood behind this dedicated women’s movement. In line with the Mission Board’s policy of widening of evangelism outward from Saga, and in awareness of the financial situation, we cannot deny that it was the strong backing of the Women’s Missionary Conference that made this growth possible. It can even be shown that they were able to influence the board and at times had the power to control it.



Jiaien Nursing Home



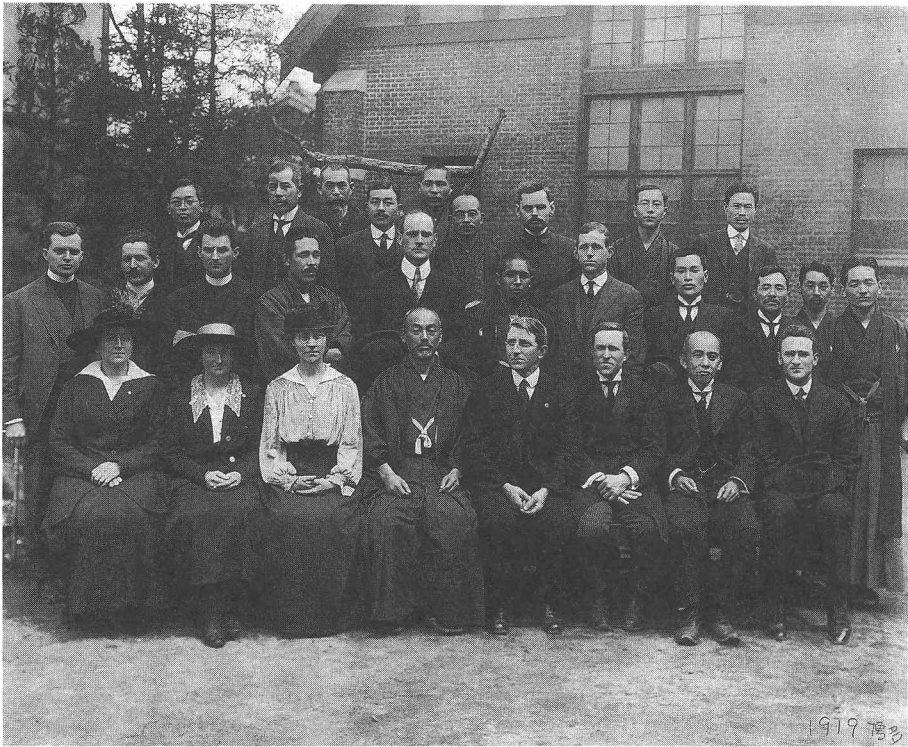
Kurume Church - 1917

DECISION MAKING PROCESS, RESPONSIBILITY

On the other hand, there were surely merits and demerits in the multi-faceted approach between “policy” and “reality” concerning evangelism in Japan. The backside of aggressive dedication reveals a number of problems. For example, within the bicameral system -made up of the annual church convention and the missionary association- the final right of decision always rested with the missionary association. The annual convention on the other hand, which was made of Japanese church members, was not even allowed to express its opinion in areas such as education or social welfare. Hidden within this problem, was the complicated issue of mission board initiative for evangelism in Japan, as over against the work and activities in which women missionaries were directly involved. But even if these issues belonged to the missionary association, the Japanese members surely did not keep silent at times. Already within the American church, the decisions of the Women’s Missionary Conference swayed the decisions of the Board concerning personnel and work, and this made for a double structure of power. For missionaries on the field it was a question of whom they were being supported by, and for example, to which supporting group they were responsible for sending reports. If we were to check out where the missionaries of that period sent their work reports and then study the contents of those reports, we could affirm some of these hypotheses. In truth, we who are of the generation that began our ministries following the war, heard and saw some of this disharmony as eyewitnesses. We should notice however that some of these matters were taken care of at about the same time that the “Women’s Missionary Conference” came to an end within the Lutheran churches in America. This came about naturally as the women of American, particularly church women, turned their vision to a variety of new and different concerns at the end of World War II.

LOOKING INWARDLY

In 1920, the JELC embraced at least 15 local congregations. Evangelism and church growth were amalgamated further and, along with the inauguration of educational and social welfare facilities, efforts were centered on church stabilization and management. At this time, when both Japan and the world were being influenced by the Japan/Russia war, and later by World War I, it seems that the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church paid little attention to the great number of issues facing society. The unanswered internal problems facing the church at that period, continued to affect the direction and policy of the church in later years. Small in size and grouped tightly together, “was the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church really ready and able to carry out its task earnestly in the areas of church, education and social ministries?” These questions were carried over into the next period, the period of World War II.



Annual Church Meeting - 1919

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE FLOW OF HISTORY 1921 - 1941

EARLY JELC RECORDS AND STATISTICS

Historical materials concerning the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church are collected in the Ruteru. Almost all of the issues since the time of the Ruteru Kyoho (published from 1900) down to the Ruteru of today are preserved, giving us a valuable historical record of nearly one hundred years. Minutes from the the first JELC General Convention held in 1920, called according to the constitution and by-laws drawn up in 1919 (Taisho 8), are available. The minutes of all other church conventions too are preserved in their entirety. At the same time, materials on the American side are available. These include church publications, as well as the English minutes of church conventions. These records are especially interesting because they include personal reports written by individual missionaries. And, because the church convention minutes include the annual reports of the mission board, one can grasp a total view of the situation each year. By putting these materials together, we are able to form a fairly accurate historical picture.

From the 1921 (Taisho 10) church convention, statistical records were consolidated and added as an appendix to the convention minutes. Incidentally, the records of 1921 indicate that there were 23 congregations consisting of 1,390 members, and that prior to merger with the Finnish church in 1940 (Showa 15) there were 46 congregations with 5,259 members, and that after the merger the church consisted of 58 congregations and 7,158 members. It is interesting to note that some congregations did not report their statistics, leaving their records blank. Hence, the figures given are not totally accurate. All of which indicates that little has changed over the years. These church conventions minutes and statistical records help us to grasp the development of church administration. Strong central church administration was a logical development of the first constitution and its by-laws (1919), and even accelerated by it.



Copy of the
Ruteru Kyoho - 1900

STRENGTHENING INWARDLY, UNAWARE OUTWARDLY

If history had progressed peacefully, these twenty years would surely have been years in which our church strengthened itself internally. When we look in detail at the inner workings of the church, we can see that things were moving in that direction. For example, until the church was abruptly hit by the events of the time, the church hardly showed awareness of the direction in which history outside the church was moving. In fact, in order to fortify the structure of the church, a decision was made in 1922 to “suspend pioneer evangelism for five years,” presumably to strengthen local congregations. The issue of self-reliance was continually raised as seen in the inauguration of plans calling for “self-support of 50% of the pastor’s salary” and in the call of the missionary association for “full self-support.” In 1929 the Kurume congregation became the first JELC church to become fully self-supporting. In all honesty, church growth was minimal during the first ten years of this period with the number of congregations barely reaching the twenties. In the latter ten years, however, congregations increased to nearly double that number.

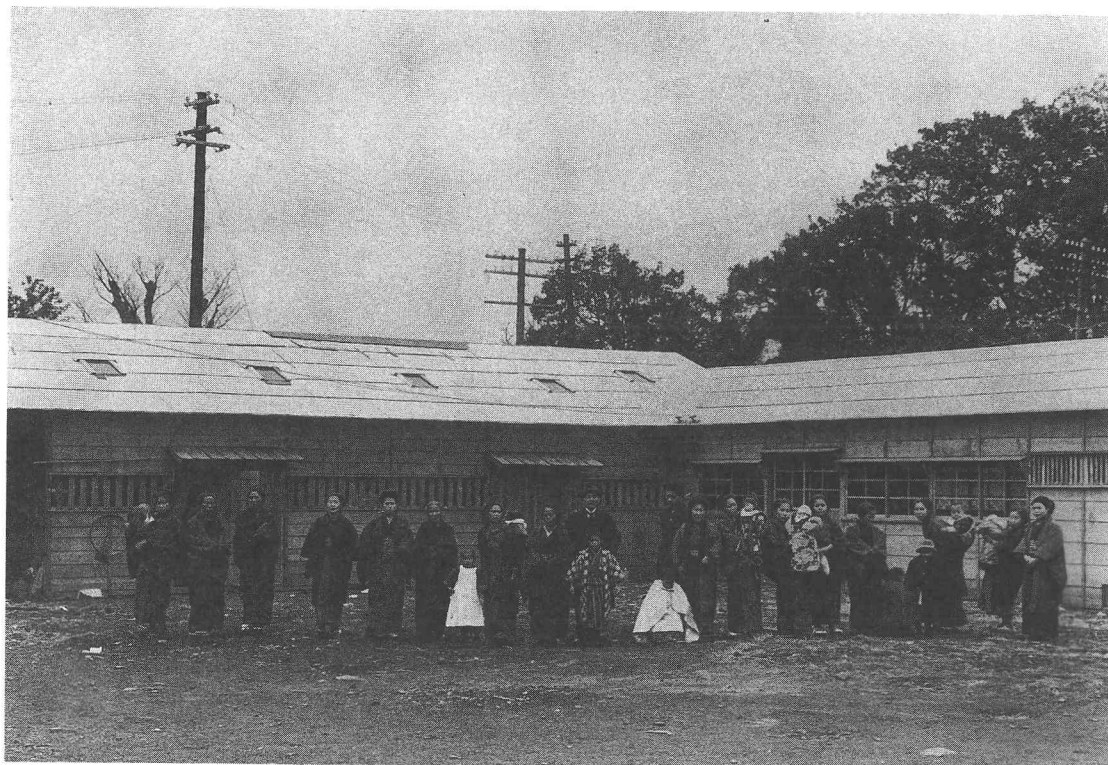


Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saginomiya, Tokyo
Ground Breaking - 1934

GREAT KANTO EARTHQUAKE, START OF TOKYO WELFARE INSTITUTIONS

Nevertheless, during this twenty year period, development was not completely inconspicuous. For example, during this period, established congregations were being strengthened, and a new liturgical service was officially adopted with such thoroughness that all other previously used forms were withdrawn from use. In 1925 (Taisho 14), the seminary was moved to Saginomiya in Tokyo and became “Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary.” The following year, after many years of planning, Kyushu Jogakuin was opened. Thus we see the investment of people and financial resources in the field of education. There were also lay movement activities.

Two consultations for lay members were held at Kyoto and Kurume in 1925 (Taisho 14), centering on the theme of self-reliance. In 1928 (Showa 3), a women's convention was held and the federation of JELC women was organized. As part of this trend, a training course for lay people was opened at the seminary in 1930. There was also the response of the church to the unexpected disaster of the Great Earthquake of 1923. Social welfare activities were initiated immediately for the relief to fire-storm victims. These were followed by the establishment of Tokyo Home for the Aged and Bethany Home. The inner strengthening of the church can also be seen in the decision made to publish a translation of the Lutheran confessions, portions of which were completed by 1935 (Showa 10).



Tokyo Nursing Home

UNICAMERAL SYSTEM, SECOND CONSTITUTION

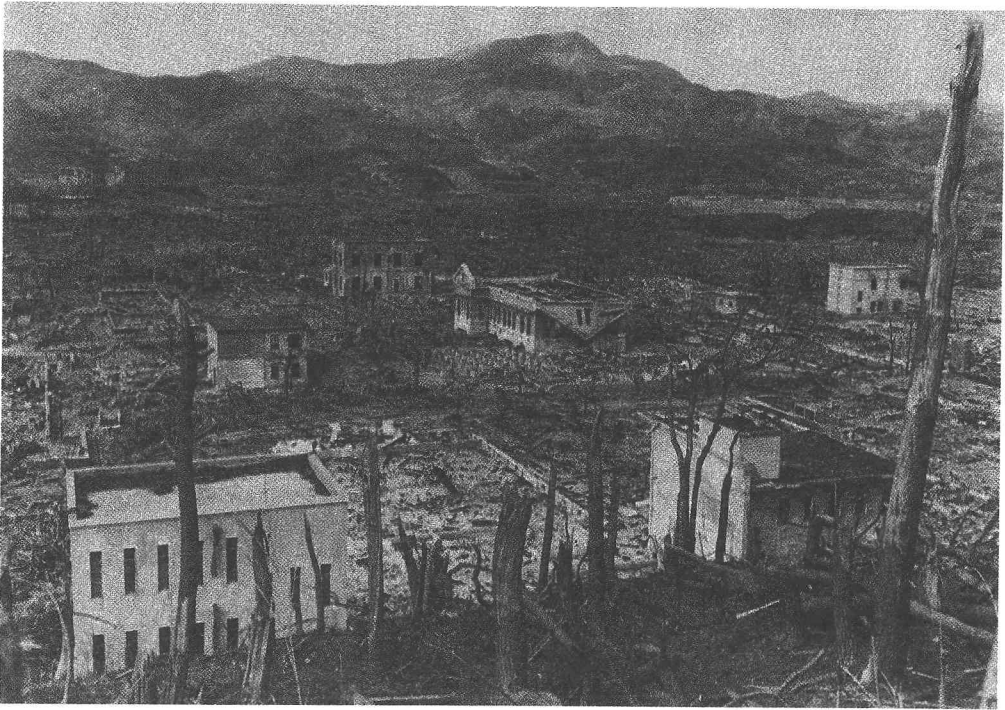
The adoption of the second constitution and by-laws set the stage for the change to a unicameral system of organization. Two years of negotiations followed, from the time of the church's first request to the mission board, before this new system was established in 1930 (Showa 5). This constitution (and by-laws) has basically continued until the present day as the norm for our church. At that time there were 27 congregations with 3,362 members. Compared to our present number of approximately 140 congregations and 20,000 members. We realize the need for reevaluation of our constitution as the JELC faces its second century of mission and evangelization.

EVENTS AND TENDENCIES OUTSIDE OF THE CHURCH

While the church was putting effort into building itself internally, it of course was not totally unaware of the changes in the world around it. We have mentioned the immediate response of the church to the needs raised by Kanto earthquake. In 1924 (Taisho 13), the year following this earthquake, the “Anti-emigrant Act” was adopted in the USA. A declarative statement was made that “from the point of view of the churches related to America this law impedes evangelistic mission.” Thus the rising sense of alarm on the world scene at the beginning of the Showa period, and the church’s efforts toward self-reliance, were not unrelated. In 1934 the church adopted a resolution calling for the acceleration of self-support, and in the following year, a ten-year plan for self-reliance, as well as a coalition for self-management, were initiated, all of which indicate the increased tempo of the times. But, as to awareness of, or any warning and criticism of the rapid militarization of the country at the beginning of the Showa period, it seems to have been a topic off limits. Therefore when the church was finally swept up by the wave of the times, its response was overly optimistic. Thus, in the end the church was caught off-guard as it was engulfed in the sudden panic of those times. In those unexpected events, was it best to endure patiently, waiting for storm to pass? That kind of passive attitude was not allowed, of course, as the church was forced to respond to the demands for obedience and cooperation enforced on it by the state government. The period from 1937 (Showa 12) when Manchuria was invaded until the start of World War II in 1941, was a period of great upheaval.



Scene of Japanese Invasion into China



Ruins in Nagasaki after World War II

LAW TO CONTROL RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

The “Law for the Control of Religious organizations” was submitted to the Diet repeatedly, failing each time, but was passed into law in 1939 (Showa 14). We must recognize that there were a number of positions and opinions within the various Christian churches concerning this issue. Many were quite optimistic in stating that this turn of events was positive for Christianity and a victory, “believing that this in no way restrains rightful activities.” From the beginning of the Meiji constitution (1889, Meiji 22), and in following years when Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity had been listed as the “Three Religions” (1912, Meiji 45), the Christian church had rejoiced in being officially recognized by Japanese society. Many Christians naively welcomed this new law as an extension of that policy. In 1940 (Showa 15) the calendar was renamed as the “2600th Year of the Imperial Reign.” With the call for “All Citizens to Fully Support Their Country,” many religious groups were happy to be asked for their participation and some even evaluated the new religion organization law as a “good opportunity for the church.” But for all religious organizations, the political policy of the government of that period led repeatedly into deeper and deeper darkness. The “regulation” of religious activities quickly raised its ugly head in its true form as “coercion” of religion. For example, under the new law - “Control of Religious Organizations” - the government did not recognize religious organizations in their existing forms. Recognition was given only to those religious organizations with more than 50 congregations and more than 5,000 members. Glance back at the statistics of our church mentioned earlier for those years. Plans were made to merge with the Finnish Lutheran church and the process went as far as the final step before the official recognition of merger.

THE DARKNESS OF CHURCH UNION

In the summer of 1940, the government made the decision to “expand into the southeast Asia through the use of military power.” In September they invaded Northern Indochina. In October the Imperial Rule Assistance Association was established and all government policies were aligned with this military strategy. With the enactment of the “Law and Regulation of Religious Bodies in Japan,” the policy of the Ministry of Education changed drastically. The move was made to recognize only one Catholic organization and one Protestant organization. The federation of Christian churches took the lead in working toward a swift union of protestant churches. On October 17th at the “All Japan Christian Gathering” on the occasion of the “Celebration of the 2600th Year of the Imperial Reign,” the statement that should have been read, “we hope for complete cooperation of all Christian believers in one large body,” was instead read as, “we desire the goal of one united church.” Sixty-three representatives from the various churches gathered there made up the new ruling council. This included two representatives from the Lutheran church. The two Lutheran representatives strongly emphasized that church union must first be reached through agreement in creed, and that “blocs” should be allowed to exist from the beginning. Yet they seemed to have had very little influence. The joint council moved toward adopting a common creed, but even the shortest sentences found no agreement. The result was that the “bloc” system was adopted “with conditions” for the time being.

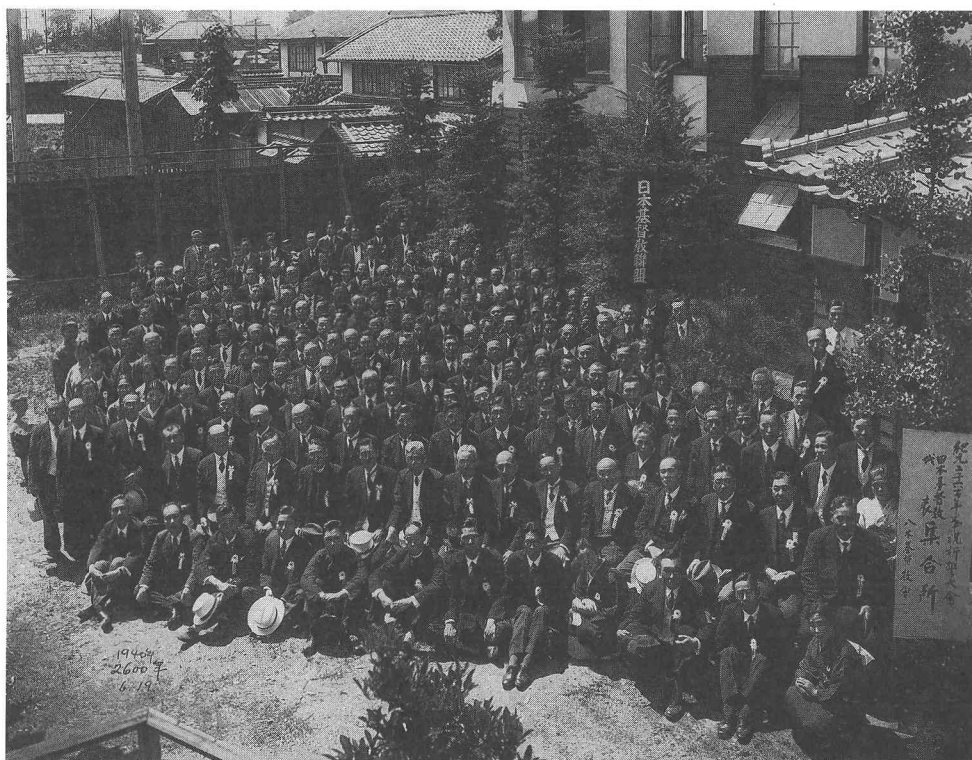


Merger with Finnish Mission - 1940

It is true that the union of all Christian churches was one of goals of early Christian organizations in Japan, and many were still striving for that goal. But union brought about in such an unexpected and abrupt way was hardly in line with that goal. The truth must be said that process and result of this whole development was due to the pressure of the militaristic government of that time. It also must be said that an overly optimistic attitude on the part of many Christians helped to bring on this distressing situation.

LUTHERAN CHURCH “DISAPPEARS”

With the decision of the May 1, 1941 general convention of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church to “participate in the United Church of Christ in Japan,” the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church disappeared for a time from history. We must see clearly the reality that our one hundred years of history has not been a continual history, and then we must learn from that fact. On June 24 and 25, 1941, the inaugural convention for the union of all Protestant churches accepted “for the time being” the concept of blocs as an appendix. With this agreement, the United Church of Christ in Japan came into being. In reverse, the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church disappeared, becoming only “bloc number five” on paper. It was expected that the situation would stay this way for some time. But the phrase, “for the time being,” turned out to be for only one year as things worsened. It was a difficult and dark period for our church, and a period for which we must take responsibility.

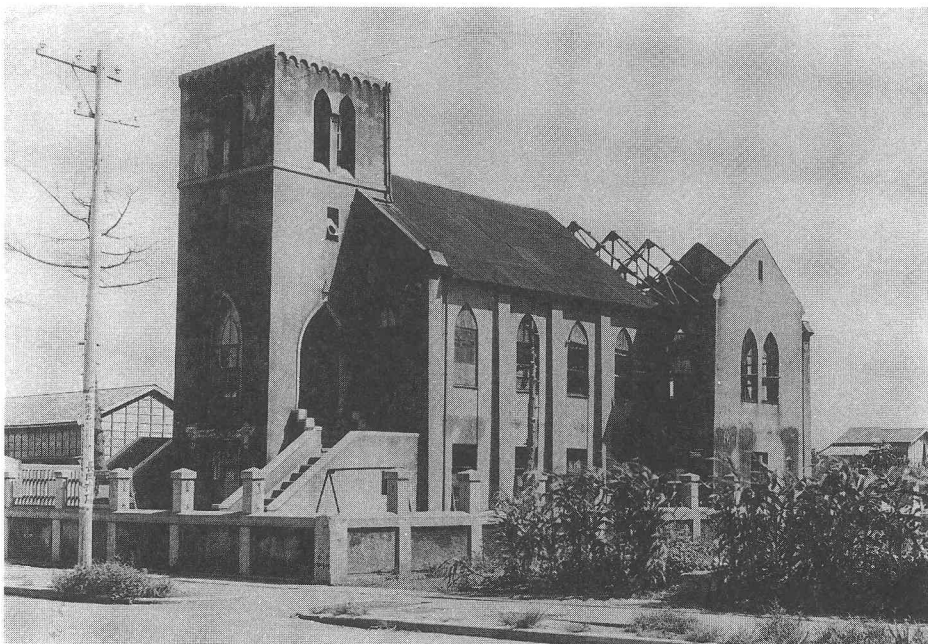


Japanese Christians-Nationalistic Movement - 1940

SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR HISTORY

Sharing history means sharing responsibility for that history. We are now dealing with a most important period in our history. Here the question of common responsibility means taking responsibility for joining the United Church of Christ in Japan. And then, it means taking responsibility for secession from that union. Even more than that, it means we must still wrestle in our day with the issue of our church's responsibility during the World War II.

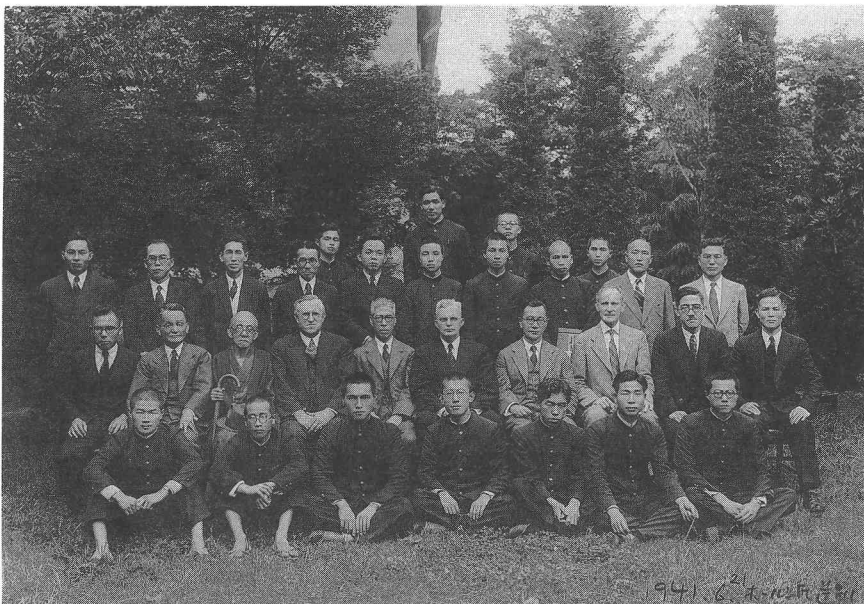
I have in my hands a brief history of United Church of Christ in Japan which lists its "chronology" in 34 pages. In my copy the section concerning the union of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church with the United Church in June 1941 until its withdrawal in November 1947 is underlined in red. That was the period when the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church did not exist. But nevertheless as a member of the United Church of Christ in Japan at that time, we must carry our share of responsibility during that period. Two problems stand out in particular and can be clearly identified in the records as mentioned above. They are: 1) the uncritical alignment with governmental trends and policies and the optimistic viewpoint taken concerning policies involving the church, and 2) standing upon its creeds, the JELC took a basic stance against church union (merger based on common agreement of creed), but did not carry out this posture consistently from beginning to end. In the face of those historical facts, the JELC must admit its responsibility for what happened during this dark period in our history.



Tokyo Church Ruins after Bombing - 1945

WAR TIME COOPERATION

Apart from responsibility for participating in church union during World War II, we also must reflect upon our actions during the period leading up to war and upon our cooperation with that war. The "Minutes of the United Church" indicate the following notes: "Christian patriotic council supporting war," "Visitation of the Ise shrine by church leaders," "Teacher drill camps," "Persecution of the Holiness Groups in the 6th and 9th blocs, (and the attitude of the United Church to that persecution)," "Proposal for propaganda in war time," "Elimination of blocs," "Christian assembly supporting the Emperor's principles," "Letters sent to Christians in the greater Asia area from the United Church," "Contributions to military aircraft," "United Church of Christ in Japan's proclamation of readiness for final battle," "Sending of missionaries to southeast Asians," etc., all with brief explanations attached. For these actions as well as others, our church, which was part of the United Church at that time, must carry its responsibility for doing things which it should not have done, and for not doing those things which it should have done.



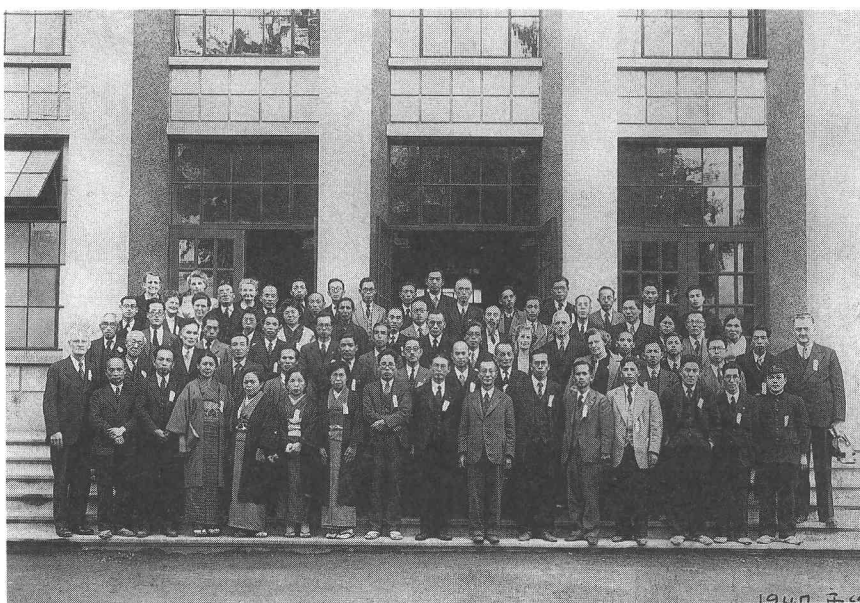
Missionaries Leave Japan - June 1941

AMBIGUOUS STANCE

The United Church of Christ in Japan, following World War II, took an ambiguous position concerning its war-time responsibilities, and has recently begun to think of itself as a victim of war. It can be said that the United Church took the easy way out as it began to rebuild itself immediately after the war by rushing into the "Christian boom." This is where we as Lutherans must start as we seek to understand our mutual responsibility for that period.

SECESSION FROM THE UNITED CHURCH

Since the “union of the protestant churches” was enforced by pressure of the monolithic policy of bringing all religious bodies under government control and cutting all ties with foreign countries, when pressure disappeared, the churches were once again able to reestablish themselves in denominations, and set up relationships with churches in foreign countries. Along with the movement to reestablish the Anglican church and other denominations through withdrawal from the United Church, the issue of “the establishment of the Lutheranism” and the “reorganization of the United Church” was discussed as early as 1946. This was the start of the formation of the “Lutheran church,” and negotiations with the United Church began within that same year. First of all we should take notice that the United Church worked toward restructuring itself as a federation of churches resembling the original structure of “blocs.” At the January 1947 “Reconstituting Convention” of the United Church, the Lutheran church was still groping to find itself within the United Church. Secession from the United Church followed later, at an extraordinary church convention of Lutherans called in November 1947, after it was decided that it was impossible to reach full agreement with the churches remaining in the union. The “Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church” was organized once again. This step was made by the Japanese Lutheran church which was of American background. Unfortunately, within the total process, no reference was made to the need of taking responsibility for all that had previously taken place during union with other churches during World War II. Opinions were expressed that “confession was necessary because the church had not been faithful in taking a stand” when it came to the issue of union by common creed, but reference to war-time responsibility can be found nowhere. This too is where we as Lutherans must start in carrying out our responsibility for past deeds.



Reorganization of Lutherans - 1947

FINNISH LUTHERAN CHURCH DELAYS DECISION

Records indicate that the Japan Lutheran church of Finnish background was not able to make an immediate decision to act with us, unsure whether to stay within the United Church of Christ in Japan, or to secede from it. Not having a strong conviction as to what course of action to take, it moved slowly until August 1948 when the independent “Evangelical Lutheran Church” was reestablished through secession from the United Church. These two Lutheran churches were reunited once again in 1953.



Sunday School Children in Nagoya

Within the mutual sharing of history and responsibility, and looking at our actions during World War II from fifty years later, we should be able to see clearly that repentance remains a personal issue for each one of us. That is, as we concentrate on Jesus Christ and his redemption and believe upon the one triune God who rules over history (from the eschatological aspect), then we will walk in the world as a “confessional church” truly “confessing our faith.”

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH FOLLOWING THE WAR

The period immediately following the war was the so-called “Christian boom.” Christianity, along with democracy, was seen as being in vogue, stylish. Indeed, Christianity did bring a fresh breath of air into Japan which had been devastated by war. People came seeking a new resting place for the longings of their hearts. Not only did America give needed support in the political, economical, and social arenas, it supported Christianity as well. In the eyes of the Japanese people following the war, Christianity was deeply related to America itself.



Rev. Ellis and the Bookmobile in Kumamoto

Immediately following the war, an envoy of four delegates from American churches arrived in Japan in October 1945. In June of 1946 six missionaries arrived in Japan, forming the “Christian Committee for Local and Overseas Cooperation,” and began to rebuild churches, provide Bibles and hymn books, support pastors, and offer many kinds of aid. The first missionary to come with a civilian passport, not a military one, was L.S.G. Miller of the Lutheran church (August 1946). Martha Akard and A.J. Stirewalt came soon afterwards. Arthur Knudten was at one time a member of the Committee for Cooperation. The United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA), which had been “awaiting the decision of our Japanese brothers and sisters” concerning their relationship with the United Church of Christ in Japan, now sent former missionaries as well as new missionaries, cooperated constructively in evangelism, restored war ravaged churches, and opened pioneer evangelism fields. It was a period in time when “it couldn’t be helped” that “whatever was done in the name of Christianity” brought people together in great numbers. “Kyushu Gakuin and Kyushu Jogakuin were both reopened. In 1950, theological education was begun again at the Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary. The third church constitution and by-laws were adopted, and the issue of self-reliance was once again discussed.

WORLD LUTHERAN CHURCHES RUSH IN

One of the things that we should understand about the period immediately following World War II is that many Lutheran churches from overseas came to Japan at this time to participate for the first times in Japanese evangelism. Soon after the war ended we notice that the Missouri Synod was the first new group to arrive (W.J. Danker, September 1948). The Missouri Synod began independent outreach in metropolitan Tokyo, northern Japan, Niigata, and Hokkaido, forming the "Japan Lutheran Church." Next to arrive in Japan was the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). Based on a survey by mission board secretary R. Syrdahl, Olaf Hansen was sent out in 1949. He was followed by many other missionaries serving from Tokyo (Koishikawa, Hongo, Itabashi) southward to the Tokai region, which became the center of the "Japan Mission of the ELC." Shortly after arriving in Japan, these missionaries established a Bible School in Shizuoka, initiated Bible education courses for lay persons, and began training lay evangelists. The Augustana and Suomi Synods joined work in Japan in 1950. These two churches cooperative from the beginning within the framework of evangelism of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church in their outreach programs. The former group, under David Vikner's leadership, placed young missionaries in teams with national pastors and assistants, opening work in Tokyo (Den-enchofu) and the Sanyo region. The latter group evangelized in Tokyo (Omori) and in Kofu. Also at that time, missionaries from a number of missionary societies in Norway were sent to begin evangelistic work in the Kansai, Kinki, and West Japan areas. Today these missions make up the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church and the West Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church.

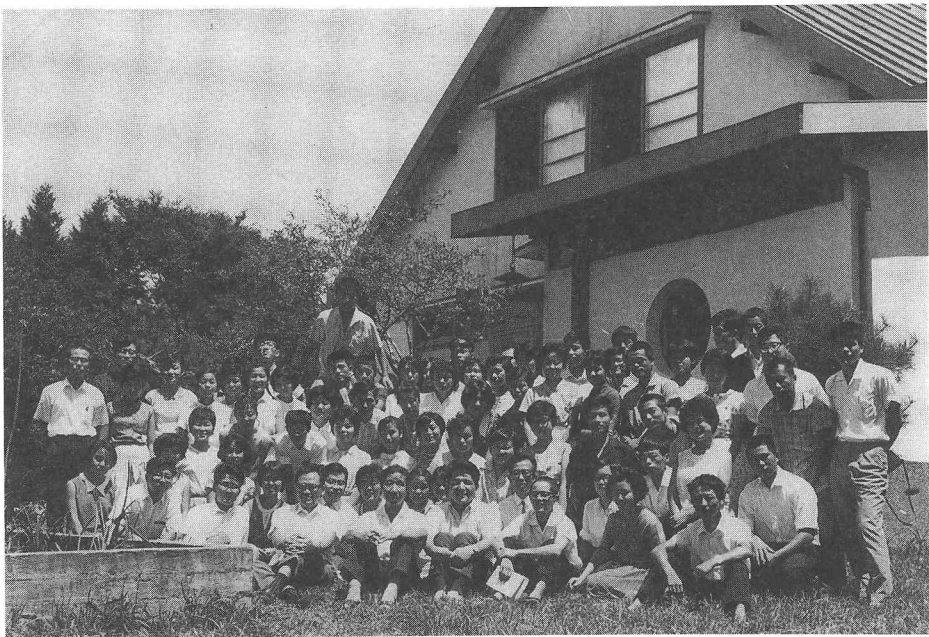


Lutheran Hour Radio Broadcast

TOWARDS MERGER OF THE VARIOUS LUTHERAN CHURCHES

The Lutheran Churches that came after the war did not begin work in a helter-skelter manner. All of them in some way negotiated with the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church concerning mission work, reaching an understanding as to the division of each group's mission field. Eventually, these Lutheran churches began to publish cooperative evangelism materials (1950). A loosely organized conference was established, called the "All Lutheran Free Conference." The Missouri Synod began the Lutheran Hour broadcast in September 1951. This was eventually broadcasted nationwide, further increasing the need for concrete cooperation amongst all Lutheran churches.

Within the framework of these areas of cooperation, "negotiations between the various Lutheran groups concerning merger" occurred off and on over a period of years. Beginning with confirmation of doctrinal testimony, church constitution, by-laws, theological education facilities, district divisions, etc., many difficult peaks were surpassed, reaching down to cooperation on the local congregational level. But in the end, final agreement was not reached. Due to differences in each church's traditions, customs, and theological background, as well as the concrete division of districts and established facilities for theological education, the only group to overcome all barriers was the ELC Mission. As a final step of preparation toward merger with the JELC, the Tokai Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized in July 1960.



Aso Bible Camp

STRENGTHENING CHURCH MERGER

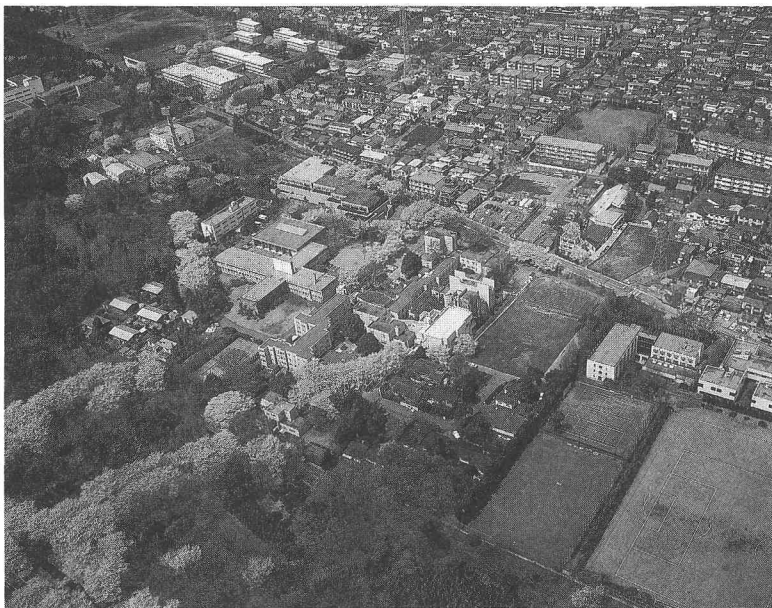
The Tokai Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church were merged at an inaugural convention May 1963. From the beginning, their relationship was unclear concerning the division of districts. The situation was left to stand with four districts: Eastern, Tokai, Western, and Kyushu. Pastor Hiroshi Fujii was sent out as an JELC missionary to work in Brazil. This was an important step forward for a church that had worked some seventy years relying on the support of overseas churches. Following a transitional period of one year, the newly established Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church proceeded to adjust and strengthen merger at its first church convention in 1964. The constitution and by-laws for the new church were approved, again leaving for the time being certain areas in need of adjustment. It should be noted that preparations had been made for the merger of all Lutheran churches in Japan, but the early merger of the above two churches had surpassed these plans, even though some problem areas remained such as the fact that our constitution and by-laws were originally drawn-up for a small church of only 30 congregational units. Questions also remained concerning the need to strengthen the administrative organization of the church, and concerning the role of the missionary.



Rev. and Mrs. Fujii - First Missionaries to Brazil

OTHER LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN JAPAN

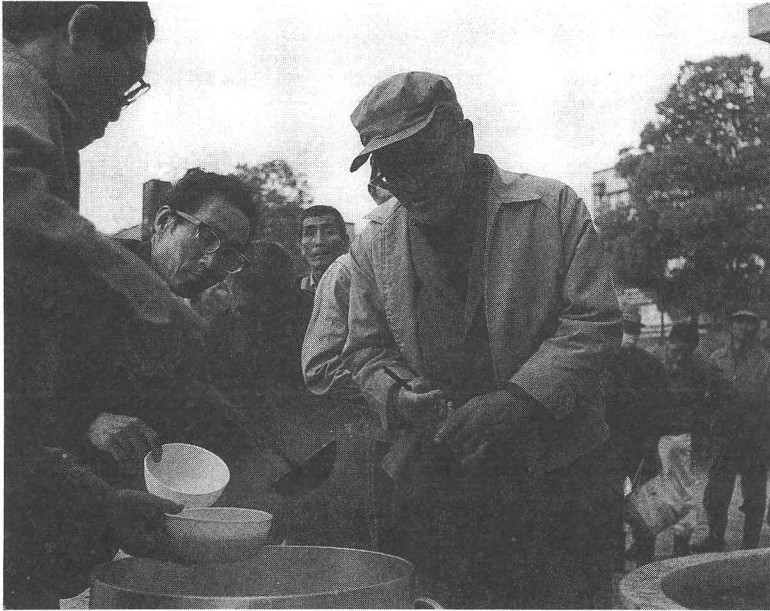
For those Lutheran churches that had not joined in the final merger, namely the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church, the West Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Japan Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod related), our working relationship did not end with the termination of merger discussions. Rather our contacts were intensified through cooperation in such areas as radio evangelism and literature evangelism. The two churches of Norwegian background, which worked in the western part of Japan, also moved forward in mission as they added Kobe Bible School and strengthened their seminary. The Japan Lutheran Church on the other hand joined the JELC in conversation concerning theological education. One of our prayers since restructuring in 1964 was answered when permission was granted for the two churches to jointly establish and manage a theological college and seminary. This agreement was signed in 1966 and the Japan Lutheran Theological College/Seminary became a reality in 1969 at a new location and campus in Mitaka (1969).



Japan Lutheran Theological College/Seminary in Mitaka

Realization that merger must be tied to evangelism was seen in the two year commemorative slogan for merger, “Large Scale Evangelism.” The development of an “overall plan for evangelism” can be seen as going hand in hand with the unfolding of this movement. “Multiple ministry” and “multiple parishes” were discussed for the first time during this period. It can be said that several grass-root level experiments were tried, but they were not based on thorough testing. With support from overseas churches during this period, JELC evangelism centered on the “All Japan Level Pioneer Evangelism” (from 1966), and the “Church Center System” (from 1967). Concentrating on a flexible plan

for personnel placement, division of funds, and the concept of church centers, the results of some of these projects are worth looking at. But unfortunately many of these concepts were not able to break through church structure because they were not based on concrete national or local church policies. This whole area still needs to be examined and evaluated. About this time, Missionary E. Strohm from Germany took up residence in Kamagasaki, Osaka, beginning her work among day laborers and those with alcohol dependency. Her ministry caused our church to reexamine the quality of its evangelism program.



Diaconia Service in Kamagasaki Osaka

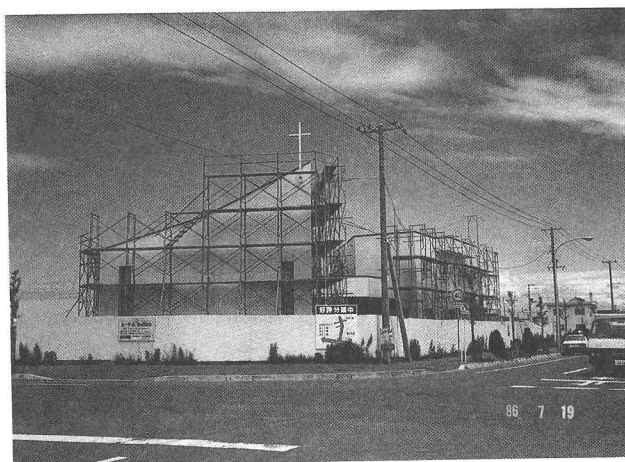
TOWARDS SELF-RELIANCE

In the flow of events, "1969" is a year that will be long remembered. Expectations were placed in a new program for nurturing graduates of the Lutheran Theological College/Seminary. Many difficulties were faced however, in developing a educational program which included internship during the final two years. This was due to the world-wide based student and social movements of that period, which, with added Japanese undulations, widened into struggles not only within the seminary, but within the church at large. Those who asked questions and those who were asked questions, both continue to carry the burden of these concerns even until today, as we have been awakened to new issues of life which we share with those who are now co-workers and those who have chosen other lifestyles. These issues concern our church's responsibility to society, and at the same time press us to widen our scope of vision. Another problem area remaining for our church is the issue of confession concerning wartime responsibility. We missed a good opportunity at the time of the United Church's "Confession of War Responsibility" (1967), because we vacillated back and forth until nothing was done.

ASMARA DECLARATION

Another topic is the “Asmara Declaration.” This was an declaration made by JELC President S. Utsumi at Asmara, Ethiopia, April 1967 at the JCM (the conference of overseas churches that supported the JELC, and which was restructured in 1973 under JELC leadership as the LCM). President Utsumi stated, “The JELC will bring the amount of outside support needed for the general budget close to the zero number by the year 1974.” If we look at issues of the Ruteru from June of that year, we will see the reaction of the church council and others, and the repercussions this statement caused. But when we look at the state of the world economy today and the economic situation of the overseas supporting churches, we see that this decision was correct, even if it seemed difficult at that time. It can be said that even without that declaration, the overseas churches would have soon pressed us to make this change. One person wrote that it was like “trying to totally overhaul a ship while it was still running at sea.” This probably reveals a feeling of responsibility, as well as a feeling of danger, to those persons who were involved in tackling this issue.

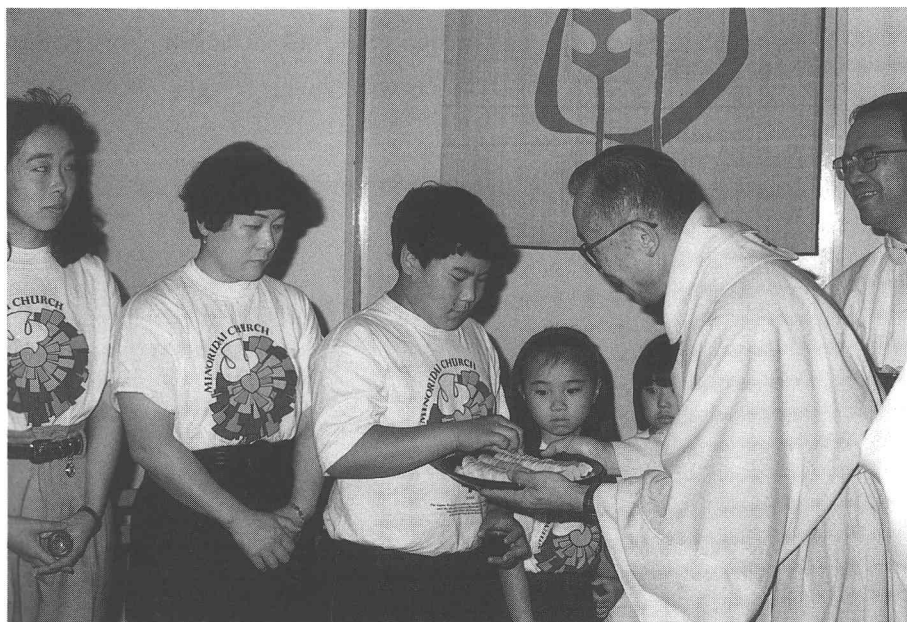
“The First Comprehensive Plan for Self-reliance” was reached in 1972. This plan was coherently established when the first profit producing projects were begun in Ichigaya (1974), Osaka (1976), and Koishikawa (1980). At the same time, preparation was made for self-reliance from the individual congregational level, upward to self-reliance on the district level (support done within each district), although steps taken to reach these concrete goals were not always perfected. From 1975 and on through the Second Comprehensive Plan, this structure continues until the present. During this time the staff of our church stoically strove forward at all times. It must be said that even though we became self-supporting on the first section of our budget, theological education and radio evangelism still required help from overseas churches. And we cannot overlook the fact that today churches are still being built partly by funds received from abroad.



New Chuurch Sanctuary under Construction in Hokaido

DISTRICT AND NATIONAL LEVEL PLANNING

During this time it was realized that the main responsibility of mission outreach is not just the responsibility of scattered local congregations. Rather, it is also the responsibility of the conferences and the districts. Specific examples can be seen in the JELC's national level plan initiating the Hokkaido Special District. (The plan and schedule for the Hokkaido Special District was established in 1970, evangelism promotion began in 1978, and it was recognized as a special district in 1981). Another example is the Tsurugaya project promoted by the Eastern District. The theme, "Plan for Training the People of God" (1976), which is based on "God's People Proclaiming the Gospel and Serving the World" is related to this. This trend is further revealed in the pamphlets for the education of lay persons published by the Eastern district, and in the "Living Faith" series of the Kyushu district concerning confirmation.



Children Participating in Holy Communion

In 1977 our church, taking up the questions and issues concerning "baptism, confirmation, and holy communion" that were being raised on the world Lutheran scene, wrestled with the issue of early communion, and then began to move steadily on the road to continuing education for all believers. The Tokai, Hokkaido, and Eastern districts each made plans to publish materials concerning faith and life in order to appeal to and share with the church at large. The "practical" and the "theological" are themes always discussed at each church convention. The question of the sacraments is one which we carry together, and we face other challenging choices as we experience the process of turning in new directions.

LOOKING TO TOMORROW

Ever since the first consultation with overseas churches in 1968, the “role of the missionary” is a topic which has still not been adequately dealt with. The importance of the topic can be seen in that the LCM took up this issue in consultation in 1979 and again in 1983. From a wider viewpoint, our Lutheran church, which was begun by missionaries and grew under the guidance and support of overseas churches, now must wrestle with the question of how to continue living faithfully in the tradition of the Lutheran faith as we become an established church in Japan. The publication of the JELC hymnal (1976) and the Book of Concord, Japanese Edition (1982), the revision of the liturgy (“Worship and Baptism” in 1983), etc. are all part of this challenge. As we enter the next one hundred years of our mission, we are called to take upon ourselves anew these various issues, and from our own personal experience, be more aware of and involved in the total picture. As a first step, we want to all become united as one in confessing the “Mission Centennial Declaration of Faith,” (see inside cover of this book). It is necessary that the new church constitution, which is now in the preparation stage, bring common unity as it grasps both the essence of the church today and brings into concrete image the church of tomorrow.



Commemorative Ordination at Saga Church - April 2, 1993

日本福音ルーテル教会宣教百年



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