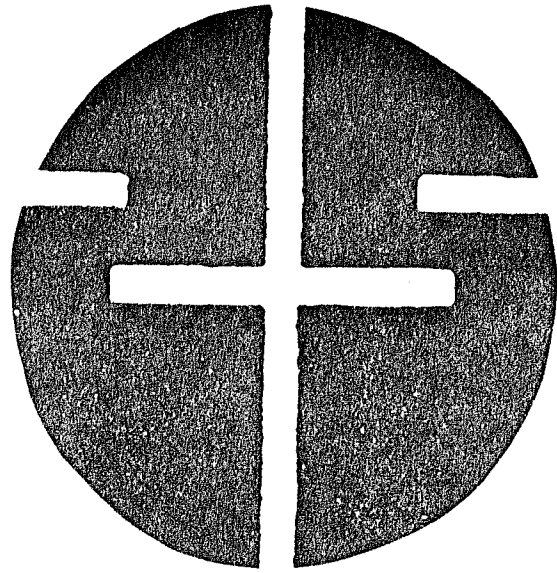


Book II - Clark, David
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The History of the
Wisconsin Synod
in Japan

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Preface

In the writing of this paper, various materials were used as primary sources. For the sake of brevity and ease, the sources will be referred to by abbreviations. A set of notes compiled by Missionary Richard Poetter specifically for this paper will be referred to by "P.N." (Poetter's Notes), e.g., "P.N., p. 39." In addition, the monthly letters of the missionaries serving in Japan sent to the Japan Board were used. They are identified by the name of the missionary and the date when written. The letters of the Japan Board to the missionaries are noted by the initials "J.B." and the date, e.g., "J.B., April 21, 1962." The minutes of the Japan Mission Board are indicated by "J.B. min.," and the date of the meeting. The minutes of the Mission Council, the monthly meeting of the missionaries, are noted as follows: "M.C. min." and the date of the meeting.

The reader will notice throughout the paper various paragraphs set off by asterisks. These "highlights" are intended to offer the reader a passing acquaintance with some of our fellow Christians in Japan, the Japanese pastors, and life in Japan. We hope that these will prove beneficial for the reader.

It is our hope that this paper will prove beneficial to our readers, bringing them to a greater appreciation of what the Lord of the harvest has worked in Japan. We truly have every reason for "Praising His Grace."

I. A NEW BEGINNING

The year of our Lord 1957 was the year of the new beginning for Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) mission work in Japan. In the spring of 1956, Seminary candidate Richard Seeger was assigned to serve as the second WELS missionary to Japan. He was commissioned as such on October 14 of the same year in his home church, Atonement of Milwaukee. We wonder what he must have been thinking after he had received this Call and was preparing to depart to his field of labor. Fresh from the Seminary, straight to the Orient. "What will it be like? Will I be able to adapt to Japanese culture and customs? Will I be able to master that difficult language? Will I be able to properly communicate the gospel?" Yet he could console himself with this thought: he would be serving with our veteran missionary in Japan, Pastor Fred Tiefel.

But that was not the plan or thought of the Lord. 1957 was to be the year of the new beginning. On February 6, 1957, Pastor Tiefel resigned as our missionary in Japan and from the WELS, accusing the Synod of sinful church fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS). Tiefel's resignation was the cause for the new beginning. With his actions the WELS lost everything in Japan: its veteran missionary, its property, its members and its Japanese religious materials.

Pastor Seeger and his wife arrived at Yokohama, Japan, in April of 1957. On hand to greet them were Rev. O. J. Naumann, President of the WELS, Rev. E. Hoenecke, Chairman of the Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions (now the General Board for World Missions, GBWM) and Rev. Harry Shiley, the new chairman of the Japan Mission Board. These three gentlemen had come to Japan both to welcome the Seegers to their field of labor and to discuss mission work with Pastor Tiefel. They were unable to fulfill their second goal.

1957 was literally a new beginning. Seeger took up residence in Itabashi, Tokyo, and enrolled in language study at the LC-MS mission school. He began intensive language study which continued for the next two years. But it would be two years before mission work was begun anew.

Almost two months to the day of his arrival in Japan, Pastor Seeger began reaching out with the message of God's grace to the Japanese heathen. Anxious to begin mission work, Seeger initiated an English Bible class in his home on June 17 of 1957. Eleven Japanese were in attendance: ten students from nearby Keio University and one part-time policeman. They did not come to learn God's Word, as they frankly admitted to Seeger, but to learn English from a native American. Perhaps we would question their motives. But they were in the class, under the influence of the Spirit working through the Word. The new beginning was made. The seed was being sown. The fruits were to come. Six months later another English Bible class was started. From this humble beginning the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (LECC) in Japan was born.

Pastor Seeger had been called as our second missionary in Japan. For a little over a year he had to labor alone. But the man the Lord was to provide as our second missionary was to be a valuable asset to the work. He would come to Japan as one who "knew" the language. He would come as one who had experience in this field. The man was Richard Poetter.

Pastor Poetter had been trained as a WELS Christian day school teacher. After a change of course he was called as a missionary to Japan by the LC-MS. He served in this capacity for the next seven years (1950 - 1957). Because of the doctrinal controversy in his adopted Synod, Poetter resigned his call and returned to the WELS. In April of 1958, he accepted the call of our Japan Board to be our second missionary in Japan. In a meeting with this Board, Poetter discussed missionary work first hand. Because of his personal experience, he advanced the idea that our Board would adopt: our missionaries should work different fields, yet be located in areas close enough to each other to be able to offer mutual support. This policy is still in effect.

As Poetter joined Pastor Seeger in Japan in August of 1958, the Lord had yet another gift for our new mission: Mr. Ryuichi Igarashi. Mr. Igarashi had worked with Pastor Poetter in the LC-MS for about five years. A diligent student of languages, Igarashi speaks, in addition to his mother tongue, fluent English, French, Russian, (courtesy of three years in a Siberian prisoner-of-war camp) and has a knowledge of several other languages. Such talents are invaluable in literature outreach to the Japanese natives.

* * * * *

Mr. Ryuichi Igarashi

"Actually Igarashi is several men wrapped into one. He is my right hand man, a faithful and honest man. He is the only man we have that can translate well in literature. He teaches Bible class, Sunday school, and preaches when needed. He is on the Board of Directors of the LECC. He is the only one of us who studies and knows the laws pertaining to the Religious Incorporation. He is teaching Church History to a Seminary student and preparing a Japanese text from the English. He will be important in preparing many of our texts in the future. He works in German, Latin, and is now studying Greek. He takes his turn in radio preaching. Informally I still pick up some Japanese from him. I can leave the field on furlough and know he will keep it running. He represents you, the WELS, well..."

Richard Poetter
February 8, 1967

* * * * *

With two missionaries in the field and the able assistance of Mr. Igarashi, 1958 was a year of organization and outreach for our young mission. September witnessed the beginning of the Mission Council (MC), a regular meeting of our missionaries. The MC offers the separated missionaries an opportunity for fellowship, mutual encouragement and a forum for discussing our labors in Japan. Already at its initial meeting, the MC urged the Japan Board to pursue the incorporation of our mission. In October, Pastor Seeger began conducting English worship services in his home. Three students attended the first service.

Our missionaries now faced the major decision of where to concentrate their efforts. Protestant mission work had been conducted for nearly a century in Japan. Several American Lutheran bodies were working the land. The Japan Lutheran Hour (LC-MS) was being broadcast throughout the islands. It was through the Lutheran Hour that we received guidance in this decision. At the end of their broadcasts, the listeners were offered Lutheran literature by mail. Hundreds of people throughout the nation wrote in. Their names and addresses were then forwarded to Lutheran missionaries in their areas. Numerous requests were received from residents in Ibaragi-ken. (A ken is a prefecture or state.) But there were no Lutheran missionaries working in this areas.

Ibaragi Prefecture is located on the Pacific Ocean northeast of Tokyo. The population then numbered about 2,000,000. Some Protestant mission work was being done there, with about one missionary for every 60,000 people. It was, in effect, virgin territory for Lutheran mission work. In the fall of 1958, Pastor Poetter and Mr. Igarashi surveyed the prefecture. With a list of prospects furnished by the Lutheran Hour, they visited three cities: Ishioka, Tsuchiura and Mito.

Mito is the capital of this prefecture. It had a post-war population of 120,000. The city had been virtually leveled by navel bombardment during the war. A university town, Mito is a three hour train ride from Tokyo. Because of the number of prospects, the Poetter family moved there in November. At the same time, the LC-MS Tokyo area conference "turned over" this area to Poetter and the WELS. That same month Pastor Poetter began our first Japanese worship services in the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. H Tamura. Seven Japanese attended and five requested baptism. On Christmas Eve of that year, attendance reached twenty-five. Christmas Day saw another first: the seed of a Japanese Sunday school was sown as Mrs. Poetter taught the Christmas story to the children.

* * * * *

Ikuko Poetter

"I, Mrs. Ikuko Poetter, formerly Ikuko Abe, as a Japanese girl was brought up in a small city in Japan named Niigata City. Of course, my family's religion was Buddhism and all family events were characterized by this ritual. And I didn't think it strange. However,

the Lord lead me to Jesus' feet and instructed me. In 1948, missionary Suelflow (LC-MS,ed.) spoke to me the Gospel of the Lord. My heart accepted the Savior as the light of hope....The believer's life began in me. At that time going to church was accompanied by various persecutions.

"One more problem I had. That is, I chose for a spouse, an American missionary. Of course, because of this my family was put to great shame and felt the cold attitude of society toward such a marriage. For two and one-half years we waited the guidance of the Lord and finally my parents and brothers gave their blessing and we entered married life.

I am a Japanese woman who believes in the Savior. I have peace in my heart which other unbelieving women do not have. I am frequently avoided by the neighborhood women and feel their cold attitude toward me. But I have learned to live with this. The Lord always guides and teaches me and I always wait upon the Lord."

Letter written by Mrs. Poetter,
Translated by her husband,
(P.N., p. 42)

* * * * *

Pastor Seeger continued to study in Tokyo, but when rats and termites invaded his home he was forced to move. His new residence was in Nerima-Ku. (A ku is a ward of a city, in this case, Tokyo.) This was poorer section of town. To show Christian love, Pastor Seeger used \$60 to buy blankets and clothes for families in the neighborhood. These families were then invited to Christmas services. Mr. Uchida preached a sermon prepared by Seeger. Uchida was a policeman who had been a member of Seeger's first English Bible class. The Word was taking root!

In the late 1950's, the mother church in America was wrestling with the question of continuing fellowship with the LC-MS. The daughter church was not spared such anguish. We have noted that the LC-MS had been at work in Japan for several years prior to our arrival. At an "All-Lutheran Free Conference" in 1959, Rev. Leroy Hass, a Missouri Synod missionary, circulated a paper in which he stated that Romans 16:17,18 does not apply to Lutherans fellowshiping with any other Lutherans. Such an attitude led our missionaries to inform their supervising board in the States, "Because of this and similar statements and practices we cannot fellowship with Missouri Synod men in Japan." (J.B. min., May 4, 1959).

Relations between Missouri and Wisconsin in Japan at that time were somewhat confusing. With the help of Missouri, we began our work in Ibaragi Prefecture. However, even after our missionaries broke with the Missouri men, we still received prospects from the Lutheran Hour. Yet after Pastor Poetter returned to the WELS in 1958, the Missouri Synod Board for Foreign Missions attempted to collect from us the cost of Poetter's language courses (\$875). Their request was denied.

In 1959 the Protestant church in Japan celebrated its centennial anniversary. Regarding this occasion Poetter wrote:

"Put yourself in the place of the heathen Japanese and ask if you would not be confused, to say the least, by a missionary of Christianity who not only uproots heathen religions but explains about false doctrines in the Christian churches in Japan. But this is the very blessing which we have to offer to the Japanese. At last there is a church which teaches God's Word in truth and purity. Here is a church in which God's Word is the rule of faith and life. For this reason also God will bless and protect our mission work here in this hodge-podge of heathenism and Christian sectartianism. We do not hide our light under a bushel but hold it high to bring light to all, be he heathen or Christian"

(P.N., p. 19)

Japan is a nation steeped in heathen superstition. Each August 13th there is, for example, the Buddhist festival for the dead, Obon. On the night of the thirteenth, the people flock to the cemeteries to escort the spirits of the ancestors home for a visit. The dead leading the dead! How great is the need to let the light of the ospel shine in Japan.

Satan has Japan firmly in his grip. Yet, God has his elect and through our humble preaching of his Word, he has begun to gather some. The year was 1959. Pastor Seeger began preaching in Japanese. He was working in the field in Tsuchiura, Ibaragi Prefecture. Pastor Poetter recorded our first infant baptism in Mito and Japan. Our first adult baptism and confirmations, Mr. Naito and Miss Watabiki in Mito, were recorded. Bible class started in Hitachi, a city of 140,000 situated northest of Mito. Contacts were made in Diago, Ishioka, Shimodate (in Ibaragi Prefecture), and Utsunomiya City, the capital of Tochigi Prefecture. An all day Bible conference was held in Mito with people in attendance from eight different cities. Over seven hundred contacts were made by mail. Thirty-three Japanese



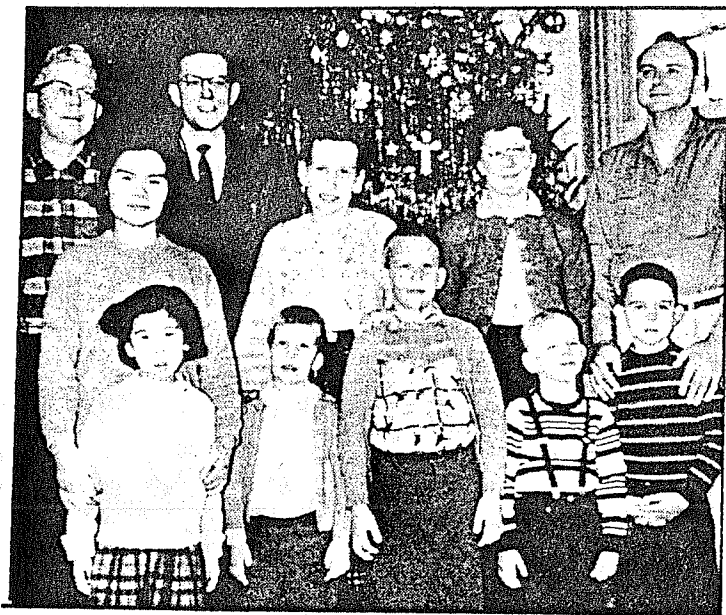
First infant Baptism, 1959

were studying the Word through the "Search the Scriptures" correspondence course written by Mr. Igarashi. "Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop" (Mt 13:8)

On May 22, 1959 the Japan Board took note of our growth and sent a letter to Poetter and Seeger with the following instructions:

1. Our goal in Japan is to establish an indigenous church.
2. Poetter is to continue working in Mito; Seeger is to move to another field when a third missionary arrives.

At its August convention of 1959 in Saginaw, Michigan, the Synod authorized this third missionary to Japan.



1960

II. A NEW CHURCH IS BORN

What are the necessary "ingredients" for forming a new church? More specifically, what are the necessary ingredients for forming a new Christian church body? (We acknowledge that it is the Holy Spirit who builds His Church through the Means of Grace.) Church history teaches us that in forming a visible church there are two indispensable elements: Leaders (pastors) and people. Without pastors, the people will not be gathered. Without people, the pastors do not have a congregation. As the WELS began its third year of mission work in Japan, the Lord was providing both ingredients for a new church body in Japan.

Persuant to the action of the 1959 Synod convention (Saginaw), the Japan Board began to call for our third resident missionary. After numerous declines from the field, the Board again had to appeal to the Assignment Committee for a Seminary graduate. The Call was issued to and accepted by Luther Weindorf. Pastor Weindorf and two sons arrived in Japan in mid-August, 1961. One of the aims of our work in Japan is to establish an indigenous, self-supporting, church. It seemed as if our prayers were being answered when in April, Mr. Shoichi Onomura approached Missionary Seeger with the request to be trained as a pastor. Mr. Onomura, who was twenty years old, was a faithful assistant to Seeger in his work in Tokyo. Soon to be baptized and confirmed, Onomura was faithful in church and Bible study. The Mission Council decided that Seeger should begin to teach him Greek. As a student, Onomura would not be able to work full time. In addition to his seminary studies, he was also to enroll in courses at a nearby university. Accordingly, the Japan Board resolved to grant him financial assistance in the sum of fifty dollars per month.

* * * * *

Mr. Onomura's Fifty Dollars

"From this fifty dollars Mr. Onomura will provide his own transportation (within reason), support himself while at school (except university entrance fee), support his father's family, buy his own books, and consider himself remunerated for the work done for either of the missionaries. During spring and summer vacations he will be expected to resume his normal duties as a missionary helper, also he will be expected to assist week-ends. Thus within six to nine years we can expect to have our first national Japanese pastor in the field."

J.B. min., April 27, 1960

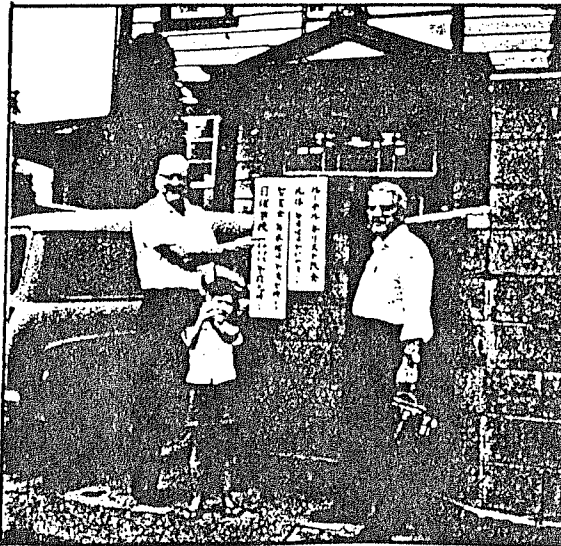
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The Lord was also providing the saints who would form the new

church in Japan. Seeger began (February, 1969) to work in Tochigi Prefecture which borders Ibaragi Prefecture on the northwest. The work was concentrated in Utsunomiya City, the capital of the prefecture. His labors in Tsuchuira were beginning to bear fruit as he baptized and confirmed four adults there. Contacts were established and services begun in Shimotsuma (later moved to Shimodate) and Oarai. By the end of 1960, nineteen Japanese souls, twelve of whom were communicants, had been entrusted to the pastoral care of Seeger and Poetter.

Missionaries Poetter and Seeger, assisted by Mr. Igarashi and Mr. Onomura, were now working regularly in eight cities: Tokyo, Diago, Hitachi, Ishioka, Mito, Shimotsuma, Tsuchuira and Oarai (see map). Requests for information and services from various areas of Tochigi and Ibaragi Prefectures were reaching our men. In order to coordinate our efforts and maximize their benefits, the Mission Council in September of 1960 adopted an overall strategy for the Japanese field. Since we were the only Lutherans working in these two prefectures, the MC decided to make the most of the situation. Geographical consideration assisted in determining the plan of attack. Although these prefectures are adjacent, it was nearly impossible to travel from one to the other because of the almost impassable secondary roads. Thus our work concentrated on the two major highways north of Tokyo: the one through Tsuchuira and Mito to Hitachi in Ibaragi-ken, and the other through Oyama and Utsunomiya to Nikko in Tochigi Prefecture. The Japan Board approved this plan at its next meeting.

In 1960, the first field visit was made to Japan. The day after Weindorf arrived (August 22), our missionaries welcomed Rev. H. Shiley, the chairman of the Japan Board and Rev. E. Hoenecke, the chairman of the General Board for World Missions. Such visits are essential to our foreign mission program. Personal experience enables the boards to better understand the monthly letters from the missionaries. The members are thereby able to render important decisions with more information and personal familiarity with the area. They are able to better understand, though to a limited extent, the conditions and circumstances under which the missionaries labor. Such visits are beneficial not only to the board members, but also to the missionaries and their families. The visits provide an opportunity to socialize and worship with fellow believers and co-workers. Pressing problems and promising possibilities can be discussed in depth, without the limitations imposed by trans-oceanic mail (it takes about one week for a letter to cross the Pacific).



Rev. Shiley and Hoenecke

Missionary Seeger returned the favor of the visit of Shiley and Hoenecke when he and his family went on furlough to the States in the summer of 1961. Pursuit of incorporation was the chief topic on discussion as he and the Japan Board met. With the arrival of Luther Weindorf the year before, we now met the Japanese government's requirement that three missionaries in the field are necessary for incorporation. Upon the advice of Seeger, the Board decided to register our properties in Japan in the names of the missionaries. This action was to avoid the possibility of government control of the mission.

The 36th convention of the WELS was held in Milwaukee at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in August, 1961. Missionary Seeger personally reported on the work of our Synod in Japan. One of the highlights was the news of the dedication of our first chapel in Japan on May 5 of that year. Located in Utsunomiya City, the chapel measured eighteen by twelve feet and was built at the cost of \$500. Comfortably seating thirty people, it was estimated that the building would serve our needs for the next ten years. With the prospect of further growth and the pressing need for additional manpower in Japan, the convention authorized the calling of a fourth expatriate missionary.

"The gathering of precious souls did not slow down with one missionary out of the country. Bible classes, correspondence courses, instruction classes and church services continued to offer the Word of salvation to those held captive in Satan's power. As God promised, His Word would not return unto Him void. Missionary Poetter wrote in December, 1961:

"There were many blessed events here during the past month. Our believers and seekers gathered at the manger of Bethlehem to behold the wondrous Babe and fall down and worship Him. Four received baptism-confirmation at Mito: Mr. Yoshida, Miss Watari, Miss Inoue, and Mrs. Takahashi. In Ishioka four received baptism-confirmation: Miss Yukie Muromachi, Miss Yoko Muromachi, and Mr. and Mrs. Komatsuzaki and two of their children were baptized. In Oarai, Mr. and Mrs. Nemoto were received by confirmation, Kayoko Nemoto by baptism-confirmation, Michiko, Takashi, and Etsuko Nemoto by baptism. Thus 16 rejoice with Brother Weindorf for the baptism-confirmation of Junko Ishii in Hitachi and Miss Shiohate in Tsuchiura. The mission now has 47 souls of whom 32 are communicants."

The Mission Council formally organized on November 15, 1961. The council had originated as a regular meeting of our missionaries. Its membership and purpose were now enlarged. The council was now to consist of the missionaries and Japanese Christian men of our church "deemed responsible by the majority of the active missionaries." Under its auspices, the publication of the Japanese church periodical, "Church News," was begun. Mr. Yamada, a Japanese lawyer, guided the MC as it pursued the incorporation of our mission.

Four months later, March 8, 1962, the MC revised and approved the articles of the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church. The Japan Board followed suit. The first Delegate Church Council (DCC) of the LECC was held on April 29, 1962, in conjunction with the Spring Bible conference in Mito. Japanese delegates representing five cities (Mito, Tokyo, Utsunomiya, Shimotsuma, and Tsuchiura) were present. The three missionaries represented the Japanese Christians in three other cities (Ishioka, Hitachi and Oarai).

April 29, 1962. For the nation of Japan, it was a holiday, Emperor Hirohito's sixty-first birthday. For our Japanese brethren, it was a more special birthday - the birthday of their own church, the LECC. A three man board of trustees was elected: Poetter, chairman; Seeger, secretary; and Mr. Igarashi. An initial budget of \$10,000 was adopted, \$500 of which was pledged by the Japanese churches. The properties which had previously registered in the names of our missionaries were now listed under the incorporation of the LECC. Regarding this action, the DCC resolved to accept these properties "with the moral agreement that the LECC shall administer them according to the wishes of the WELS." The articles of incorporation were approved by the government of the Ibaragi Prefecture on January 29, 1963.

Meanwhile Pastor Weindorf was completing his intensive language studies and he was able to assume more duties. So at the September MC the fields of labor were divided as follows:

1. Seeger: Tokyo and Utsunomiya City;
2. Poetter: Mito, Ishioka, Shimodate (formerly Shimotsuma)
3. Weindorf: Hitachi, Tsuchiura and Diago.

In addition to the cities under his care, Weindorf opened a new and promising field in Japan as he began a ministry among the blind. Their physical blindness served to heighten the awareness of their spiritual blindness. Many of the blind were reported to be nominal Christians. With the assistance of Mr. Keiichi Takahashi of Mito, Japanese Braille materials were produced and distributed among fifteen to twenty blind contacts. Though unable to see with their eyes the creation of their God, they can see His love for them in Christ through this ministry.

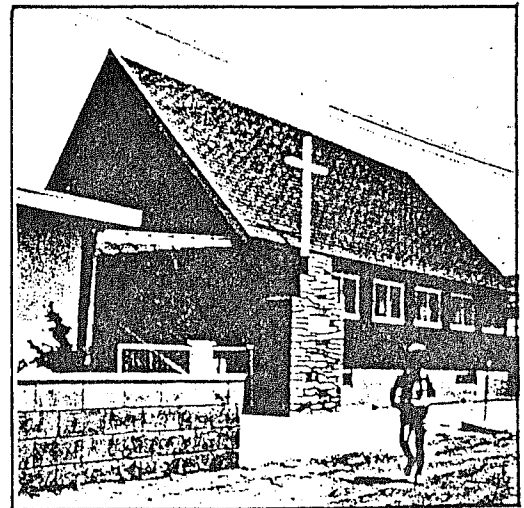
The LECC closed 1962 by gathering to dedicate (December 30) the mission house and chapel in Mito (built at a cost of \$23,000). The seed had been planted and the Lord was providing the growth. Pastors and people were working together to build the new church. The new building served as a witness and a promise: a witness that God had been with them and richly blessed them, and a promise that God would continue to do the same for them as they gathered around His Word and sacraments.

III Growing Pains

With growth comes pain. As a child grows - physically, emotionally, socially and mentally - there are problems and pains. We might call them growing pains. These pains affect the child and parents alike. But such pains are necessary and beneficial, because they develop and mold character. As the LECC was growing during the years following its incorporation, it was not spared the customary growing pains. As with a child and parents, these pains afflicted the LECC and the mother church. As with a child, these pains shaped the future of the infant church.

As many a church worker will testify, the importance of a physical structure in mission outreach is invaluable. The edifice is a promise that the missionaries are committed to serving the area for an extended period of time. To the passer-by, the physical plant is a public witness that this church body is not some "fly-by-night" organization. At the same time, it serves as a standing invitation to pass through its doors and hear the message proclaimed, i.e., the message of a crucified and risen Savior.

The 1961 Synod convention in Milwaukee, acting upon the recommendation of the Japan Board, authorized \$50,000 to be used in Japan for the purchase of property and the erection of chapels and parsonages. Pastor Seegre, on furlough in 1961-62, raised another \$20,000 with slide lectures and speaking engagements. These monies were turned over to the Church Extension Fund of the LECC. In June of 1962, \$20,000 in Synod money was released to Missionary Poetter for land and buildings in Mito (Grace church in Mito was dedicated on December 30, 1962). The next month \$30,000 was forwarded by the Synod's trustees. Two-thirds of this amount was earmarked for a chapel-parsonage in Hitachi and the remaining one-third for chapels in other, unspecified locations. Since suitable land was available in Hitachi, Missionary Weindorf relocated to Tsuchiura where building was soon begun. A third installment of \$20,000 was soon sent to Japan for land acquisition and building in the Tokyo area. As these funds were made available, the missionaries would search for a suitable site and then purchase it.



Grace, Mito builds, 1965

From this rather loose policy a controversy arose. This affair is known as the "Tokyo Site Question." With the approval of the Japan Board, one of our missionaries began searching the northern periphery of metropolitan Tokyo for land for a chapel-parsonage. Unable to find an appropriate area in the north, the missionary turned to the west. In February of 1963, he located a section of land in Higashi Kurume. Higashi is thirteen miles west of where we were then working and four miles north (about a thirty minute train ride from Tokyo). This land was purchased in July. What followed was the Tokyo Site Question.

In its July letter of 1963, the Board wrote the missionary for further information. "Our board would like to know where this location is. We thought you had always agreed to purchase land north of Tokyo" (P.N., p. 52). Following the regular board meeting of September 11, 1963, the board chairman wrote (September 23) and listed the following as objections to this acquisition:

1. It is not in keeping with our master plan;
2. It separates our missionaries in the field;
3. It overlaps with work done by the LC-MS;
4. It brings about much added travel time to other fields;
5. It causes loss of fellowship with the other missionaries, and especially of the missionaries' wives;
6. It would seem to disrupt the possible joint school as hoped for for the missionaries' children; and
7. It would seem to be weakening our concentrated efforts and witness north of Tokyo.

The board also solicited the opinion of the MC on this property. This had not been the practice in the other property purchases in Japan. The MC did approve the acquisition, though not unanimously.

The Japan Board brought this "question" to the attention of the General Board for World Missions (GBHM) at its October 16, 1963, meeting. The World Board adopted the following resolution:

Whereas, Pastor Seeger was instructed to purchase land in northern Tokyo by the Executive Committee, and

Whereas, After some investigation he bought a piece of property on the west side of Tokyo without the committee's consent, and

Whereas, The new location does not fit in with the Executive Committee's master plan for Japan, and

Whereas, The Executive Committee for Japan reports that it doesn't intend to use the location in the foreseeable future because of the above reasons; therefore, be it

Resolved, That the World Board concur with the decision of the Executive Committee for Japan.

: (GBWM min., Oct 1, 1963.)

With the approval of the World Board, the Japan Board sent a

With the approval of the World Board, the Japan Board sent a letter (November, 1963) authorizing the sale of the Higashi Kurume property.

With several letters, the missionaries answered the objections of the Japan Board and mentioned several advantages of this location. In a letter dated October 17, 1963, the missionary wrote:

1. This property is not on the far west side of Tokyo as the board thinks (maps were provided to maintain the point);
2. Other sites are impractical;
3. Members of the Tokyo congregation live along the same railroad line that runs past Higashi Kurume;
4. There is no overlap with the LC-MS as a letter from the field representatives attested;
5. This will not weaken work in Tokyo as this is where most of the members live;
6. There is easy access for U.S. servicemen stationed in the area;
7. Regarding the education of the children, other missionaries' children can board in the Tokyo parsonage and attend the American School in Tokyo; and
8. The new "Tokyo Loop Highway" will connect this area with the other mission locations.

Between July of 1963 and January of 1964, numerous lengthy (a rarity for those involved) letters concerning the property criss-crossed the Pacific Ocean. With the Japan Board insisting on the sale of the property, the missionary filed an official letter of protest with the World Board Executive Secretary, Rev. E. Hoenecke, and Synod President O. Naumann.

With strong opinions being voiced on both sides of the ocean, the Japan Board submitted the following resolution to the January, 1964, meeting of the GBWM:

Whereas, the world Board referred the Tokyo land matter back to the Japan Mission Board, and

Whereas, the Japan Board has failed to find an adequate solution to the matter at this time, and

Whereas, Executive Secretary Hoenecke is going to Hong Kong in the near future by resolution of the World Board, and

Whereas, the representative intends to make travel arrangements and connections to Hong Kong through Tokyo, and

Whereas, the Synod may realize a saving in travel expense by having the representative visit our Japan field; therefore, be it

Resolved, that the Japan Board respectfully request the Executive Secretary, Edgar Hoenecke, to spend some time in Tokyo and discuss the land situation and the general welfare of the Japan Mission, with our missionaries in the field.

(J.B. min., January 29, 1964)

The World Board adopted the resolution. In March, Executive Secretary Hoenecke, President Nauman and Pastor Koeninger (Synod Committee on Relief) visited the Japan Field. Prior to their arrival, the three missionaries drew up and adopted the following "Suggested Plan":

1. Place the fourth expatriate missionary in the general area of Oyama (Tochigi Prefecture).
2. Leave the Tokyo site at the present location (Higashi).
3. Move Pastor Yamada (cf. p. 28) temporarily to Shimodate, and eventually to Utsunomiya City.

("Report on the Tokyo Site Question" no date, p 3)

This plan would establish our efforts along two parallel highways: the Tokyo-Hitachi (Ibaragi Prefecture) and the Tokyo Utsunomiya (Tochigi Prefecture). In effect it was an approval of work already being carried out by the three missionaries.

The World Board urged the Japan Board to adopt a "new Master Plan to include this Suggested Plan." In order to make the plan workable, the following recommendations were to be acted upon:

1. Sufficient American missionaries (at least five at the present time) in the Japan field;
2. Money to be released now to build the Tokyo chapel-parsonage on the Kurume site;
3. Purchase additional property adjacent to the Kurume site and construct a larger parsonage there to enable the Tokyo missionary to board the missionary children wishing to attend the American School, whenever mutually feasible; and
4. Build a house-chapel in the general Oyama area for the fourth man when he comes. (Ibid., pp 3-4)

The report of the visiting committee concluded:

"It was felt by all present that the adoption of the Suggested Plan would not only be a full solution to the present problem, but would also work as a wonderful, positive step forward in our Japan Mission program. All concurred that the Lord seemed to be directing us to recognize that our mission work is already established along a second axis in Japan. It should be noted also that our Mission is still the only Lutheran Church working in the Tochigi Prefecture." (Ibid., p 4)

Thus the Tokyo Site Question was solved. Two lessons can be learned from this issue. First, there was a need to define terms. The Japan Board's main objection to the Kureme site was that it acted against the "Master Plan." As far as can be determined, there was no official, written, master plan. The closest thing to a master plan is a board letter to the Japan field dated May 22, 1959:

All of us have not altered our opinion about the location of our mission. We instructed Poetter to find some place

north of Tokyo, yet fairly near to that city. We are happy with the choice of Mito and Tsuchiura. All of us feel that Seeger should leave Tokyo as soon as a third man is available. The new man can take over the work begun in Tokyo and study language. The third man will eventually leave Tokyo and join you.

This lack of a written document caused great confusion in the field. There was the question of whether we intended to even continue work in Tokyo at all or to use it as a mission station. While the Board may have felt there was a master plan, none of our missionaries knew what the exact details were.

Secondly, the need for regular field visitations by the Executive Committee. The first and only visit was in 1960. At that time this question was not foreseen. As can be seen by the results of the visit of Pastor Hoenecke and his committee, much time and anguish could have been spared. To try to decide a major land purchase on the basis of letters and maps, from a distance of several thousand miles, is not easy. To attempt to visualize the site and understand the reasoning of the missionary for the purchase are difficult when one is unfamiliar with the area. Regular field visits are a necessity for all concerned (present Synod policy calls for such visits every three years but these are often postponed due do financial considerations).

Closely related to the Tokyo Site Question was the problem of the education of the children of the expatriate missionaries. There were four possible solutions. The children could:

1. Attend a local Japanese school;
2. Attend the American School in Tokyo;
3. Be taught by their parents; or
4. Be taught by a teacher called by the Synod.

Between our three missionaries in Japan in 1963 there were seven children. When Pastor Norbert Meier arrived in 1964 the number jumped to ten.

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Japanese Semester Week

The Japanese school year comes to a climax in February with weeks of examinations. Students burn the midnight oil and literally stay up all night, become bleary-eyed and groggy. Many go to extremes to keep themselves going. The weak are eliminated by a breakdown of health and may contract T.B. at this time. Their whole future depends on the outcome of these tests. Even when they marry their class standing is investigated by parents of the opposite party. They will never be able to escape their school record. Some who fail to reach the standard they have set for themselves will again this year commit suicide. These tests start with entrance into a kindergarten of high standing and go on through life. Every business or industry has entrance examinations. The heartaches caused by this competitive system also reach into our work and into our church (P.N. p 15).

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The problem with the education of the children depended upon the location of the missionary. The missionary in Tokyo was able to enroll his children in the American School. Here they received the equivalent of an American education. For the missionaries farther away, i.e. those residing in Ibaragi and Tochigi Prefectures, the only practical solution for them was to teach their children at home. This was the situation that prevailed in the field in the sixties. On September 4, 1963, one of the missionaries who was educating his children at home wrote to the Japan Board:

I think you gentlemen know what would happen in your churches if you had to take every morning away from your work. I think in one week you would soon learn the results. It is really impossible. Moreover in a mission field, unlike an established place, one at all times, morning, noon or night must be ready to face the newcomer at the door. To turn him away because he is busy teaching one's children could be disastrous for that person's soul. This happens just about every time I get myself all nice and prepared and settled down to teach my boys...boom, there goes my morning explaining the road of grace to some newcomer. Result, uneducated boys and parents embarrassed to face the American culture with uneducated children. Gentlemen, it is no laughing matter. Either we come to grips with the problem or lose workers in the field. This is an emergency matter, time will only make the situation worse. Some might say that the people should come on Sundays. Impossible, as Sundays are not a holiday in this culture. Moreover, unlike the American culture, to get a time schedule for meeting persons such as the work of the missionary is just about impossible. To turn anyone away is the highest type of shitsurei (bad manners). You cannot compare this culture with the American culture.

The same letter raised the suggestion that a student of Dr. Martin Luther College be sent over to teach the children.

This letter made a valid observation. Educating his children seriously limited the time the missionary had available for his Gospel outreach. Time had to be set aside not only for the actual teaching of the lessons but also for the preparation. We should not forget that the missionary is continually engaged in the attempt to master the Japanese language. Even after three years of intensive language study, the missionary has not mastered it. Considering the circumstances prevailing at the time, we cannot but wonder at all that the missionary was able to accomplish.

The Japan Board recognized the problem. In its report to the Synod in 1963 (Proceedings, p 174) the Board noted: "As in all foreign fields, we do have some problem with the education of the children of the missionaries." The convention did not address this issue, nor was it asked to. But it did authorize the

calling of a fourth man for the field. As the Board prepared to call this fourth man, they wrote to the nine district presidents requesting a list of candidates. After listing several desirable qualities for the man, they added:

A large family might be a hindrance as we are having problems with the education of the missionaries' children. However, this need not be the determining factor (Board letter, September 12, 1963).

In his monthly letter to the field (September 23, 1963), the Board chairman wrote:

Our Japan Board wants to assure you that we want to solve your problem of education of your children, however, at this Synod we dared not ask for a teacher, all boards had to cut costs. We are far too short of funds. The matter will be brought up at the next Synod (1965) for solution...Something may be worked out sooner, I hope.

A partial solution was sought as the Board issued calls for the new fourth missionary. Several pastors were called whose wives were teachers. The idea was that she would assist part-time in teaching the missionaries' children. There was only one problem with this plan: these men declined the call.

As promised, the Board reported to the 1965 Synod assembled in Watertown, Wisconsin, of the need to settle this education problem. In its report to the Synod (BoRam, 1965, p 75), the Japan Board presented the following requests to the delegates: "We ask permission of the Synod to give a temporary assignment to a New Ulm student, if the need arises to teach the children of our missionaries."

The need had certainly arisen. But the Synod resolved (Proceedings, 1965, pp 249-250):

Whereas, Our missionaries in Japan must take valuable time from their work in the mission field to give formal education to their children, and
Whereas, It does not appear practical to send a student teacher from the U.S. to Japan to teach the children of our missionaries; therefore be it
Resolved, That the Ex. Comm. for the Japan Mission, the Board for World Missions, and the missionaries in Japan find a mutually acceptable solution for the education of the missionaries' children.

A temporary solution was arrived at with the acquisition of the Higashi Kurume site. As the World Board had recommended, a parsonage was built on that site (1965) and room was provided for the boarding of the other missionaries' children. This enabled the children to attend the American School in nearby Tokyo. A permanent solution was yet to be discovered.

IV. Into the Second Decade

As the year 1966 faded into the pages of history and 1967 dawned with its new opportunities and promises, the WELS mission in Japan, the LECC, prepared to enter its second decade of history. The Lord of the harvest had bountifully blessed its birth and infancy. Statistics compiled at the end of the first decade indicated that 112 souls, 86 of whom were communicants, were listed on the membership rolls of the LECC. There was one organized congregation, Grace in Mito, and nine preaching stations. But there was a disturbing number in the statistical report: three pastors, including the missionaries!

The year just ended had begun with great hope and expectation. In 1966, we were "fully" staffed. Three missionaries - Seeger, Poetter and Weindorf - were busy in the harvest. The fourth, Pastor Norbert Meier, was entering his second year of language studies and was becoming more active in mission work. But the truth of the proverb, "Man proposes, God disposes," would again be confirmed. In March, 1966, Pastor L. Weindorf accepted a call stateside to Seattle, Washington. That same month, Pastor Seeger, who had faithfully labored in Japan for ten years, accepted the call of his Lord to be Friendly Counselor to our Hong Kong mission. The expatriate staff of four was quickly cut by one-half. As 1966 drew to a close there were only three pastors in Japan: Poetter, Meier and Yamada.

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A Fitting Farewell

On May 1, 1966, Dr. Aoki (a neurosurgeon), his wife and daughter, Mr. Yamamoto, Miss Maruyama and Mr. Suzuki were baptized in the name of the Triune God. Jesus had removed the scales from their eyes, and now these people, instead of seeing a fairy-tale person, saw the Son of God as their living Redeemer. It was a happy day, an extremely happy day, in my life. On that day I ended 10 years of ministry in the Japan Mission. The Savior had called me to a new field in Hong Kong. What a pleasant gift he gave to me with the baptism of these six people. How I wish that you could get to know them. You would gain much, my friends, from their simple and sincere faith in our Savior. How thankful you should be that the Lord has deigned to use you as his instruments in bringing these people to eternal life.

Richard Seeger

N.W.L., July 24, 1966, p 233

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1967 was to continue changes begun in the previous year. The change occurred, not in Japan, but stateside in the Executive Committee for the LECC, the Japan Board. Pastor Harry Shiley, the chairman of the Board for Japan's first decade, asked to be relieved of this duty. Rev. Karl Bast of Madison was selected to

replace him. Pastor Poetter wrote (February 8, 1967):

It sounds like the end of an era when I read that Pastor Shiley is no longer chairman of the Japan Executive Committee. He has been God's gift to the Japan Mission in guidance, instruction, patience and humor. A feeling of closeness and dependency has grown in us toward him. He has faithfully carried out a difficult task for these many years. We hope he will remain on the committee for years to come (he stayed on until the 1967 Synod convention, ed.) and enjoy the relaxation of only being a member of the committee. With the mantle of Shiley now cast upon Pastor Bast we turn to you for the same understanding and guidance as your predecessor. Your letter will now become the most important letter of the month for us and the work we have been called to do. Our mutual responsibility before the Lord is lighter as we share it. May the Holy Spirit give you the necessary wisdom for a God-pleasing development of this mission.

The executive committee for a foreign mission (each one of our Synod's foreign missions has one) serves as the vital link between the Synod and her missionaries. The committee is the missionary's prime connection to his homeland and church. The committee is the Synod's link with its workers in the field. Each month letters cross the ocean: to Japan from the committee, to America from each missionary. The committee is responsible to the World Mission Board, and ultimately to the Synod, for the affairs of its specific foreign field. The committee is responsible for the total well-being of the missionary, his family and his field. Besides requisitioning funds for the missionary and his labors, the board provides guidance, instruction and encouragement to the men in the field. Surely such people deserve our prayers as they carry out this great responsibility!

Regrouping was the order of the day in early 1966. The Japan Board appointed Pastor Poetter as the "Field Representative" of our mission. As such he was to "coordinate the work of the mission field and to administer the affairs of the mission as the personal representative of the Executive Committee for the Japan Mission" (Board Letter, March 26, 1966). The various fields of labor were re-divided among the three pastors to insure adequate care. Pastor Poetter continued his work in Mito, Oarai and Daigo and served the vacancy at Tsuchiura and Ishioka. Pastor Meier, completing his language study in June, served Tokyo and Ashikaga. Pastor Yamada labored in Shimodate and Utsunomiya.

As the work continued under rather difficult circumstances, the Lord was still providing for his people in Japan. In May of 1967 Seminary graduate Kermit Habben accepted the call to Japan. He began his language studies in the Fall. The LECC was coming of age. This shortage in manpower illustrated the need for a national pastorate. Several young men approached the missionaries with the request to be trained as pastors.

These requests were in keeping with our plan of establishing an indigenous church. In order to do so, a national pastoral team was necessary. Hence there was a need for and talk of a Japanese theological school. Plans for a Seminary in Japan had already been discussed prior to the incorporation of the LECC in 1962. Two years earlier, Mr. S. Onomura had asked to be trained as a pastor. Unfortunately he had to discontinue his studies a year later for personal reasons. Our first national pastor, Tatsushiro Yamada, came to us by way of colloquy in the summer of 1963. Before that year was out, he offered himself for training as a full-time church worker. He began his studies in April of the next year.

Yoshida's training confronted the infant church with a difficult, yet joyous, dilemma: How are we to train our future pastors? Should the worker-training institutions of the WELS, Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, be used? That solution was not feasible. To train a Japanese national in American schools offered too many difficulties: language, finances, etc. The Mission Council finally adopted the following course of instruction for Yoshida:

1. Rev. Seeger: N.T. Introduction;
2. Rev. Yamada: N.T. Greek;
3. Mr. Igarashi: Church History;
4. Rev. Poetter: Dogmatics and Catechetics.

(P.L., April 11, 1964)

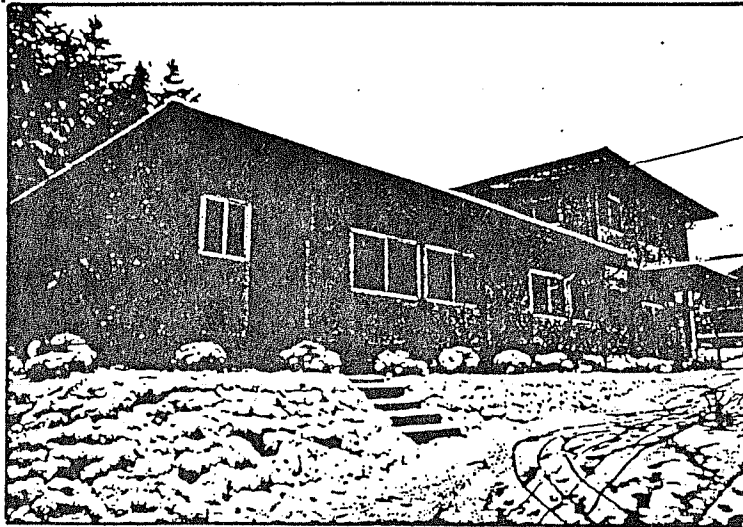
During the year Yoshida would move from teacher to teacher. At the end of the year the MC was to review this program and adopt a further course of action.

The road to the establishment of a Japanese seminary had its ups and downs over the next few years. Yoshida discontinued his studies after one year in order to get married. He was replaced by Fukuichi Oshino, a twenty-three year old machinist. He was accepted for the program with the condition that he first obtain high school and college diplomas. Oshino was joined by Yamaguchi of Tsuchiura. He, too, had to complete a college education before entering the seminary program. These two men later deferred their studies, but Yoshida decided to resume his.

1967 - the year of continued change. For the seminary it was the first year of a concentrated effort that culminated in the establishment of a formal seminary. In March of that year, the Board of Directors of the LECC finalized the curriculum of the seminary. This curriculum was based on the one employed by our WLS. In September Yoshida began his second year of studies under Yamada, Igarashi and Poetter. Plans were made to make a seminary classroom in the basement of the Mito church. In the spring of the next year, Oshino entered the seminary. There he joined Yamaguchi and Mr. Suzuki of Tokyo. Thus by April of 1968 the seminary had four students.

In that same year the Japan Board began calling for a fourth resident missionary for Japan. This man was called as a missionary, but he was to specialize as head of the seminary. Pastor Harold Johne of St. Paul, Minnesota accepted this call in 1969. Shortly after his arrival, our pastoral team in Japan was augmented by Rev. Yukichi Makise. Makise had been a pastor in the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church. He had left this church and become a member of Agonai (Atonement) congregation in Higashi Kurume. He passed a colloquy in October and was called to serve the church in Ashikaga.

As Pastor Johne prepared to depart for his new field of labor, the Japan Board and the Synod were taking steps to build a seminary facility. At its April 21, 1969 meeting, the Board agreed that Johne should reside in Tsuchiura and that the seminary he was to head was to be located there too. Following that decision, the Board requested that the missionaries search for a suitable site for the school. The 1971 Synod convention in New Ulm resolved that a multi-purpose building be erected in Japan. This edifice was to provide space for seminary classrooms and a printshop. The convention authorized \$50,000 for this project and for the calling of a fifth expatriate missionary.



Shortly after Johne began his intensive language studies, he and the LECC rejoiced as the infant seminary produced its first fruit. Mr. Yoshida completed his seminary training in December, 1969. He was called by the LECC to serve the Hitachi area. His graduation and ordination service was scheduled to coincide with the annual meeting of the Delegate Church Council of the LECC on January 15, 1970, at Mito. He was joined by Oshino and Suzuki a year later. Oshino succeeded Pastor Makise at Ashikaga, and Suzuki was called to Utsunomiya City.

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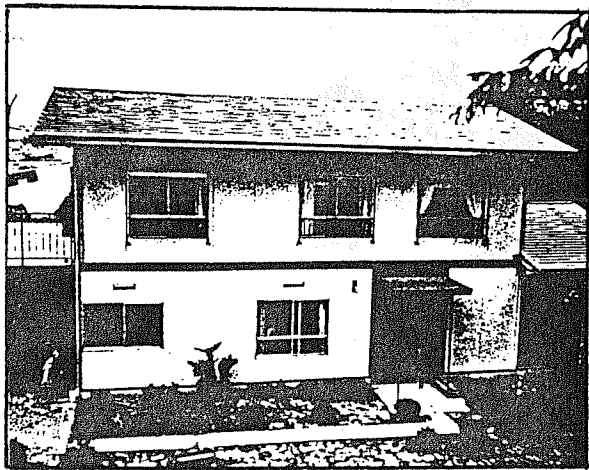
Ordination in Japan

Fukuichi Oshino and Yasuo Suzuki will no longer be addressed by their fellow believers in Japan as San but as Sensei. The change was made on March 28, 1971. San in Japanese is a title of honor like "Mr." and "Sir," and is always used at the end of a name. Sensei in Japanese means "Most Honorable One" and is the special title given to teachers, pastors, professors and leaders.

These young men...were ordained as pastors in a service conducted at Grace Ev. Lutheran Church in Mito City. Todashi Yoshida Sensei, another of our mission's national pastors, preached the ordination sermon. He is pastor of the congregation in Hitachi.

The ordination of students Oshino and Suzuki brings to five the number of national pastors. They are Tatsushiro Yamada Sensei, Todashi Yoshida Sensei, Yukichi Makise Sensei and the newly ordained men. The mission also has three national lay pastoral helpers. They are Ryuichi Igarashi San (literary expert), Kiyoshi Nemoto San (printer and evangelist) and Keiichi Takahashi (printer of Japanese Braille). (N.W.L., June 6, 1971).

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September 15, 1971, was another red-letter day for our Japan Mission. On that day the new facilities in Tsuchiura were dedicated to the glory of the Triune God. Three buildings had been erected there. The largest one served as the "All-Purpose Center." It provided a large meeting hall, two seminary classrooms and a chapel for the Tsuchiura congregation. The second building was to house the print shop of the LECC. The third building was a parsonage for the seminary head, Pastor John. This home was built adjacent to the parsonage of the Tsuchiura pastor (Habben, at that time).

The mettle of the LECC and its national pastors was soon to be tested. Oshino had moved to Ashikaga and assumed the pastorate of Makise, who had moved to Kashiwa. During his stay at Ashikaga, Makise had swindled local merchants and forged Pastor Poetter's signature. Makise disappeared after his move to Kashiwa and was not found. The LECC was forced to absorb the losses incurred by Makise.

In 1971 the Japan Board settled one long-standing problem. Dr. Martin Luther Colledge graduate Eric Hartzell was called to teach the children of the missionaries for one year. Since that time, a new teacher has been called every year. This action has enabled the missionaries to devote more of their time to their calls to preach the Gospel to the Japanese.

As the Japan Board reported to the nine districts of the WELS on our fifteen years in Japan (Report to the Nine Districts, 1972, p 64, 66), they wrote:

As the disciples must have been overwhelmed by the commission of their Lord to 'go into all the world,' so our missionaries in Japan and the executive committee are at times overwhelmed by the size for their assignment. With four American families and a budget of \$130,000 we are to bring the Gospel to one hundred million people with a heathen culture as ancient and as solid as the 500 ton, 1,200 year old great Buddha at Nara. But we are there because God has called us, concentrating our efforts in two prefectures to the north of Tokyo, beginning with Kurume, a suburb of Tokyo. It is our privilege to report to you that God has demonstrated yet once again that his Gospel is truly his power unto salvation.

In the same manner let us look at the number of converts gained. The mere report of a number 21 adults baptized last year would appear to be very small. But let us set this number against the number of communicants at work with their leaders, and it makes us blush for shame, for every six communicant members gained a convert with the Lord's mighty blessing. What a tremendous thing this would be if here in the States we could gain converts at the rate of one for every six communicant members.

May God grant the increase in faith and love to keep pace with the Gospel assignment to the millions of Japan and 'into all the world.'

