

God Opens a Door in Japan
1951-1956

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Most people, when asked when Christianity came to Japan, would probably be shocked to hear that its introduction came long before the 20th Century. If you know anything about the Japanese culture you know that the Japanese are a very proud people. You also know that historically they have been an isolationist country. Despite their ideals, Christianity was introduced to them hundreds of years ago. It was in the mid-16th Century that mission work was begun in Japan, and just as today, faced many obstacles. Sadly, from 1614-1854 the doors were closed not only to Christians, but to all foreigners!¹ It was the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853 that helped to open the doors for trade and more importantly, mission work.

Several church bodies are presently involved in Japan. On paper there would have appeared to be more present in the past than today, but much of that has to do with the congealing of several church bodies into E.L.C.A. and other unionistic groups. Compared to most, even Missouri which came in 1948, WELS is a latecomer. As the title of this paper suggests, the goal of this paper is to give a chronological history of Wisconsin's initial work in Japan. It is well known that WELS needed to restart this mission in 1957 due to difficult times being met with extreme measures. That is the sad part of this story and will only be dealt with very briefly at the conclusion of this paper since it has been dealt with in depth elsewhere. The goal is to see how and why it is we came to Japan in the first place and also to see the ministry performed during those first years.

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Recall that World War II came to a close in September of 1945. Besides having a great military presence in Europe, America also had a great presence in the East, especially Japan. Japan had been economically and spiritually crushed in their defeat and were looking for hope.

¹ Bernhardt, William F. *The History of Our WELS Mission in Japan, with Historical and Cultural Background*. EF 746. Introduction p. i.

The fields were ripe for harvest and missionaries quickly flooded into the land. One interesting fact was that the WELS had discussions on sending someone long before the War ever ended. Richard Balge notes that already in 1891 there was a proposal to start work in Japan, but this never materialized because funds for missions at that time were scarce.²

1951

Even before there was any serious talk amongst the General Mission Board or even the Synod as a whole, Richard Poetter, a WELS member serving a vicar call through the LC-MS in Japan sent a very encouraging letter to Pastor Karl Gurgel, chairman of the General Mission Board (GMB). In this letter dated February 11, 1951, Poetter introduces himself to Gurgel.

Poetter was sent to Japan as a vicar in October of 1950. But one might wonder, "Why is he, a WELS member, vicaring for Missouri?" Poetter has quite the interesting story. He attended Winnebago Lutheran Academy High School; DMLC for four years and then spend four years in the teaching ministry. After four years he resigned because he did not agree with his pastor's laxity toward Scouts. After resigning he decided the Lord was calling him into the preaching ministry. Because of his age (at this time already 25) and his need for Greek and Hebrew study he went to Concordia Seminary in Springfield. Before he finished school he volunteered himself as a candidate to vicar in Japan. He received the call and accepted it. After his year in Japan he felt as though it would be wrong for him to leave this field and asked to continue his work in Japan. The Seminary granted his requests and he finished his final year at the Seminary by correspondence. (In 1958 he would be called to be WELS missionary in Japan).

Why then, is this young man writing Pastor Gurgel? The superintendent of the LC-MS Japan mission, Rev. William J. Danker asked him to contact the WELS and beg them to send a missionary to Japan. Already, Missouri had 15 men in the field of Japan with more coming but

² Balge, Richard D. *Von Rohr: A Beloved Brother and Faithful Minister*. WLS Essay File. p. 10

still needed more manpower. Poetter encourages, "The Japanese people at the present time are willing to listen to anybody who will offer them any hope....The amazing zeal of the reborn Japanese Christian I have never seen anywhere before. The mission station here in Niigata was started one year ago. Niigata Prefecture is the stronghold of Buddhism in Japan. And yet this morning I worshipped with a Christian congregation of over fifty....There are hundreds of cities and thousands of villages who do not have even this scant opportunity to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ. What are you going to do about it?"³

These words may seem rather strong but they come from a heart filled with zeal for the spread of the Gospel. As his letter continues Poetter prays that the Lord would move his dear Wisconsin Synod to send missionaries to Japan. We can only assume that Pastor Gurgel received this letter with great joy and zeal because within a year a man would be sent! Now came the hard work of committees and research to determine whether or not to send a man to Japan, and in what function.

In the GMB meeting of May 1951 the Maas committee report was accepted with this comment: "Your committee, although in favor of sending men to Europe and Japan as well as to camps in our country, cannot offer any suggestion until the Spiritual Welfare Committee has provided information on the question whether our pastors on foreign soil can reach and serve our men in the armed services."⁴ The SWC was involved because of the great amount of WELS members who were serving in the armed forces and needed to be served by WELS pastors. It was the work of the SWC to print materials for these men and to get them into contact with pastors in their area. So with this initial report, the feasibility of sending a man to Japan has already been recognized to some extent.

³ Letter from Richard Poetter to Karl Gurgel, February 11, 1951⁶ Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1951.

⁴ GMB minutes May 17-24 1951

In August 1951 the GMB met once again and this time with more reports and materials to look over and discuss. Pastor Gurgel briefly presented letters, facts and figures concerning work in Japan during the first session. During the second session an amazing decision was reached. The GMB concluded that they would present to the Synod a plan to send two missionaries to Japan and two missionaries to Rhodesia in Africa. They also stated "that the men in Japan work in cooperation with the SWC in serving our men in the armed services there and in Korea; that Synod appropriate \$70,000 for this purpose, (the cost will be less the second year); and that the GMB be instructed to call these men and to send them to their respective fields."⁵ Now all they needed to do was present their plan to the Synod in convention.

"When our 1951 WELS Convention took place, Committee No. 8 recommended that work in Japan be placed under the canopy of the Spiritual Welfare Committee; our primary work was to be among the military personnel. This recommendation was altered by the convention when it got to the floor with the following resulting recommendation: 'We recommend that the GMB ask the SWC to place a man in Tokyo, a) to care for our servicemen, and b) to investigate the mission opportunities in Japan.'⁶ Things moved quite quickly thereafter and on October 20, 1951, Pastor Fred Tiefel was called to be the WELS' contact man for the SWC in the East and to investigate the real opportunities of mission work among the Japanese people.

1952

With all his bags packed Pastor Tiefel departed from Portland, Oregon aboard the SS India Mail bound for Yokohama, Japan on February 16th.⁷ Tiefel made this trip alone, leaving his wife at home because of the nature of the trip and the first months of intense work that would be

⁵ GMB Minutes August 14-16, 1951.

⁶ Bernhardt, p. 1.

⁷ See Appendix Item 1 for a picture taken just before he boarded the ship.

required of him. She also stayed behind because there was no idea of how successful Tiefel would be and how long his stay would be.

Interestingly, no documentation could be found between his departure and the May GMB meeting. Obviously he had been communicating but unfortunately that communication is not to be found in the Archival records. At this May meeting Pastor Blakewell of the SWC reported on Tiefel's situation. Tiefel had established himself at the Yokohama Hotel and for the most part was comfortable. He reports that Tiefel is enjoying a fine spirit of cooperation from the Missouri brothers but has also come to the sharp realization of a language barrier. Surprisingly Tiefel was already instructing 15 students by this time!

Later that month, Blakewell wrote a letter to Tiefel dated May 22. In this letter he encourages Tiefel to meet with the military men at the hotel instead of him travelling all over to visit them and to continue his survey of the feasibility of a mission there. In the letter Blakewell also announces that they have decided to send Mrs. Tiefel to Japan because his long term service seemed a reality.

In his first lengthy report back to the States (May 29,30) he expresses his surprise that they had already decided to send his wife. Although surprised he was very glad to have her come. In this letter he also emphasizes that it would be much better for him to have a home established to better minister to the servicemen and to have a concrete location for outreach. In his work related to the SWC he already had many wonderful opportunities to serve not only WELS servicemen, but other Lutherans and even non-Lutherans! Because of the contact he had with a serviceman who was half Japanese and half Hawaiian he gained "Oriental 'face' with the Japanese at the hotel, in Hawaii, and all those connected."⁸ All this also resulted in him being the

⁸ Letter from Tiefel to GMB May 19526 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1952.

only foreigner allowed extended stay at the hotel. If this had not been the case he quickly was going to have to find a new place to rest his head.

In his work related to the GMB he announced that he already had 20 students in two different classes with six more applying. Sadly, he was not able to receive them because there simply was no room. (He had been conducting a class in Yokohama and one in Tokyo.) The Missouri missionaries told him that he was having faster success than any Missouri missionary! At this time Tiefel also came to the conclusion that language study was going to be necessary and, in fact, had already begun. He emphasized that the Missouri wives except those with child or ill were all taking Japanese. He saw the language study especially important to outreach but he also saw a need in it just to accomplish his SWC work with the best efficiency. He also noted that all the missionaries were employing a house maid. Mentioning this he was just giving the GMB a heads up as to what might be expected of a missionary in Japan and the expenses.

Tiefel's words of opportunity echo much of what Poetter said in his letter to Pastor Gurgel. By this time he had made some very helpful acquaintances. One such acquaintance was Motoko Miyama-san. She was a young student who had already become very useful to him in his understanding of the Japanese people and often came to his classes all the while encouraging her friends to come along as well. Tiefel writes, "One Japanese-Lutheran student assured me that if we would establish a small school of high academic standards our only trouble would be to turn away students because of the terrific school shortage and the desire on the part of youth for education especially 'Western'."⁹ He later comments that the U.L.C. (United Lutheran Church) was already beginning to do this.

Later in his report he gets to more logistic items pertaining to Mrs. Tiefel's trip. He says that things would be much cheaper to import from the States instead of purchasing them all in

⁹ Ibid.

Japan. There was a special 60 day window from your time of entrance to receive your household goods and whatever else you brought with you duty free. After that time high duty taxes took effect, up to 50%.

He goes on to talk about the health situation in Japan at the time. Today, if one were to go to Japan they would find a very Westernized and modernized country, with health being a top priority. In the years after the War, this was not the case. He said that one needed to exercise much caution in washing and handling food because some of the fertilizer they used was their own excrement. To make matters worse, they wouldn't just spread it onto the soil but would dump it on the crops as they were growing. Therefore the produce would often be covered in all kinds of filth. Because of this he stayed away from the raw food and even the water of Tokyo needed to be boiled before drinking. Tiefel has an interesting comment on all of this, whether it is accurate or not, who knows. "Japanese health is a serious impairment to worker efficiency. Maybe that's why they work so slowly."¹⁰ Even though he did his best to avoid contaminated food he was certain that he had a new friend living in his intestines. He didn't want to get a "worm-purge" because he said it would shortly return. He also recalled a dog he once given worm pills but worried about taking them himself because "he (the dog) was never quite the same thereafter."¹¹

Unfortunately he also could not purchase food from the Military PX because he was not associated with the military, unlike the Missouri missionaries who also served in the military chaplaincy. He finally notes that to build a house of appropriate size would run between 10 and 12 thousand dollars which doesn't seem like much by today's standards, but in 1951 that was a large chunk of money.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

In a letter from Pastor Gurgel to President Brenner (June 7) Gurgel said that the SWC was not willing to erect a parsonage for Tiefel in Japan and so that duty was going to fall to the GMB.¹² Unfortunately, Gurgel realized that they would not be able to support both Japan and Rhodesia at this moment. Although no resolution was made at this time Brenner voiced his favor to support the Japan efforts. Later on this would become an easy decision to make because the political climate was quickly changing in Rhodesia to make it almost impossible to start a mission there.

As the weeks went on in Japan, Tiefel came across a wonderful opportunity to purchase a house. In his letter to Gurgel dated June 25¹³ he informed the GMB that the Army was returning most of their properties that they held in Japan. Fifty percent of their holdings would be released in July and the rest in September. Because of this Tiefel makes an urgent request that \$25,000 be released by September 1st so that he might purchase a residence. Unfortunately, because this was a matter of such short notice this plan would not work. It also was not yet decided by the GMB that Tiefel or any other missionary would be able to be sent to Japan to begin an official mission.

One thing that surprised the GMB was that Tiefel was already conducting Bible classes when all he was to be doing was taking a survey. Pastor Gurgel informed Tiefel that he was encouraged by the great opportunities he was seeing in Japan but also warned him to be cautious in his "reading and understanding of the Synod's word 'survey work'."¹⁴ (letter dated July 2) Tiefel would reply to this concern in September¹⁵ in great detail but before this would happen a Japanese man would write a very encouraging letter to President Brenner himself! Why Tiefel

¹² GMB Minutes June 1952.

¹³ Letter from Tiefel to Gurgel June 25, 1952⁶ Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1952.

¹⁴ Letter from Gurgel to Tiefel July 2, 1952⁶ Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1952.

¹⁵ Letter from Tiefel to GMB and Japan Commission Sep. 21, 1952⁶ Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1952.

didn't address this "problem" probably had to do with the great amount of time it took to send letters at that time. Airmail was available, but very costly.

In his letter of July 27, John Hasegawa gave an excellent description of the thoughts and attitudes of the Japanese people of that time. In his letter he also encourages President Brenner along with the rest of the Synod with strong words to make their presence official in Japan.¹⁶ Following this letter two other very similar letters would follow from members of Tiefel's Bible classes. Certainly Mr. Hasegawa would have been invaluable to him. Sadly, Tiefel had to turn him away, but not because of false doctrine or a lack of zeal for the Lord. He had to turn him away because he was another missionary's student, Missionary Meyer. Tiefel did not want to be sheep stealing from his Missouri brothers and cause strife in the land. Why exactly Hasegawa wanted to learn from Tiefel instead of the missionary who was already teaching him we cannot be certain, but it is likely that Hasegawa already saw where Missouri and Wisconsin were differing on various matters, particularly unionism.

With that somewhat sad account behind him, Tiefel continued on in his work. In a handwritten letter to Gurgel and Brenner (Aug. 6)¹⁷ he gives a further update of his work in Japan. In this letter he speaks of the great challenges that face a foreigner in learning the Japanese language. He laments the fact that the students in his classes are understanding only 50% of what he is saying, and yet is amazed that the Holy Spirit is still creating faith despite his weaknesses. He then writes, "It has served to goad me on to continue my language study even though this weather makes one almost stupid. Honestly, just now while writing this letter I am stark naked, electric fan blowing, and still perspiring freely." So despite all his difficulties, in his

¹⁶ Letter from Hasegawa to Gurgel July 27 1952⁶ Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1952. To read the whole letter see Appendix item 2.

¹⁷ Letter from Tiefel to Gurgel August 6, 1952⁶ Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1952.

love for his Lord and the lost souls of the Japanese people he vows to continue his studies in the language.

To help him communicate better he searched high and low for an adequate interpreter and his searching led him to "the President of one of the English-speaking societies of the Tokyo University." The president offered himself but unfortunately it didn't work out. Tiefel felt that he didn't know enough English and to put the cherry on top he requested a contract, and so Tiefel dismissed the man. At this point Hasegawa volunteered but because of what was mentioned above this did not work either. With no interpreter therefore he began to write out his class in advance to be translated by the chairman of the each class so that the class can follow along. The progress is slow but still encouraging. In a different strain he announced that he would no longer attend the services at the LC-MS Chapel (military) due to its unionism in regards to Communion. (Here begins the point of contention that would eventually destroy the relations between Tiefel and the WELS, but many more wonderful things will intervene before that time.)

In his September "Report to the SWC & GMB"¹⁸ he gives encouraging news pertaining to his SWC work. By this time he has communed 15 servicemen and has had over 50 visits. He notes that to some this may seem like a very low number, seeing as there are thousands of US personnel in Japan. He speaks of the great difficulties facing these young men. They range from the terrors of war to the immorality of those who surround them on the battle field to the evil influences they face in Japan. Sexual immorality is probably the greatest problem he has to deal with. Yokohama and Tokyo are said to be the worst in the world when it comes to prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases. Many a serviceman he has counseled has been with a harlot or gotten a Japanese girl pregnant and needs guidance. On a more positive note he has also been

¹⁸ Letter from Tiefel to GMB and Japan Commission Sep. 21, 19526 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1952.

able to reach out to the widows of soldiers who were still in Japan. (I'm assuming that most if not all of those wives were Japanese. Perhaps some were American and had not yet returned stateside.) He also notes how much he enjoys his visits with these young men and doesn't mind that they can sometimes last for hours.

To another point, he speaks of the concerns he has about the new LC-MS service pastor, Pastor Sohn. He says that he has unionistic beliefs and practices and agrees with the statements of the U.W.C. and A.L.C. (American Lutheran Church). Although he still has these concerns he deals with this issue in a very evangelical manner. His letter concludes with nine requests/suggestions. 1) SWC keep a contact man in Tokyo and Yokohama; 2) authorization to purchase a house; 3) send Mrs. Tiefel; 4) if the house is unfurnished, authorize the purchase of household items; 5) that the addresses of hospitalized servicemen be given to him ASAP because he has not received any; 6) permit an announcement through the SWC to the servicemen if his address changes; 7&8) give me encouragement; 9) pursue better ways to provide financial assistance.

In this report Tiefel finally addresses the concerns that he is overstepping the bounds of his call by holding Bible classes. He responds that two Japanese girls (whom he calls his angels which God sent to show him the great work to be done in Japan) showed up at his door desiring to learn of Christ. He stalled for a time but then consented. When he consented they made him promise them that he would not leave Japan until he had taught them Christianity. He promised.

On one occasion one of them invited him to her house for their study. When he got there instead of the two of them there were ten waiting to hear the gospel! From there his work spread to two classes, one in Tokyo (10 students) and one in Yokohama (13 students). He writes, "Sometimes new faces appear. There seems to be some kind of rotation system at work. For

these students know that I will take no more new classes. Do you brethren know the awful experience of turning a serious student away, who is asking for instruction in the Way?

Unfortunately, I do."

These two young women have been a great blessing to him in his survey work as well. He learned a great deal about the Japanese people. In fact, a Missouri missionary told him that he had a better insight into the Japanese life and customs than any of their men! He admits that some may now think that he has officially committed the Synod to mission work in Japan in the Japanese eyes. But in a response to anyone who would think negatively of this he says, "In answer to such an one I will state, that this commitment I can for the time being fulfill in addition to my SWC work. If that work should cease, and hence my call, I would gladly stay in Japan, obtain employment as a civilian, and fulfill my promise."

Tiefel goes on to list reasons why WELS should be in Japan. He points out that we are the defenders of orthodoxy in the Synodical Conference and Japan is in great need of orthodoxy. He mentions that our educational system produces men well suited for this mission setting. In addition he makes note of the fact that our men give "something clearer to digest on the problem of sin and grace than Kierkegaard's 'Pilgrimage to Faith.' In Japan's theological circles, he is now much the subject of discussion. [In Japan, Kierkegaard's "Angst" discussion, strikes home.]" He continues that the WELS is outspoken against unionism which has a great presence, not only because of heterodox church bodies present, but also because of the national religions of Japan. Finally he draws attention to the present "open door."

He writes of how America will spend \$170 million in the next ten months and asks, "so per man, woman and child what is the Wisconsin Synod being taxed for political, military and economic assistance to Japan? But will not we spend a little to bring them the Gospel? The

billions Japan has cost the tax payer in the States will all be lost if Japan decides to 'jump' to the Russian side, but a gospel dollar will not be lost." He then requests, 1) that Synod recognize his classes as legitimate; 2) that funds be provided to a) inaugurate public service both in Tokyo and Yokohama; b) purchase materials and instruments for worship; c) produce literature for preparing Sunday School teachers; 3) send more manpower; and 4) "to begin at this time to prepare for a school."

In light of all this information from Tiefel the GMB in its October meeting announces it is greatly encouraged by the news from him. Therefore a motion was made and passed to present to the Synod in convention that WELS begin official mission work in Japan and offered a budget for a two man team.

1953

From all information gathered there is a gap in the correspondence from October of 1952 to late July of 1953. It is assumed that things continued as usual and perhaps that Pastor Tiefel made even more strides to extend his mission in Japan. It was also during this intervening time that Mrs. Tiefel moved to Japan to finally be with her husband from whom she had been separated for over a year. Tiefel was also able to find a home for them to live in, but because of funding and Japanese "red tape" the house was not officially theirs at this time. Luckily the owner of the property allowed them to move in anyways.

Then for seven weeks Tiefel returned to the US to prepare their things to be shipped in certainty that at the Synod Convention he would be called to be the Synod's missionary to Japan. The motion passed and he was called in August to be missionary. On August 23rd he was officially commissioned. He would spend the next couple of weeks preparing their household items to be shipped to Japan. During this time he also purchased a '53 Chevy and drove it all the

way to Washington so that it too could be shipped to Japan. While he was in Spokane, WA, he was able to purchase a small used reed organ for \$60 to be shipped to Japan along with the rest of their belongings. In a letter to Pastor Dorn, the Japan Committee Chairman, Tiefel informed him that all was going well despite a few kinks and was looking forward to getting back to Japan, seeing his wife and getting back to work. His flight departed on September 9th.

On September 11th he wrote a letter to Dorn and informed him of what had occurred in Japan during his absence. While he was gone Mrs. Tiefel was bothered by prowlers on two different occasions. Because of this, he said that the stone wall surrounding the house should be raised to prevent more trouble. In regards to that house, plans were set in motion to finally purchase the house and its property for \$15,750. When everything was completed he said that he would write out a will in favor of the Synod concerning the property in the event that he die unexpectedly. (This he actually did which is interesting because this will come into play in the future.)¹⁹

Later on that month Dorn would inform Tiefel²⁰ that the newly elected President Naumann and the District Presidents were working on a list to call a second man to Japan. In his November report, Tiefel notes his disappointment in the fact that Dorn is the only clergy contact he has and encourages that anything sent his way is appreciated. At the end of September he was invited to the "All-Lutheran Free Conference" and to present a paper on "Church and Church Fellowship" to the brothers in Japan.²¹ He pointed out the unionistic errors of those around them. He was asked about the proposed action of Wisconsin toward Missouri and how that would affect his attitude toward the Missouri brothers in Japan. He answered that he still could not

¹⁹ Letter from Tiefel to Dorn Sept. 11, 19536 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1953.

²⁰ Letter from Dorn Sept. 21, 19536 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1953.

²¹ At this conference statistics for Japan were also handed out. See item 3 in the appendix.

fellowship with them in pulpit, altar or prayer but would still be willing to speak about the subject at any time. With tears in his eyes, Missionary Heerboth hoped that Tiefel would speak to them further in the future. Most of the others present were grateful for his presentation and many serious discussions among them all resulted.

Despite the hardships and disagreements he has with the Missouri brothers in Japan, Tiefel still praises them for their great zeal to reach out to the Japanese people. He then continues a regular update. He announces that he is about half way through translating the 2nd Article in the Catechism and that Pastor Takashima of the U.L.C has been a great help in this translating endeavor. Pastor Takashima was very interested in helping out because he too wants to be able to use the Catechism in his teaching. Bible classes were down to 11 students. He felt the main reason was because some of them have had conflicts with the regular class schedules and others have just left.

He also emphasized that he has not been able to follow up on prospects because he must get back to language study (he had already been absent from it for over seven weeks). He understood that Synod wanted to see results but assured that it would come in time. Yet, he also felt that two solid years of study was required, otherwise he felt the work would just be superficial. On a better note, he announced that the SWC work is going well and services are regularly attended and he was even able to baptize the child of one of the married servicemen.

At this time the paper work still had not been completed to be able to "close" on the house and therefore they have yet to be able to install a heater. Japan doesn't get bitterly cold during the winter, but it does get cold enough!²² Thankfully the owner was very understanding. Even though they were not able to install a heater they were still able to raise the stone fence

²² I have been told Japan's climate is similar to that of South Carolina. I also know it can get quite cold yet in Japan. When visiting the Hiebs in late December I woke up my first morning there and could easily see my breath in the bedroom! Even today, central heat is not standard in Japan.

around the house with wood and topped it off with some barbed wire to discourage any more vandals. Describing the burglary in Tokyo Tiefel writes, "The burglars become more desperate the last two months of the year, as all personal debts must be paid, and will overpower the residents and clean out the house^ó as they did in the case of an Australian resident a few weeks ago." Their personal effects also finally arrived in Japan but to get them took a great deal of patience and negotiating to actually get them into their possession.

1954

In his first report of this new year (Jan. 4)²³ Tiefel revealed the complex tax and ownership laws of Japan having do deal with property. He wrote that ownership, "must of necessity be in the missionaries name at first while there is no organization (according to Japanese law). After there is a legal organization then it can be placed in the name of the organization, with two missionaries given 55% (i.e. controlling) voting right by the organization." Because of this situation he informed them that at that time the parsonage was in his name and his wife was named as the inheritor. More important than that is the fact that they celebrated their first church service in their home on Christmas Day!

In the next month the first call for a second missionary to Japan is sent out to Pastor H. Birner. After some correspondence he would return this call. Not until April 28 would there be another report sent to Pastor Dorn.²⁴ It was a usual report but Tiefel emphasized that things were looking worse in regards to the unionism in Japan. Three men from Missouri continued to meet with Tiefel: Pastors Popp and Heerboth and Mr. Tews (the business manager). Speaking on this topic he says, "Especially those who have 'love' on their lips have shown animosity toward me.

²³ Letter from Tiefel to Dorn Jan. 4, 1954⁶ Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1954.

²⁴ Letter from Tiefel to Dorn April 28, 1954⁶ Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1954.

This latter phenomenon has not escaped the notice of sincere students of the Truth, like Pastor Heerboth."

On May 7 Tiefel would write another letter to Pastor Dorn.²⁵ In this letter he reiterates much of what he had just said in his report. He suggested that the house next door be purchased for the new missionary because of the location. He also said the Japanese businesses would buy it, tear it down and build a two story store. He mentioned that this house could serve as the first church home until the second missionary arrives. Later in May Pastor Franzmann received the call to Japan, he would be the second man to decline the call. The last order of large business that was dealt with was the *ikay* given to Tiefel to purchase the adjacent house for \$5,000.

It wouldn't be until October that much is heard from missionary Tiefel but in October there was certainly much to report. In his October 7 letter to Dorn,²⁶ Tiefel gladly announces that the first essay done by a regular printer will be accomplished very soon! He is very happy that this material will be beneficial to many outside our circles as well and that it will help pastors who are ministering to Japanese wives in America.

Later he moves on to the growing matter of unionism among the church bodies of Japan. He writes, "The unsettled condition on the union front in the Synodical Conference is affecting conditions here in Japan. As long as there is no decision in the States, the men here who are on the fence will not come to any decision for themselves." Earlier he had stated that several would come to the WELS if there was a break and therefore WELS would not have to call from the field back home but have men already in Japan.

²⁵ Letter from Tiefel to Dorn May 7, 19546 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1954.

²⁶ Letter from Tiefel to Dorn Oct. 7, 19546 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1954.

One week later he had some wonderful news to share. A national candidate for the ministry! Mr. Oshima, 22 years old and the oldest of four children had been coming to the Bible classes for some time and now came to him to announce his plan. He was a student at the local university but his father had just unexpectedly died and now he was the head of the house. He was being pressured by his uncles to work and provide for his family, but had a deep desire to study Scripture and to become a public minister of the gospel. He even wanted to study Greek and Hebrew. He understood that there wasn't any money in the ministry and that didn't matter because he loved his Lord and his countrymen.

Sadly, a little over a week later, Mr. Oshima came to Tiefel and informed him that his hand had been forced to work. One of his uncles had secured a good job for him and it would be very disrespectful and unthankful to his uncle if he did not work. Tiefel writes, "He will continue to assist us with translation work, and wherever possible, in addition to his trade company job. He was fearful that I would despise him, but I assured him to the contrary, and stated that my endeavor would be to make him a good witness unto his Savior-God in his business profession, and beseech the Savior for his continued blessings upon him."

By God's grace there was another student who soon offered himself to become more involved in church work. Mr. Yamanaka also wanted to study Greek and to help in the translation of Bible literature. He too was a serious student of the Bible but not as advanced as Oshima. Later that year another man, Pastor Schumann, would be called to serve as missionary to Japan, but he too would decline the call. In his last report of the year Tiefel would inform Pastor Dorn that servicemen visits were down but contributes them to the troop withdrawal from Korea.

1955

In his first report of 1955 missionary Tiefel had some more good news to announce. They again held a service in their house on Christmas Day that had 24 in attendance. Those who came stayed from 1:30 in the afternoon until 10 at night! During their time together the group decided that it was time to begin regular weekly services that would start on Sunday January 16 from 10:30-11:30. In February less happy news was announced as Pastor G. Jerome Albrecht declined his call to serve in Japan.

In a letter dated February 15 to the Ladies Aid of a congregation back in the States²⁷ Tiefel focuses on the many blessings they were enjoying in Japan. "After three years of Bible class instruction, on Jan. 23, I confirmed three Japanese students. (2 boys, 1 girl). 22 years of age. We began public services in our home on January 16 (aside from some Christmas services). At first I preached in English, with the Japanese student interpreting into Japanese. On the 1st Sunday in February I installed one of these boys to preach my sermon in Japanese. I write the sermon, he translates it, it is critically reviewed, then he memorizes it, and delivers it in Japanese. I do not preach but sit in the audience. Another one of the boys, conducts the service at the altar. So the entire service is in Japanese. They do it well, without pay..." These two "boys" that were assisting were Mr. Oshima (preaching) and Mr. Shigata (liturgy). Essentially these two were made his elders for their small congregation. In his April report he also assured the Board that as soon as Oshima became more comfortable with preaching real mission work will be able to be accomplished. He wanted him to be comfortable in order to make the best situation for him and for the visitors.

²⁷ Letter from Tiefel to Ladies Aid (of Stambaugh, MI?) Feb. 17, 1955 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1955.

On May 2 Tiefel would send another report,²⁸ this time the official report to the Japan Mission Board. In it he requests \$1,100 so that they can add a room on to the house. In his discussions with the contractors Tiefel has some interesting comments. "...with the appropriate number of cups of tea, an occasional bottle of beer, the interminable bowings and palavering (with sake, among themselves of course), it can no doubt be built, at the contractor's representative assures me, for \$1,000. That's after the rainy season of course! Anyway, I will not ask for more, even if I have to finish it myself." This is ironic because right after that he asks for another \$100 so that he can paint the house. In addition to these requests he also asks that another office worker be granted to help in the great challenge in preparing materials.

Already, as he has been working on a translation of the Catechism and of NPH's Sunday School materials. During this process his small group has come up with 3,000 confirmed Biblical terms that they have carefully written out on index cards for reference. In addition to this great project they have been working on another 2,040 words from the Japanese Government, specifically the Ministry of Education. They were "religious terms for which they have selected and wish to standardize the Kanji terminology." There were many that needed revising and because of the time constraints to get it done missionary Tiefel got his younger brother George involved. George was currently at WLS and he along with some of his friends helped out his older brother the missionary. All they had to do was write down the definitions of some of the simpler words. Tiefel took the harder words. Again, this was another invaluable project that would aid them in translation!

²⁸ Letter from Tiefel to Dorn May 2, 19556 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1955.

The calling process would continue for a second man to be sent to Japan. In June Pastor Willard Kerhberg was called and in July returned the call. Then on August 3 Pastor Edwin Schmelzer was called and on the 22nd of the month returned the call as well.

In an October letter²⁹ to Pastor Dorn missionary Tiefel again emphasizes the great importance of having approved religious terminology before anything else. Pastor Heerboth of Missouri supported this plan saying, "That is the work which we feel is most important. We should have done it at the beginning. The other Lutheran bodies expected us to do it. But we became too busy with parishes. Now we are losing more men (by furlough) and they are not being adequately replaced.³⁰ Every man is handling more stations than he can handle. All complain of the inability to convey the truth of God's Word adequately in Japanese, and the inadequacy of the Bible translation. We need a Lutheran dictionary most urgently. Tiefel, if you can enlarge upon your work with these terms and get it into print, you will render the entire church an inestimable service. But perhaps your Board, like ours, will expect immediate mission returns (souls) on your work here."³¹

By the end of October of 1955 J.A. Westendorf would have returned the call to Japan. Since December of 1953 when the Synod began calling a second man seven calls had been sent out and returned. This was something that to some extent weighed a burden on missionary Tiefel and certainly his board. But all news wasn't bad. By this time 3 Japanese had been confirmed and two baptized and over 90 more had at least visited the Bible classes or worship services. The group was still small by many standards, but when one understands the great difficulties that are

²⁹ Letter from Tiefel to Dorn Oct. 11, 556 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1955.

³⁰ At least at that time it was Missouri's practice that a missionary stay in the field for 6.5 years and then take a year long furlough. This is why there was always a need to have replacements because a year is a very long time in a foreign mission field like Japan. In fact, Tiefel reports that many in Missouri did not agree with this system because a year was much too long to be away from the work and very often 6.5 years was much too long for most to be away from "home."

³¹ These were words summarized by Tiefel in this letter.

particular to Japan one can see the grace of God's almighty hand at work. It is also good to mention that at this time the mission now owned two houses with an expansion already completed on the first house!

1956

In their April meeting, the Japan Mission Board determined that the time had come to change their strategy in calling a second man to Japan. Instead of calling from the field "a call for a second missionary to Japan will be placed into the hands of The Committee On The Assignment Of Calls."³² Some other shocking news was also brought to their attention. The Japan expenses were expected to increase due to a new heavy tax upon foreign residents. This new tax ran upwards of 60% of the foreigner's total income! Needless to say, Synod had their accountants working on a way to reduce the taxes that would have to be rendered.

Tiefel wrote a letter to Pastor Dorn³³ not long before the call would be issued to a graduate from WLS giving a brief update and an added reminder with examples of how hard it is for the Japanese to become Christian. He was glad to inform that SWC work was still progressing nicely. In fact, he was having regular instruction with Sgt. and Mrs. Saylor every Friday evening for several hours. In addition to that every 2 to 3 weeks Navyman Lyle Faulken would spend Sunday afternoon and evening at their home. During this time they would have a 2-3 hour German class and then private communion. This young man also intended to enter Northwestern and study for the public preaching ministry once he had served his time in the Navy.

³² Japan Mission Report April 19566 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1956.

³³ Letter from Tiefel to Dorn May 16, 19566 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1956.

He goes on in his letter to describe that commitment to Christianity for the Japanese is very difficult. "Confessing Christianity in the average Japanese home requires a firm conviction" because of the huge familial implications. E.g. "Recently, a girl from my office declined to participate in the annual memorial service for a deceased grandfather. In anger the father hit her a sever blow on the face and threatened to disown her. The next day, due to the mother's intercession, the father cooled down. Such testing of the Christian's faith will continue year in, year out, or will result in the Christian son or daughter being driven out of the home and disowned as only an Oriental can disown. (completely, coldly, and irreconcilably)."

Then at the end of May, to the great joy of many, a call to Japan was received and accepted by graduate Richard Seeger! On June 11th Seeger would write a letter to his new colleague.³⁴ In his short letter he announces to Tiefel that he is his new assistant and asks the typical questions, "Where will we live? What's the food like? What about hospitals?" etc. He expresses his eagerness to get to work among the Japanese people. Tiefel receives his letter and responds in his own letter with joy and looks forward to receiving him and his family in Japan. He suggests that he come before his family so that they arrive when all their belongings arrive. He also suggests that they not come until January of 1957 to make sure that everything is prepared and because taxes will be easier to take care of if he comes at the beginning of the year.

In September Tiefel would write a letter to the Pacific Northwest District.³⁵ This letter really seems to be the beginning of the firestorm that would ensue until his resignation on February 6, 1957. In this letter he talks about the continuing strife growing not only between Missouri and Wisconsin but within each respective synod. In his letter Tiefel's stance becomes

³⁴ Letter from Seeger to Tiefel June 11, 1956 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1956.

³⁵ Letter from Tiefel to Pac. NW District Sept. 14, 1956 Located in the Japan Mission Archival Box on the Asia Missions shelf in the WLS Archives, folder dated 1956.

more firm and vocal. At the end he offers his district three minimum requirements. "1) declare ourselves 'in statu confessionis' over against the majority in the Wisconsin Synod; 2) request meetings with the majority in order to attempt to convince them that they have not upheld the honor of God's name and His doctrine; 3) however, since I am not fully informed of your previous 'protest action', more than the minimum action may be necessary."

As the weeks progress things continue to decline. Communication breaks down between Tiefel and the other committees. One can only imagine how hard it must have been to deal with a situation such as this thousands of miles away when all they had was the telephone for immediate conversation, and even that at times wasn't reliable. Stubbornness seems to have set in on both sides, although some would argue that it was one-sided. Either way, things went from a simmer to boiling in a matter of weeks. The Japanese Christians of Tiefel's congregation were also getting involved in the mayhem which really seems only to have made matters worse. Eventually Seeger would be rejected by Tiefel and his congregation as a missionary sent to support them in their mission. Finally things would fall completely apart early in February and Tiefel's congregation would eventually be supported by the CLC.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the goal was not to focus so much on these sad events, but instead to see all the good that had been accomplished before the devil stuck his nose where it didn't belong. We can look back on these nearly six years in Japan and see all the good work that was done for God's Kingdom. A man was able to set foot in a land that we had never sent a man to before. Yes, Missouri was already there, but they were the ones who pleaded with us to come. Although this may seem to have been a great hindrance to the spread of the gospel in Japan, God always uses our blunders for our good and the good of his kingdom. From this experience our Synod learned invaluable lessons that would forever influence our

mission work around the world. Doors are opening for us all over the world and the door is still open for us in Japan. With this in mind may we always be zealous to reach out to this sinful world with the only message that can save!

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Appendix

Item 1



Pastor Fred Tiefel (left) about to board the U.S.S. India Mail from Portland, Oregon, for Yokohama, Japan.

Item 2

11

Letter written after he dis-
continued coming to my class. T.

27 July 1952
Yokohama Japan.

Dear Sir:

Perhaps I am being a bit presumptuous in writing to you at this time, but when I will have explained my purpose, I hope you will forgive me.

First let me introduce myself. My name is John Hasegawa and I live in the suburb of Yokohama. I am a communicant member of Totsuka Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and is working as an interpreter and translator for the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in Japan.

I feel its God's direction that I had an opportunity to meet with Rev. Tiefel and that through his Bible Classes I found great interest in the teaching of your Synod.

I firmly believe that Japanese people who are desperately seeking the spiritual stability needs a man like Rev. Tiefel. Therefore I can never express my hearty appreciation fully to Rev. Tiefel who is sparing his precious time for the salvation of Japanese souls out of his work for the spiritual welfare of American soldiers in the Orient.

Through the bitter experience during and after the war Japanese learned that they can never depend on anything which is earthly. And now that our economic condition is heading toward stability, the nations in general are seriously seeking for the spiritual support.

In prewar days the Emperor system based on Shintoism was regarded as the backbone of Japanese spiritual life. The Imperial Rescript on Education was accepted as the absolute standard of morality for Japanese people. But these prewar ideals have been entirely discredited and cast aside since the termination of war. Instead of these concepts, Japanese people are trying to find something which will fill the mental and spiritual vacuum resulted from the inadequacy of the former ideals.

This fact that the moral and spiritual stability is not in parallel with the material and social stability is suggestive of something grace for the future which Japan is leading. I feel keenly that the need of spiritual confidence and security in the minds of Japanese people is vital. They especially need the spiritual blood transfusion by Christian missionaries and church organizations

Christianity, indeed, is the only medium that will not only bring the people to a salvation of peace in Christ but also it will encourage and elevate this defeated and frustrated Japan. Furthermore, I am quite certain that it will heighten the mutual understanding of the free nations, which is inevitably necessary at this critical moment in the actual condition of two divided present world. Confronting with this critical situation I heartily wish that real friendship will be born out of Christianity and finding the free nations by bonds of love in Christ.

Through my contact with Rev. Tiefel, I am confident that your church will not disappoint us in the true presentation of Christianity and I hold high hope and expectation to your Synod.

2.

We are separated by thousands of miles of ocean, but we know that the solid and well-built bridge of faith spans all distance.

Yours in Christ

John Hasegawa

This letter written in English by the man himself. All Japanese and English letters will be on display at Milwaukee.

Item 3

ALL-LUTHERAN FREE CONFERENCE (Condensed Statistics, Sept. 30, 1953)

	JELC	LEAF	LCMo	ELC	LBM	NLM	ALM	JMSS	LFCN	NMS	Total
I. <u>Statistics on Personnel</u>											
A. Japanese											
1. ordained	39	5	1	1	0	0	3	--	1	1	48
2. unordained	6	23	--	5	0	26	0	1	4	4	69
B. Missionaries											
1. ordained	15	3	22	23	6	8	9	2	4	7	99
2. wives	14	3	22	23	6	7	9	1	3	7	95
3. unordained											
a. men	0	0	3	--	0	--	0	--	--	--	3
b. women	13	7	2	12	3	7	3	2	--	2	51
4. total missionaries	42	13	49	58	15	22	21	5	7	16	248
II. <u>Statistics on the Church</u>											
A. Congregations											
1. organized	38	10	6	1	1	0	2	--	--	--	56
2. unorganized	12	10	17	9	3	26	3	2	3	11	93
B. Baptized Christians											
	5925	689	700	101	168	175	63	17	30	23	7828
C. Children's Work											
1. number of church schools (Sunday Schools)	82	13	26	11	15	21	10	--	5	10	184
2. number of pupils	7167	1300	2272	910	2625	1141	712	--	150	490	16,055

JELC--Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church; LEAF--Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland; LCMo--Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; ELC--Evangelical Lutheran Church; LBM--Lutheran Brethren Mission; NLM--Norwegian Lutheran Mission; ALM--Augustana Lutheran Mission; JMSS--Japan Mission of Suomi Synod; LFCN--Lutheran Free Church of Norway; NMS--Norwegian Missionary Society. Dash indicates no report.