

The Beginning of Methodism in Japan

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Early Mission Work

The first Methodist missionaries to Japan - Robert Samuel and Henrietta Sperry Maclay, and Irvin Henry and Jennie Long Correll - arrived in Yokohama on June 11, 1873. They were all sent by the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC). Later that month they welcomed the first missionaries from the Canadian Methodist Church. The Evangelical Association (which became the Evangelical Church in 1922), the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South followed, and in 1895 the Church of the United Brethren in Christ arrived, completing the circle of the predecessor bodies of today's United Methodist Church.

Within a year of its inauguration, the MEC mission stationed missionary couples in Yokohama, Tokyo, Hakodate, and Nagasaki, and in 1874 sent a couple to Hirosaki, thus establishing what were to be its main centers. Dora Schoonmaker, the first missionary sent by the MEC Women's Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS), arrived in 1874 to begin educational work for women and girls.

In each center preaching was begun, converts were made, foundations for educational work were laid, and Japanese partners-in-mission were gained. The role of the partners-in-mission was indispensable. It was, for example, Honda Yoitsu who first invited the missionaries to help him in Hirosaki. As a result of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit there in 1875, a vibrant church was established that has produced a continuing stream of workers for the Kingdom of God in Japan, including Honda himself. Later he became the first bishop of the Japan Methodist Church.

The MEC work was organized into an annual conference in 1884, with 13 missionaries and 19 Japanese as charter members. The conference extended from Hokkaido in the north to Kyushu in the south. During the last decade of the century, evangelistic efforts were expanded to the Ryukyu islands.

The Canadian Mission began work in Tokyo and pioneered Christian witness in

Shizuoka in 1874. It organized an annual conference in 1889, by which time it had established its area of geographical outreach across the central part of the main island of Honshu.

The first missionaries of the Evangelical Association reached Yokohama on November 13, 1876. The warm welcome and hospitality extended to them by Methodist Episcopal missionaries laid the foundation for cooperation between the two missions in the coming years. Frederick C. Kreeker, M.D., and his wife, Elizabeth, led the group. Work was begun in both Tokyo and Osaka in 1877, and later extended to Koriyama. Yamamuro Gunpei, who became the founder of the Salvation Army in Japan, was converted and baptized in the Evangelical Church in Tokyo in 1888. The annual conference was organized in 1893.

The Methodist Protestant Church's first missionary to Japan was Harriet G. Brittan, who arrived September 12, 1880, and a month later started a school for girls. Until the arrival in 1883 of Frederick C. Klein, there was no ordained Methodist Protestant missionary on the field, and Brittan depended on the Methodist Episcopal missionaries in Yokohama for pastoral care of the girls who became Christian in her school. Klein established the first Methodist Protestant Church in Yokohama in 1886 and in 1887 became the first Protestant missionary to start work in Nagoya. An annual conference was organized in 1892. Its churches were scattered along the ancient Tokaido (Eastern Seaboard Route) with centers in Nagoya, Shizuoka, and Yokohama.

The MEC, South established itself in the Inland Sea area of Japan, with encouragement from the other Methodist missions that had neither the personnel nor the funds to work in that area. Its pioneers were all former China missionaries, including James W. and Mary McClellan Lambuth, who arrived July 26, 1886, and their son and his wife, Walter and Daisy Kelly Lambuth, who came later that fall. Kobe was the center for this mission. Within a year, missionaries were preaching on the island of Shikoku, and Nannie Gaines had arrived to begin educational work for women in Hiroshima.

In 1888 work was begun in Oita, Kyushu, by Samuel H. Wainright, who supported himself by teaching in a government school, as did a number of early missionaries. A group of his students experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit late in 1889, and several gave their lives to the ministry. One of them, Kugimiya Tokio, became a bishop of the later united Japan Methodist Church. An annual conference was organized in 1892 with a voting membership of twelve missionaries and four Japanese.

United Brethren work was begun by two Japanese, Nakajima Kingoro and Doi Sokichi, both of Methodist Episcopal background, who returned from America in

November 1895 and began preaching in Kyoto and Tokyo. Alfred T. Howard arrived in the summer of 1898 to superintend the work, and his wife Mary joined him a year later. The annual conference was organized in 1901. Its churches were scattered over an area of some 300 square miles, with clusters of work in the Kyoto-Shiga, Odawara-Shizuoka, and the Tokyo-Chiba areas.

Educational Work

From the beginning educational efforts played a large role in the development of Methodist missions in Japan. The womens missionary societies poured personnel and money into their schools for girls through the years, thereby developing quality institutions. Educational work for boys on both the secondary and college levels was also emphasized. All of these schools were noted especially for their English-language education.

Since early days, Methodist missionaries have also been concerned about reaching students and teachers in the government schools with the gospel. In the 1920s, Thoburn T. Brumbaugh introduced the Wesley Foundation movement, and student centers were established in Sapporo, Sendai, and Tokyo.

Christian Leadership Development

The first Japanese evangelists got their training on the job. Within a few years, however, schools were also established. In 1879, Milton S. Vail opened the Methodist Episcopal Mission Seminary, which included both an academic and a theological course. The Seminary later became part of Aoyama Gakuin University. At various periods in their histories both the Canadian Methodists and the Evangelical Association were related to this school, sending ministerial candidates there for training and providing teachers for its faculty. The Southern Methodists established their own theological training course as part of Kwansei Gakuin College in 1889. The Methodist Protestants, after an unsuccessful attempt to maintain their own school of theology, divided their ministerial students between Kwansei Gakuin College and Aoyama Gakuin College. The United Brethren developed a cooperative arrangement with the Congregationalists' Doshisha School of Theology in Kyoto.

Schools were also set up to nurture women evangelists, called "Bible women" in the early days. The Methodist Episcopal started a training school in Yokohama in the 1880s. This became the women's department of the School of Theology at Aoyama Gakuin College in the 1920s. In Tokyo, Susan M. Bauernfeind of the Evangelical Association

established a training school for women in 1904, which later had a music and a kindergarten training department. This school became part of the Canadian Methodists' Toyo Eiwa Girls' classes Mary Lambuth had begun in her home. This school later School kindergarten training course. In Kobe, a school grew out of merged with several others to form today's Seiwa University for Christian Workers in Nishinomiya.

Enabling the Powerless

In addition to teaching and preaching, Methodist missionaries were also at work in a ministry of healing in the broadest sense of the word.

Although the government had established a public school system with a compulsory six-year curriculum, it was slow in implementing the system in the slum areas of the cities. The MEC WFMS developed day schools to fill this need for the lowest and most neglected classes in Tokyo and Yokohama. Married women missionaries were active in the development of the National Mothers' Association, which promoted classes in basic nutrition, sanitation, and child rearing for housewives and mothers, most of whom had only had the basic six years of compulsory education. In connection with this movement, Mira Haven Draper introduced the observance of Mother's Day in Japan.

Evangelical Association women led the way in work among factory girls, whose status was little better than that of indentured servants. Social settlement work in the slums of East Tokyo was begun by Canadian Methodists in the early part of the 20th century.

Charlotte Draper, who came to Japan in retirement to live with her missionary son, founded a Christian school for the visually impaired in 1890 in Yokohama, which is still in existence. Lois Kramer, of the Evangelical Association, received an imperial decoration for her contribution to the education of the hearing-impaired.

Attempts were made to alleviate the grinding poverty in many rural areas. John Ing became known as the "Johnny Appleseed of Japan" for introducing apple growing to the farmers around Hirosaki. In the 1930s, Janadus Stott developed several experimental farm projects in Uwajima, which were highly regarded by the government.

Methodist Union in Japan

From the beginning, Methodists in Japan were aware that a spirit of evangelism and mission goes hand in hand with an ecumenical spirit that is willing to cross denominational barriers to achieve unity in Christ. The six Methodist groups at work in Japan worked together in theological education, created a common hymnal, and published a union

periodical. Plans of union drawn up by the missionaries in Japan in 1883 and 1887 were rejected by their boards in North America. In 1901, missionaries and Japanese from the six groups adopted a basis of Methodist union acceptable to all in Japan but again not in North America. Only after a great deal of pressure was applied by the Japanese leaders of the three largest Japan annual conferences-the Canadian, the Methodist Episcopal, and the Southern Methodist-did the denominational headquarters across the sea agree to the formation of the Japan Methodist Church in 1907. This was the first united autonomous Methodist church born on a mission field. Unfortunately, the three smaller groups-Methodist Protestant, Evangelical Association, and United Brethren-were kept out of it by their parent bodies.

Toward a Larger Union

The dream of the first Protestant missionaries in Japan was one nondenominational church. Although the strong spirit of denominationalism in the home churches prevented this, there was always a large measure of cooperation, notably in Bible translation. Interdenominational missionary conferences in 1872, 1883, and 1900 strengthened this trend.

During the first three decades of the 20th century, ecumenical influences from abroad were a significant factor in promoting cooperative work in Japan. The Edinburgh Conference of 1910, with four Japanese leaders present, was a major stimulus. That year, a Conference of Federated Missions was formed; in 1911 the Japanese Federation of Churches came into being; and in 1913 the Japanese Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference was formed as a link between these two. One cooperative result was the Tokyo Woman's Christian College, for which Methodists provided both financial and personnel support.

The founding of the International Missionary Council in 1921 gave further impetus to cooperation in Japan. In 1923, the National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ) was organized to take the place of the Continuation Committee and the two federations.

A rising tide of nationalism during the 1920s and 1930s quickened the desire among Christian laity for church unity and more autonomy from foreign control. During these decades, the NCCJ led continuing discussions aimed at a comprehensive church union. At the same time, various unofficial lay groups were meeting and putting increasing pressure on their denominations.

The climax came, however, through an act of the government, the Religious Bodies

Law, designed to unify the various religious bodies in the country into large units more manageable by a government concentrating on war. In October 1940, a National Christian Assembly was held in Tokyo to adopt a proposal for union prepared by the NCCJ. The founding General Assembly of the new church was held on June 24, 1941. On that fateful summer day, the delegates to the founding assembly of the Kyodan, under the leadership of its first moderator, Abe Yoshimune (the last bishop of the Japan Methodist Church), all bowed in obeisance toward the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, thereby breaking all direct ties with the North American Churches. The church for the next four years was controlled in effect by a director appointed by the government. Not until the revocation of the Religious Bodies Law in the fall of 1945 was the Kyodan free to govern itself.

Earlier in 1941, however, as the war clouds were darkening, Bishop Abe, along with Kagawa Toyohiko and several other Japanese Christian leaders, had made a last-ditch effort to avoid war by meeting with counterparts in North America at what became known as the “Riverside Fellowship.” Although this gathering did not prevent war, it did provide the resolve and vision for forging new relationships in the future.

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