

Kyodan's 17 Districts Convene Annual Assemblies

by Katsuyama Ken'ichiro, executive secretary

Article 6 of the Kyodan's Constitution states: "To carry out its function, i.e., the work of the church, the Kyodan will establish districts." Actually, 17 districts have been established. Each year, from April to June, the various districts convene their assemblies and hold meetings. In some districts, a three-day meeting includes a study session. Districts that hold two-day meetings are the most prevalent, but some district assemblies meet for one day. Among the district assemblies this year, many will include the election of district officers.

In accordance with the Kyodan's Constitution, the Kyodan moderator (or in his place, the vice-moderator, secretary, or general secretary) will attend each of the district assemblies. In Kyodan terminology, this "visiting Kyodan messenger" reports on the situation of the Kyodan and strives to garner support and understanding. This year, the officers of the Kyodan and the general secretary are sharing the responsibility and visiting the various district assemblies. Unfortunately, Okinawa District and Kyoto District have refused to allow anyone to visit, for various reasons. Also, because of the confusion and misunderstanding of intentions related to the visit, the Kyodan did not send anyone to attend the Nishi Chugoku District Assembly.

The protocol within the various district assemblies differs to some extent, but in general, the visiting Kyodan messenger's reading of the "greetings from the Kyodan moderator" is followed by a time for questions. Kyodan Moderator Yamakita Nobuhisa's greetings this year begins with an introduction that mentions the existing depressed condition of the Kyodan and proposes that the beginning of the 150th celebration of evangelism in Japan be utilized as a good opportunity for propagation of the gospel.

In his greetings, the moderator covers the following topics: proper administration of the sacraments, the position and details regarding preaching points, disaster relief related to the Niigata Prefecture/Chuetsu Earthquake and the Noto Peninsula Earthquake, Kyodan financial affairs, ministerial pension fund, world mission, domestic and foreign cooperation,

and the Unification Association issue. Each subject is explained briefly but clearly. In conclusion, he urges the Kyodan district assemblies that are wrestling with Kyodan, district, and local church issues to have hope as they pray with and for each other, moving ahead to reveal God's glory.

A number of district assemblies have already been held. In addition to the designated "visiting Kyodan messenger," executive secretaries have also been sent to several of the assemblies. Following are the recorded impressions of two executive secretaries; one visited the Hokkai District Assembly and the other the Osaka District Assembly.

The executive secretary who visited Hokkai District related that much time was spent in lively discussion of district mission policy related to the 2009 activity plan. The assembly first separated into four subgroups; then engaged in enthusiastic debate. His impression was that with the approval of the plan at the plenary session, Hokkai District's 2009 activities have begun.

The executive secretary present at the Osaka District Assembly made the following observation. Osaka District had one proposal that is unique to that district and involves unpaid funds due to the Kyodan—a matter that has been pending between the district and the Kyodan for many years and relates to payments in arrears to the Joint Liability Fund. The assembly approved payment to the Kyodan in the amount of 14 million yen (about US\$140,000).

The Kyodan's financial crisis originated with the dispute that arose at the time of the World Exhibition [in 1970, regarding the proposed participation in the Christian Pavilion at the Exhibition]. The executive secretary who attended the Osaka District Assembly noted in his impressions that he was especially grateful that through the prayers and efforts of the district's executive committee the proposal to make the payment was presented, and assembly's decision resolved the issue. (Trs. JM & RT)

Christ Himself is Our Salvation: The 150th Anniversary of Protestant Mission in Japan

by Mira Sonntag, missionary
Tomisaka Christian Center, Tokyo

The Kyodan's decision about and tentative schedule for the celebration of a century and a half of Protestant mission in Japan has been announced in previous KNL issues. Summarizing from the celebration schedule leaflet and related articles in *Shinpo (The Kyodan Times)*, Nos. 4668, 4673, and 4674), I would like to clarify the planned events and the motivation behind them.

Despite considerable criticism, the Kyodan Executive Council has reconfirmed the year 1859 as the official beginning of Protestant mission in Japan, as that was when seven U.S. missionaries affiliated with various denominations began to share the gospel, although Christianity was still banned. The first generation of these missionaries agreed that Japan needed a unified Christian witness that transcended Western denominational divisions. While in the past, Japanese church historians have claimed that the stronger personalities of the second generation of foreign missionaries confounded the ecumenical spirit of their predecessors, today Kyodan representatives express their deepest gratitude for the work of foreign missionaries and do penance for Japanese Christians' inability to foster and develop the evangelical enterprise due to interdenominational conflicts and the lack of unity inside the Kyodan itself.

These very open words of confession may relate to the fact that the Kyodan did not realize the goal that was set at the 100th anniversary, namely to double the number of church members. Participation in the festivities at the time had been promising, but Kyodan membership has declined. (See "50 Years of Kyodan Data," KNL No. 352). But the emphasis of the first Protestant missionaries' ecumenical approach also expressed the strongly felt desire for unity. The latest issue of *Shinpo (The Kyodan Times)* reconfirms the early postwar conclusion that "the establishment of the Kyodan as one Protestant body in 1941 (actually due to state measures related to political alignment) has to be understood as God's miraculous fulfillment of the first missionaries' prayers for unity".

How is the Kyodan then seeking to reconcile itself to become one body in Christ? The first event of the year was an anniversary service week organized by the Tokyo Association of Believers, Jan. 5-11, with six consecutive (mostly evening) worship services at Ginza, Fujimicho, Koishikawa Hakusan, Asagaya, Takaido, and Tokyo Yamate churches. Over 500 people from



The official logo for the 150th Anniversary of Protestant Mission in Japan

12 denominations attended the services, which were all used the same scripture passage: 1 Cor. 1:18. Also, the information leaflet about the interdenominational celebrations to be held at Yokohama Pacific Hotel, July 8-9, expresses the wish that "using the same logo, the same theme, and the same prayer" will foster solidarity among Christian churches, schools, and organizations. (More information is available at www.protestant150.org.)

Interestingly, the celebrations in Yokohama are organized by the Kyodan and the National Christian Council in Japan, together with the Japan Evangelical Missionary Association and Nihon Revival Association, which in the past have been rather shunned for their dedicated approaches to the masses. The Yokohama schedule includes artistic worship with gospel, dance, and stage performances as part of a festival on the first day. Many guests from North America and Asia (none from Europe) are on the list, and video greetings from David Yonggi Cho, Rick Warren, and other mega-church ministers will be shown during the following anniversary service.

On the second day, there will be two large-scale symposiums with ten parallel workshops dedicated to a variety of topics as well as a special music program. Among the 24 guests for this day's program, two women will make a presentation on the history of Christian education and social welfare organizations. The program will end with a ceremony of dispatching for service. By celebrating this milestone in the history of Christianity in Japan, the organizers hope to be able to appeal to Japanese society as a whole. If "unity" is a nationwide desire, there might be a chance, but so far we will have to wait and see.

Note: For the Yokohama celebrations, the fund raising goal has been set at US\$500,000.

12th Kyodan-PCT Consultation Convened in Osaka

by Ishimaru Yasuki, executive secretary

Since the Kyodan and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) signed a joint mission covenant in 1985, a Kyodan-PCT Consultation has been held every other year, with the site alternating between Japan and Taiwan.

At present, five PCT churches in Japan are affiliated with the Kyodan, and six PCT missionaries are serving in Japan. Two of the churches are located in Tokyo District's Kita (northern) Subdistrict and one each in Chiba Subdistrict, West Tokyo District, and Osaka District. In addition, one missionary is active in Hokkai District.

The 12th Kyodan-PCT Consultation was held April 21-23 in Osaka at Osaka Taiwan Church, where Liu Fu-Ching serves as the pastor. The theme of the consultation was "The Joy of the Lord" (Nehemiah 8:10), and the aim was to bring together as many representatives as possible from men's and women's groups and from all the districts of each church in order to have a rich and rewarding time of interaction and exchange.

The 11 participants from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan included PCT Moderator Lin Tsung-Jeng, Vice-moderator Lai Hsien-Chang, Secretary Chiohh Lyan-Syian, General Secretary Chang Te-Chien, as well as representatives of PCT men's and women's groups, indigenous groups, and youth groups. The 21 Kyodan participants included Moderator Yamakita Nobuhisa, Vice-moderator Sasaki Michio, Secretary Suzuki Nobuharu, General Secretary Naito Tomeyuki, Kyodan Commission on Ecumenical Ministries Chair Kishita Nobuyo, Taiwan Church in Japan and joint covenant committee member Lee Meng Jer, representatives of the National Federation of Kyodan Women's Societies, district representatives, and Jonah Chang [a former U.S. missionary to Japan], who provided simultaneous interpretation during the three-day meeting.

On April 21, after an amiable and relaxing dinner at the guests' hotel, the group moved about ten minutes on foot to Osaka Taiwan Church for the opening worship. The sermon was delivered by Kyodan Moderator Yamakita, who used Mark 1:16-20 as his text. The service included dynamic singing of the same hymns in both Japanese and Taiwanese. The planning for the consultation truly reflected the cordial and meticulous care taken by Osaka Taiwan Church, which set up the site and prepared



The group picture taken at Osaka Taiwan Church refreshments. Thanks to the members of Osaka Taiwan Church, the three-day program ran smoothly and pleasantly.

Participants were introduced to the activities of the churches in both countries and had ample opportunity to learn from each other. This produced lots of questions, laughter, and exclamations of surprise and delight. The discussions on the wording of the final joint statement produced a skillful and competent translation and provided a chance for both churches to deepen mutual understanding and to become aware of differences. As an expression of "the joy of the Lord," both churches affirmed their commitment to do their utmost to cooperate in mission in the midst of the complexities of international relations.

In November 2008, the PCT sent to the world's churches "An Appeal for Awareness of and Prayer Concerning the Suppression of Justice and Human Rights Violations Occurring in Taiwan." The PCT requested that the Kyodan also prayerfully respond to this appeal. The Kyodan representatives pledged to take the joint statement and the appeal for prayers and to treat them with utmost seriousness.

During the optional program on April 24, participants from Taiwan visited Nijo Castle, Kinkakuji Temple, and Doshisha University in Kyoto. At Doshisha, the visitors were given an explanation of the history and tradition of the grounds and buildings by Hara Makoto, former head of the Divinity School. In addition, pastors from Taiwan who had once studied at Doshisha were introduced, and lasting impressions of the deep links between the two churches were forged. (Tr. DB)

2009 World Day of Prayer Observed in Japan on March 6

by Ibaraki Kimiko, member
Ageo Godo Church, Kanto District

The World Day of Prayer has been observed in Japan for 70 years, with the exception of the years 1941 to 1946, due to the Second World War. This year, gatherings sponsored by the National Christian Council in Japan's Women's Committee were held in various areas and places under the theme prepared by church women in Papua New Guinea: "Though we be many, we are one body in Christ." Over ten thousand persons across denominational lines gathered at the prayer meetings held in more than 200 places throughout Japan.

In Saitama Prefecture, the area in which I participated, meetings were held at three separate places. The two churches central to the preparation of these meetings were Ageo Godo Church (Kyodan) and Omiya Seiai Anglican Church, which facilitated the gathering of 125 people from the Kyodan, the Church of Christ in Japan, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Anglican Church in Japan. During the time of hymns and prayers, our hearts were quickened by the "voices" and "prayers" in the liturgy provided by the women of Papua New Guinea.

While looking over the liturgy, the unexpressed human pain and sadness that I sensed in the words of the written prayers and "voices" of the Papua New Guinea women brought to remembrance past events in Japan. These emotions are not unrelated to the experience of the people and country of Japan, so I was able to hear the cries of their hearts in relation to new situations that have developed. I have heard that during the time of the World War II invasions, the Japanese military maintained so-called "comfort women" [enslaved prostitutes]. In recent years, as an economic super power, Japan has engaged in the exploitation and destruction of the country through the activities of its businesses, although this cannot be said to be the policy of Papua New Guinea itself.

We read the prepared liturgy's Prayers of Praise, Prayers of Thanksgiving, Prayers of Repentance, and Prayers of Assurance of Forgiveness. Following the sermon, while



A poster of the symbol for the day chosen by the Papua New Guinea Committee, which connects the cross and the *bilum*: a popular cloth bag used as a baby carrier or hammock, for carrying things, etc.



"Prayer of Assurance of Forgiveness" in the *With Friends Around the World Hymnal*

listening to the prayer of the fourth "voice," which prayed for other people, we realized that this is a voice we must not ignore. The voice said: "We pray for the restoration of the natural environment and natural resources that have been exploited by other persons. That destruction has become the reason for our painful battle to continue to live. Please free people from poverty, and especially free people from the kind of greed that will even sacrifice others because of its own great wants." Referring to the mistakes of the past and present, the final prayer, "Please help us to be your good creation and to be good stewards," echoed deeply and strongly in our hearts.

The women responsible for creating the liturgy included in it the problems and issues that couples in Papua New Guinea are facing. The "voices" and prayers expressing pain and sadness were not at all those of unrelated persons because we were consciously aware that it is our own mistakes that is causing them.

This time, the NCCJ Women's Committee created and distributed a pamphlet to deepen understanding of the World Day of Prayer and to make it better known. In the section entitled "From knowledge to prayer; from prayer to action," is the following statement: "Through the World Day of Prayer, women realize that prayer and action are not to be separated. We affirm the fact that this day has a great influence on the world." The explanation given of the World Day of Prayer is clear and easy to understand.

Through the World Day of Prayer we can find meaning in learning one another's perspectives on race, culture, and tradition, as well as in coming to know and understand each other. Through sharing the trials inflicted on the couples of Papua New Guinea as well as their benefits, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, and through bearing their burdens together, our faith in Jesus Christ was deepened to enable us to seek understanding and peace.

While reading together the prayers of the Papua New Guinea women, our hearts were centered on the issue of "how we can become one body in Christ." I am praying that this will be realized through the leading of the Lord as we earnestly hear and obey God's Word. (Tr. RT)

The Work of the Green House Youth Center in Yokohama

by Nathan and Nozomi Brownell, missionaries
Yokohama, Kanagawa District

True to the meaning of its name, we purpose the “Green House” to be a safe place for youth to be nurtured and to grow. No matter how inhospitable the climate outside, a greenhouse is a place to set the atmosphere and environment for vegetation to grow and blossom or produce fruit. Those who observe modern Japanese culture and society note a certain unfortunate hardening of the hearts among a surprising number of youth. In too many cases, this can lead to crime or even suicide. We purpose the Green House to be a place for youth to experience a sense of wholeness and life through Christ. The facility actually is a green house, but we vision it to be an actual greenhouse for the hearts of the youth.

The “Green House” is the former home of Yokohama Union Church. Several years ago, the Reformed Church in America helped support the building of the new church building next door. The RCA then designated this facility to become a Christian youth center. At that time, a missionary of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Christian Zebley, in cooperation with the short-term missionary English teachers who were serving in the area’s Christian schools, began gathering junior and senior high school students to participate in an after-school program. The program was centered on fellowship, with Bible reading and testimony time. After Zebley’s return to the United States in 2007, we (Nathan and Naomi Brownell) were sent by the Reformed Church in America to lead the Green House efforts. We come with the experience of an eight-year pastorate at the Japanese American United Church in Manhattan, New York.

As a youth center, we are planning and actually reaching out to a range of persons, all the way from infants to young parents. In the wider sense, we are also planning to support those who are serving the next generation.

Children and Worship program

In recent years, the C&W program, which began in North America, has successfully been spreading across many denominations and even around the world. We have established a C&W center at the Green House, with all the materials and wooden figures necessary to hold and offer the program. The C&W program, which was originally inspired by the Montessori method and interpreted into the Protestant way of worship, offers a chance for children to experience God in worship rather than teaching them about God. The Bible stories are told with materials, such as three-dimensional wooden figures, following the church calendar and lectionary. In this way, the children can also experience and journey with us through the Bible stories.

Presently, once a week, we hold chapel time for the children of the neighboring Yokohama Union Church preschool. We also hold seminars and training sessions, introducing Christian kindergarten, elementary, and Sunday school teachers to this valuable program. We are pleased to announce that the Japanese version of the “Young Children in Worship” textbook is being translated and will be available soon. We hope this will help share this precious worship experience with more and more children. Having completed her degree in Religious Education and having



Participants attending a Children and Worship program seminar at the Green House

been certified as a Children and Worship trainer in the United States, Nozomi now comes eager to help the team, which has already been hard at work here in Japan, to share this program with the churches. We are also planning to help support a drama and puppetry ministry in the future.

English fellowship for junior, senior high school students

We have been working to provide consistency and continuity for the junior and senior high school students’ after-school program. Approximately eight short-term missionaries, who are serving as English teachers in area schools, pray and whole-heartedly serve the students. Depending on the season, the gathering can reach several dozen students. The program begins with refreshments, games or interesting activities, followed by singing hymns or praise songs and listening to a Bible message or a testimony by one of the foreign teachers. Sometimes we have a brief time to pray for a student’s request. We have seen tears well up in the eyes of some students as we pray for their heartfelt concerns. To say it another way, we seek to help water the seeds that have been planted during the students’ life at the Christian schools.

Returnees’ fellowship

We want to respond to the heartfelt needs of those returning to Japan from overseas. Unfortunately, it is said that as many as 80 percent of those who come to Christian faith during their time as international students, or living abroad, do not connect with the churches here upon their return. While there are several reasons for this phenomenon, we believe that by gathering these individuals and providing a place and time for each to share his or her Christian experience, we can encourage one another to find a church home here in Japan. We believe that this will not only benefit the returnees but also the Japanese church.

Coffee Hour: young parents’ program

Two days a week, from morning to early afternoon, we are opening the Green House. This program is primarily for parents of children attending the preschool of Yokohama

(Cont’d. on p.6, Col.1)

The General Secretary's Diary: Dedication of the Togi Mission Church's New Building

On the 17th of March, 2009, I attended the dedication service of the Togi Mission Church—one of the churches whose buildings were destroyed by the Noto Peninsula earthquake. This mission church is an outlying mission point of the Hakui Church and is a place of unforgettable memories for me.

For 20 years I was the former pastor of a church in Kanazawa, Hokuriku area's major city. During that time, I was closely related to the churches scattered along Noto Peninsula, which lies in that same area; and took part enthusiastically in their evangelistic activities. The building used by Togi mission at that time was an ordinary Japanese house, and the members of the small congregation sat on *zabuton* (cushions) on the *tatami* (straw mat) floor during the worship services.

This was just after World War II had ended; and Togi, which became the location of the mission, was a seacoast town rich with the beauty of nature. The gospel was preached there, and the small church was founded. But recently, the condition of the town has deteriorated; the church members are aging; and in addition, the population of the town is rapidly decreasing. Just as concern about the future was deepening, the Noto Peninsula Earthquake struck, and the old building was so greatly damaged that there was no alternative but to demolish it. Rebuilding seemed to be impossible.

However, the Kyodan immediately set up a special committee, the Committee on Aid for Reconstruction of Churches Damaged in the Noto Peninsula Earthquake, and appealed to all the Kyodan churches nationwide to send donations to an emergency aid fund, setting a goal of 150 million yen (about US\$1,500,000). The response was wonderful. Contributions were received at a rate that exceeded all expectations, and it became clear that

Green House Youth Center *(Cont'd. from p.5)*

Union Church. (Others are welcome). We want to respond to the heartfelt needs of these young parents. One such practical need is for a safe place for parents and other small children during the Pre-K (pre-kindergarten) time. We offer cooking, crafts, and intercultural activities. We also recognize that many of the parents need support. Two times a month we plan special activities, with a firm Christian foundation, which are focused on nurturing these couples and families.

The purpose of the Green House is to support the youth outreach of the Kyodan. We are all aware of demographics and the aging of Japan and of the churches. We are keen to help the churches welcome the youth and to pass on this precious inheritance of our faith to the next generation. We want to become a window through which youth can glimpse the church or, better yet, become a bridge over which they can eventually walk into the Christian life in a local congregation. This is our sincere hope for the Green House.



Togi Church's new building

achievement of the goal was assured. By means of these offerings, prayerfully given, Togi Church's new sanctuary was built, and a completely new era of mission work has begun.

As I attended the dedication ceremony, two scripture verses came to mind. One is Ecclesiastes 3:11: God "has made everything beautiful in its time." (RSV) The other verse is Isaiah 43: 19: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

God lives. God rewarded the labor of those who went before, and who so long and persistently bore the burden of evangelism in difficult circumstances, and gave them a lovely new sanctuary as a gift. Already some of the town's people have asked to hold their weddings ceremonies in the new sanctuary. I earnestly hope that with prayer and with thankful hearts, the church will continue and expand evangelism in this area. (Tr. RB)

—Naito Tomeyuki
Kyodan General Secretary

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Note: The names of Japanese persons are listed in traditional order, with last names first.

The General Secretary's Diary

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