

## 150 Years of Evangelism in Japan: “Planting the Word of God for 150 Years”

With the coming of 2009, Protestant Christianity has been preached in Japan for 150 years. The commemorative events planned for this milestone were outlined in the article Commemorative Events for the 150th Year of Evangelism in Japan on page 4 of KNL's December 2008 issue (#350).

When Protestant evangelism began 150 years ago (1859), Christianity was still prohibited in Japan by the Edo Shogunate. However, with a strong love for the souls of the Japanese, the missionaries felt no fear of persecution and came to plant the word of God in Japan. Through the prayers and dedication of these missionaries and those yet to come, the gospel was spread throughout the country as churches, Christian schools, Christian hospitals, and Christian welfare agencies were founded. The results were clear: education brought greater status and roles for women, and higher ideals were brought to society at large. We give heartfelt thanks for the work of these missionaries across the years.

Of course, we must not forget that part of the background for those accomplishments was the work of the Roman Catholic Church in Japan following Francisco Xavier's visit in 1549, as well as the work of the Anglican Church in Okinawa.

Certainly there were extreme difficulties at many points in this history, as well as the sacrifice of many. Today's reality is that material prosperity and spiritual disinterest have encumbered evangelism since the late 20th century. Even within the Christian community, we see less interaction among Christian organizations and a weakened unity among denominations. The fact that we are not advancing our evangelistic efforts is cause for individual Christians and the church at large to repent.

At this time of commemorating “150 Years of Evangelism in Japan,” we give God thanks for his grace through Christ and pray that we may come together in prayer, understanding one another and deepening our fellowship together for the continued evangelism of Japan. May we give of ourselves, our talents, and our resources as we strive to be tools for this task. This is the commitment to which we are being called.

In 1909, when the first 50 years of Protestant evangelism were celebrated, the Church of Christ in Japan took leadership in planning a revival at the Tokyo YMCA in Kanda on March 13~14 for the celebration. Following this, revivals and retreats were held at local churches throughout Tokyo. The Methodist Church observed a

“Revival Month,” the Congregational Church observed a half year of “Extension Revivals,” and other special forms of evangelism took place. Then, a joint commemorative symposium was held at the Tokyo YMCA, Oct. 5~10. During this time there was a special service of thanksgiving, as well as symposium topics on Christian education, Christian literature, and Christian influence as well as other opportunities for study.

With the approach of the 100th Anniversary of Protestant Evangelism in Japan, plans for commemorative evangelistic events were approved at the 8th General Assembly of Kyodan in 1954. The goals were to double the overall membership of the Kyodan and to move more deeply into the life of the general public. The slogan accompanying these goals was “Go forward with Christ.” These events continued through 1958.

As we enter this 150th Year of Protestant Evangelism in Japan, we feel that active participation in the following events is a positive response to our Lord's invitation.

### MAIN SCHEDULED EVENTS (All in 2009)

June 24 (Wednesday)

Commemorative Worship Service for the Founding of the  
Kyodan

Location: Fujimicho Church, Tokyo

July 8 (Wednesday), July 9 (Thursday)

Commemorative Convention for 150 Years of Protestant  
Evangelism in Japan

Location: Pacifico Yokohama

November 22 (Sunday)

Kyodan Laity Convention

Location: Tokyo Yamate Church

November 23 (Monday, a national holiday)

Kyodan Celebration: 150 Years of Protestant Evangelism  
in Japan

Location: Aoyama Gakuin, Tokyo

In preparation for these commemorative events, the Kyodan has set a fund-raising goal of 5 million yen (about US\$50,000). Churches, groups, and individuals are being asked to support this effort to commemorate 150 Years of Evangelism in Japan. (Tr. JS)

—Katsuyama Ken'ichiro, executive secretary

# 50 Years of Kyodan Data: Analysis and Proposals

by Suzuki Isao, member  
 Kyodan Executive Council and  
 Mejiro Church, Kita Subdistrict, Tokyo District

The report “50 Years of Kyodan Data” is the result of an effort by the Kyodan’s Commission on Finance to lay out the various trends to help the Executive Council picture the future. It is hoped that this work will be a catalyst for both clergy and laity to discuss the issues involved and to think seriously about where the Kyodan is headed as they make their own analysis and proposals. The following graphs shows data on Kyodan finances, membership, baptisms, age distribution, church school attendance, etc., in comparison with the data of other denominations

【Graph 1】

Graph 1. The Christian Population in Japan in Three Categories:

- 1) Total number of Protestants (including the Kyodan),
- 2) The number of Roman Catholics,
- 3) The number of Kyodan members

Membership (resident communicant members). These statistics show that in 1948, just three years after the end of World War II, the resident communicant membership of the Kyodan and the membership of the Roman Catholic Church were virtually the same, but in the 60 years since then, the Roman Catholics now outnumber Kyodan members by about 5 to 1, clearly showing the difference between the continued growth of the one and the stagnation of the other.

【Table 1】 Kyodan membership in relation to the total population of Japan

| Year      | R.C.Members | Population  | % of Population |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1949      | 121,844     | 81,773,000  | 0.149%          |
| 2007      | 94,709      | 127,718,000 | 0.074%          |
| 2020 Est. | 85,961      | 122,735,000 | 0.070%          |

Graph 2. Changes in total income of the 1,730 Kyodan churches during the period 2000 to 2007. The total income during the year 2000 was 13.15 billion yen. Income peaked in 2002 at 13.25 billion, but by 2007 it had dropped 4.3% to 12.58 billion, a loss of 570 million yen.

【Graph 2】

Graph 3. A comparison of membership and total income for the period 1990 – 2007, which shows the following points.

1) Surprisingly, for about ten years after the “bubble economy” burst, income continued to rise. It seems that the Kyodan curve is about ten years behind that of society as a whole. The peak in income in 2002 was some nine years after the membership began dropping from the peak reached in 1993.

2) Two other noteworthy points are:

a) The effects of the bubble economy bust finally appeared here in the income decrease. This is exactly the same curve that the general economy experienced, so it is perceivable that the decline in Kyodan income will continue beyond these ten years.

b) In addition, since peaking in 1993, resident communicant membership has been steadily declining, which is a clear danger signal. So, what is the behind this decline in membership? One worrisome trend can be seen in the decreasing number of baptisms.

【Graph 3】

Graph 4. This graph shows both the differences in membership and baptisms in each district between 2000 and 2007. It is a serious situation all across the country. The gray color indicates a change in membership; the black color represents the degree of change in the number of baptisms. The average decline in baptisms during that period nationwide was 26.6%. The greater the decline in the number of baptisms, the greater the impact will be on the decline in future membership.

【Graph 4】

years since then has been a period of sparse numbers of baptisms.

4) The “Kyodan Struggle” [internal conflict] began in 1969, but as this graph shows, danger signals were already present the year before. During the next ten years, due to the issues involved in the “Kyodan Struggle,” there was an 11.3% drop in membership, with 12,025 people leaving the church.

5) The 64,483 persons on the inactive membership roles cannot be neglected. At the very least, there is a need to focus on pastoral care and fellowship among the laity so that this figure does not rise any further.

6) The decline in resident communicant membership since 1994 is indicative of the fact that since then, the number of members’ deaths has surpassed the number of new baptisms. During 2007, 2,586 members passed on to their heavenly reward, while there were only 1,424 baptisms, for a net loss of 1,162 members to that factor alone.

【Graph 6】

Graph 5. This graph represents an estimated present-day age-range for lay members, based on the decade in which they received baptism. The first generation of post-war recipients of baptism, from 1948 to 1958, totaled 103,442. Almost everyone still remaining among this group are now over 70 years old. During the next decade, from 1959 to 1968, there was a total of 60,185 baptisms, so persons in this group are now likely in their 60s. So it can be surmised, just from these figures, that 63% of the Kyodan’s membership are 60 years of age or older. This highly skewed age distribution, together with the decline in new baptisms, accounts for the decline in membership.

【Graph 5】

Graph 7. Sunday School. For easy comparison, there are two vertical scales: one for total population of children 14 and under and the other for Sunday school attendance.

1) The 50-year decline in total population for persons aged 14 and under was 40.57%, while during the same period the number of such children attending Sunday school decreased by 84.05%, showing how serious the decline has been.

2) One fact should not be overlooked: while the decline was fairly gradual until 1979, when Sunday school attendance was still 74,229, it has rapidly declined ever since. This was just a few years after the loss of evangelistic emphasis and shows that the most severe effect of the “Kyodan Struggle” has been on the number of children attending church school. (Cont’d. on p.8, Col.1)

【Graph 7】

Graph 6. A graph comparing the annual figures for baptisms, resident communicant members, inactive members, and deaths.

1) During the period from 1952 to 1963, there were numerous pioneer evangelism programs, such as the Lacour Evangelism program, that were heavily dependent on overseas financial support.

2) In the 20 years from 1948 to 1968, there were 163,527 baptisms. This represents a total of 63% of post-war baptisms through 2007, so this coincides with this period of evangelistic activity.

3) There were 11,386 baptisms in 1948, and the number peaked in 1952, with 15,765. While there were subsequent ups and downs, by 1968 the strength to rebound was basically spent, and by 1971 it was definitive. The 40

# “Liberation Play” Challenges Our Prejudices

by Tim Boyle, missionary  
Buraku Liberation Center, Osaka

Of the many activities the Buraku Liberation Center engages in to educate people both in the church and in general society, the “Liberation Play” is perhaps the most thought-provoking. The latest play, “Forty Days in the Wilderness,” is the eighth one produced by the BLC and was first presented at the 36th Kyodan General Assembly in October 2008. The basic plot of this play revolves around the actions of a local church pastor as he tries to help the son of a parishioner of buraku background land a job in a major company. Instead of interacting with these people as his equals, however, the pastor unconsciously looks down on them. Thus, his desire to help is actually motivated by feelings of pity for them and superiority over them. The pivotal line, which he utters while talking with a contact in the company, is: “He is from the buraku, but he’s not really a bad person at all.”

The meaning behind these words is that in reality, he too holds the common perception that buraku people are generally untrustworthy and lazy, though in his mind this particular young man appears to be an exception. Because he inadvertently lets the “big secret” slip out, the net result is that the young man is passed over by the company in spite of his clear qualifications. When the pastor finally realizes what he has done, he figuratively goes into the “wilderness” to reflect deeply on it, repents of his sin, and then embarks on a struggle to lead his church to grapple honestly with the issues of prejudice and discrimination. It is a struggle indeed, as some of the “respectable” members are more concerned about the reputation of the church than about doing what God is clearly calling them to do. It is a play that makes those who watch really think about their own subconscious attitudes, and challenges all to look into their own hearts and face up to their own prejudices.

In the year and a half since I began working at the Buraku Liberation Center, I too have thought deeply about my own prejudices as well as prejudicial attitudes in general. Probably the biggest barrier to eliminating discriminatory attitudes is the failure of most people—including those who profess to support “universal human rights”—to understand the basis of those rights. The Christian gospel proclaims that it is the “image of God” imparted to each individual human being that is the guarantee for his or her intrinsic value and is thus the grounding for the fundamental human rights of all human beings. The “image of God” concept teaches us that God values us for who we are and not for what we can do for his kingdom or for any utilitarian purpose. Any other basis one could think of for grounding fundamental human rights ends up being utilitarian in orientation.

For instance, the basic assumption underpinning the secular humanist worldview is that there is no “creator” other than the chance happenings of the natural world. Thus, according to this view, just as humans physically evolved from lower animals, the various cultures they

manifest and the ethical value systems embedded within those cultures likewise evolved naturally, without any external input from a (non-existing) deity. Right and wrong are totally relative, and there is no inherent worth in human beings independent of their utilitarian value (as determined by whoever is in power).

Within such a system of thought, then, there is no ground for any concept of universal human rights without borrowing the concept from the biblical worldview. While the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” is a secular document in the sense that it does not mention God or expressly ground its contents in any religious doctrines, it clearly is based in the Judeo-Christian worldview, since these rights are based on our intrinsic value as human beings. But there is no “intrinsic value” unless this value is grounded in something ultimate, namely the value our Creator has imprinted on each person he creates.

This is why any form of discrimination is an affront to God when is based on who a person is (as opposed to what a person has done). In one sense, there is a proper kind of “discrimination” against any particular individual—namely just treatment for what he or she has done. For instance, we properly “discriminate” against someone when they are justly sentenced to prison for harming someone else. Here, of course, the word “justly” must be emphasized, as the reality is that there are a considerable number of cases of injustice, where improper discrimination (based on who a person is) gets in the way of true justice (based on what that person has done).

One classic example of this in the Japanese context is the case of Ishikawa Kazuo, a man of buraku descent who was framed by the police for a murder he clearly had nothing to do with, based solely on the expediency of finding someone from the local buraku without an airtight alibi who could serve as a scapegoat. The BLC has been at the forefront of widespread efforts to first secure his release from prison (he was finally released on parole after 31 years) and now to get the Japanese court to reopen the case so that he can clear his name.

After his transformation into an apostle of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul stated in Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” These are, in fact, the three main categories of discrimination that are experienced in human society: racial/ethnic, class, and gender discrimination. Our goal as followers of Christ is to first to be set free from prejudicial attitudes in each of these areas and then to lead society in the same direction. May God grant us the grace and courage to persevere in this great effort. Your prayers and support for the work of the Buraku Liberation Center are most appreciated.

# Introducing The National Federation of Kyodan Women's Societies

by Go Kashiko, NFKWS Ecumenical Relations Committee chair  
Pastor, Hachioji Eiko Church, Nishi Tokyo District

When the church restructured in 1969, the National Federation of Kyodan Women's Societies was organized as an autonomous body within the Kyodan. As our 40th Anniversary National Assembly is held June 2-3 in Makuhari, Chiba, the theme, "Salt of the Earth, Light of the World, Connected to the Church as the Branch to the Vine, Bearers of Mission for Tomorrow —Learning from Mathew's Gospel," will surely inspire and challenge us.

The NFKWS' membership includes both lay women and women pastors, with the opinions of each considered equal. It supports the mission of the Kyodan but determines its own leadership, program, and budget as it functions on three levels: national, district, and subcommittee. The main goals and activities of the NFKWS are as follows.

**Rainbow Haven**, located near the sea in the southern part of Chiba Prefecture, was built as a residence for retired women pastors and pastors' wives in 1973. The building is also used for church school summer camps, seminars, and meetings. In November 2007, an advisory committee was formed to consider the merger of Rainbow Haven and Shin-ai-soo (a home founded in 1959 for retired pastors in Tokyo District). Construction of a new building, to be called Rainbow Haven Shin-ai-soo, is now underway in Tokyo, with completion scheduled for June 2010.



*The present Rainbow Haven building*

**The Ecumenical Relations Committee** strives to strengthen ties between NFKWS and women's organizations in other denominations, both domestic and international. Members attend meetings of the Asian Church Women's Conference's Japan Committee, the National Christian Council in Japan's Women's Committee, and other international gatherings to broaden and deepen relationships with churchwomen in Japan, Asia, and other parts of the world. The committee also cosponsors youth mission

programs with partner churchwomen abroad, such as the Germany and Japan Youth Exchange Program, and for over 35 years has run a home-stay program for participants at Asian Rural Institute (ARI), which trains agricultural leaders mainly from Asian and African countries. Through the home-stay program, ARI participants learn about Japanese family and church life, and Japanese churches and families learn about the realities of life in other countries.

**The Committee to Study the Bible as Canon** continues the emphasis on Bible study and prayer that the NFKWS has had since its beginning. It holds a monthly Bible study that is open to the public, organizes a National Bible Study event every two years at different locations in Japan, publishes a Bible Study Series, and assists many small Bible study groups throughout Japan, providing leadership as well as literature.

**The Literature Committee** publishes Church Women, a four-page monthly periodical with a circulation of roughly 7,300 that informs women of our mission tasks and aims to create a sense of solidarity in Christ. Church Women carries sermons that coincide with the church calendar, essays, symposium papers, up-to-date reports, and information from the NFKWS' Central Committee and other committees, as well as articles concerning fellowship with ecumenical groups. The page allocated to reports on local and district church events helps churchwomen learn about the ministry and prayer requests of other districts.

**The Committee to Study the Situation of Women Pastors** publishes an annual paper and holds annual seminars for women pastors.

**The Pastor's Wives' Committee** was established in 1975 to identify problems faced by churchwomen, including pastor's wives. Members consist of pastor's wives, women ministers, and lay women. The committee publishes an annual newsletter, supports church mission activities, and holds biennial nationwide seminars. The theme of a recent seminar was "Joy in Walking Together with Peaceful Hearts."

**The Education Based on the Dignity of Life Committee** recently published a book entitled Consider Human Beings based on Education for Children, after six years of research. The reports included are 1. Environment of children; 2. Issues of school education reformation; 3. On handicapped children; 4. Passing the torch of faith to younger generations; 5. Church and children; and 6. What the Bible teaches about education.

The main purpose of the NFKWS is to help churchwomen recognize ways to serve in the local church and to help build up the church as a whole. In the face of issues like the aging of NFKWS members and the serious decline in the number of youth in the church today, we must strengthen our solidarity and find ways to transmit our faith to the next generation.

# Reclaiming the Rights of the Ainu People\*

by Miura Tadao, Ainu Peoples' Resource Center Director  
Pastor, Rumoi Miyazono Church, Hokkai District

In recent years there has been a lot of action all over the world around the issue of indigenous peoples' rights. On Sept. 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly approved the "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." In June 2008, the Japanese Diet passed a resolution recognizing the Ainu people as indigenous people of Japan. However, a detailed look at these documents reveals that there are still many issues to be considered. The Japanese government voted in favor of the UN Declaration. However, before actually voting, each country gave a speech indicating its position with regard to the Declaration, and Japan's speech made clear that although it would vote in favor of the Declaration, there was to be no consideration of any kind of autonomy for indigenous people and that any land claims would have to be dealt with in accordance with existing Japanese law.

After that, nothing happened in Japan until just before the G8 Summit held in Hokkaido in July 2008, when members of the Japanese Diet suddenly took action. On March 26 a multi-party "Diet Members' Group to Consider the Rights of Ainu People" was formed and encouraged Japan, as host country of the Summit, to issue a statement recognizing the Ainu people as indigenous people of Japan, as a sign to the world that Japan is a mature, developed, industrial democracy since this was in Japan's national interest. On June 6, the resolution to establish the rights of the Ainu people was passed in both the Upper House and Lower House at lightning speed.

After passing the resolution, the Cabinet on July 1 approved the establishment of a panel of experts to consider a new policy regarding the Ainu people. The purpose of this panel was to allow a high level of government to receive the opinion of experts so that a new overall policy in relation to the Ainu people could be developed. Areas to be considered by the panel included an investigation of the living conditions of Ainu people and their experience of discrimination, an evaluation of past policies regarding the Ainu people, and a consideration of the policies of other countries towards indigenous peoples in the light of the UN Declaration. The final goal was the development of a new and appropriate policy concerning the Ainu people, with specific suggestions for implementing it.

A fundamental problem with the panel of experts was that only one Ainu person was included as a member and the time limit of one year was far too short for the panel to do its work. So far the panel has met four times and is beginning a discussion of concrete issues. The issues are numerous. And yet, in response to questions about the June resolution in the Japanese Diet, the Japanese government has indicated repeatedly that because there is no clear definition of "indigenous people" in the resolution that recognized the Ainu people as "indigenous people," it is not clear whether the Ainu would fit the category of "indigenous people" as laid out in the UN Declaration. Such cowardly behavior is not helpful.



Cooperating in the "Indigenous People's Summit 2008 Ainu Moshir" (Moshir means "the great quiet land where people dwell.")

However, this kind of attitude illustrates the important role that the panel of experts has to play. These experts must evaluate carefully government policies of the past and offer new directions by making clear the painful history and the discrimination that the Ainu people have suffered under past policies and see that their position as indigenous people is set down clearly in the law. A multi-racial group called "Chi-kara-nisatta" (Building Tomorrow Together) was formed in 2008 and, rather than watching idly as the panel does its work, this group is studying the UN Declaration in order to make recommendations to the panel. The Ainu Peoples' Resource Center is pleased to be able to work with this group and will join it when concrete suggestions are presented to the panel of experts in the near future.

Hokkai District, reflecting on its own past history of walking on the side of the invader and oppressor, established the Ainu Issues Committee in 1985, at the time of the Nibutani land claim court case, in an attempt to join with the Ainu people in their struggle to reclaim their rights. To be even more active in this work on a daily basis and to enable church people to see the reclamation of Ainu rights and the end of discrimination as valid mission concerns, the district established the Ainu Peoples' Resource Center. It has worked slowly but surely to deepen the relationship between the church and the Ainu people. However, with the exception of Hyogo District and committed individuals, the situation is that the Kyodan as a whole does not seem to perceive these issues as mission concerns. I think a big part of our job is to find a way for the entire Kyodan to recognize and to share the importance of this work. (Tr. RW)

\*The Ainu, the indigenous people of Japan, have their own unique culture and language and have historically occupied the southern portion of the Sakhalin Islands, Kurile Islands, all of Hokkaido, and the Tohoku (northeast) region of Honshu Island (Japan's main island).

## Through God's Leading: Over 70 Exhibitions of Post-World War II Pictures Held

In January 1992 I visited a small church near Nashville, Tennessee with a ten-member tour group as an activity of the Zenrinkan Christian Center (now Ou Christian Center) where I was working at that time. There I met Joe O'Donnell, who had come to Japan soon after the war as a cameraman with the army, and I saw the pictures he had taken of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

These were all pictures no one in Japan had yet seen. They were some of the pictures he had taken with his personal camera, aside from his official job of photographing the destruction of cities in Japan. Members of our group could not hold back their tears when they saw the picture entitled "Young Man at a Crematory (Preparing to lay his little brother on a funeral pyre)." O'Donnell had decided to display these pictures two years before we met him. He continued displaying them until he was called to heaven on Aug. 9, 2007, believing that this was his mission from God. He readily agreed to our request to display them in Japan, and we have been able to hold more than 70 exhibitions to date. I presently the custodian for O'Donnell's pictures and am hoping many churches will exhibit them.

I sensed a deeper purpose at work in my opportunity to meet Joe O'Donnell. Our tour to America was arranged by Richard and Martha Lammers, former missionaries who had worked at our center until 1990. Martha was part of a group that churches in America recruited to help with the reconstruction of Japan, and her first assignment was to Hiroshima Jogakuin (girls' school). She says that there she felt firsthand the horror of the atomic bomb. Martha has spoken out ever since on the horror of atomic weapons and has translated into English the story of the primary school girl, Sadako, who died from leukemia caused by the atomic bomb, and sent the story, along with folded paper



"Young Man at a Crematory (Preparing to lay his little brother on a funeral pyre)," one of the photos taken by Joe O'Donnell and being exhibited by Yamazaki Makoto

cranes, to America. Many people in our center cooperated in collecting folded paper cranes to send. Some churches our tour group visited had taken part in the folded paper crane campaign. It was in this context that we met Joe O'Donnell. I cannot think that this meeting was mere chance: that this was a response from God to Martha and those in our group who had helped with the folded paper cranes.

I am constantly reminded that God is at work and that I have been able to participate in that work. (Tr. WE)

—Yamazaki Makoto, member  
Shimonohashi Church, Ou District  
From *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend)

## Nagasaki Furumachi Church School Commended for Recycling Efforts

This marks the 15th year that Nagasaki Furumachi Church has been recycling old paper as an activity of its church school, having begun in July 1993. It is recognized as a continuing activity contributing to the recycling of natural resources by the Nagasaki City Environment Protection Bureau. The bureau has honored the church school with a financial grant, all of which is donated to UNICEF through a local broadcasting station. Old paper is accepted every day, not only from the church members but also other local residents. Once every two months, the old news papers, magazines, etc. that have been stored in the church's garage, are handed over to dealers in old paper. (Tr. RK)

—Fukui Hirofumi, pastor,  
Nagasaki Furumachi Church, and  
Ishimura Naoyoshi, church school director  
Nagasaki Furumachi Church, Kyushu District  
From *Shinto no Tomo* (Believers' Friend)



Volunteer members working on collection day in September

## The General Secretary's Diary

### On the Current State of Youth Evangelism in the Kyodan

The evangelistic efforts of churches in Japan seem to have come to a standstill, and youth evangelism is no exception. Even so, some people, albeit voluntarily, are still ardently engaged in youth evangelism--and with some success. Today I would like to share one such example.

About ten years ago in the fall of 1998, a youth evangelism activity began entitled, "A Gathering for Youth Who Will Undertake Japanese Evangelism in the 21st Century." It began with the desire to plant a sense of the joy of evangelism in young people's hearts and to raise up from among them evangelists and pastors who would participate in spreading the gospel and shaping Japanese churches in the future.

The originators of this gathering were a few pastors in the Tokyo area whose churches were quite enthusiastic about youth evangelism, and some professors from Tokyo Union Theological Seminary. Initially they formed a preparatory committee whose members included two pastors, two professors, young people from the originating churches, and seminarians--in total, about 15 or 16 people. The first thing they did was to make an appeal to the youth in Kyodan churches in the Tokyo area. They made posters and sent out about 300 informational packets to churches.

The main speaker at the gathering was a professor from Tokyo Union Theological Seminary who, based on scripture, made an appeal about the importance of a spirit of evangelism. A young pastor in ministry about ten years testified about the joy of evangelism and devotion to God. During group meetings and elsewhere the young people who gathered were involved in discussions, and the over 200 participants seemed encouraged. From this first gathering about ten young people devoted their lives to service, entered Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, and began their journeys as evangelists. And every year since then there have been others who have done the same.

This gathering has been held every year on a Saturday in late September under the same banner: "A Gathering for Youth Who Will Undertake Japanese Evangelism in the 21st Century." Preparations have already begun for the eleventh annual meeting in the fall of 2009. The cumulative effect of these regular youth evangelism gatherings has been one important way in which the Kyodan has responded to its God-given task to do evangelism in Japan.

This gathering has generally been confined to the Tokyo area, but it is my fervent hope that a number of similar meetings will be held in other metropolitan areas throughout Japan. I have heard there are already other such devotional camps and youth gatherings taking place elsewhere, and it is my heartfelt desire that they will continue to flourish all the more. (Tr. TVB)

—Naito Tomeyuki  
Kyodan General Secretary

### 50 Years of Kyodan Data (Cont'd. from p.3)

3) In spite of the fact that Japan is experiencing a very low birth rate, it is not as though there are no children at all. Only 1 in almost a 1,000 children is being reached by Kyodan churches.

So how are we to view these past 40 years? Whether or not we turn a corner and put an end to this period of evangelistic stagnation is the issue we now face. Other denominations have maintained their evangelistic outreach during this same period and have continued to grow. So, what is it that interferes with evangelism in our Kyodan churches? I pray that we will have the courage to come together in prayer and follow the path God leads us to.

This article is excerpted from "The Kyodan as Viewed through Graphs," a report compiled by the Kyodan's Commission on Finance of which the author was a former member. (Tr. TB)

#### KNL Corner

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