

Japan Denominational Statistics, 1993

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THE PAST YEAR SAW a continuation of the decades-long tendency for slow growth among the major Japanese Christian denominations, with larger but statistically insignificant increases in the smaller evangelical groups. The exception to this growth plateau was the Roman Catholic Church, which witnessed a remarkable surge that observers credit to a successful national incentive on evangelization. The structure and planning of this emphasis was discussed in detail in the 1992 *Japan Christian Review* in an article by Michel Gaultier of the Paris Foreign Mission Society. Also, a certain amount of optimism has surrounded the plans and expected evangelistic results from the thousands of commitments registered at November rallies at Koshien stadium and the Billy Graham Crusade to be held at the Tokyo Dome in January 1994. This buoyant enthusiasm is tempered, however, by the realization that such response to previous crusades has failed to translate into long-term sustained growth in the churches of Japan.

As in past years, the most reliable resource for membership and other church statistics continues to be the *Nihon Kirisutukyō Nenkan* (Japan Christian Yearbook), published by the weekly newspaper *Kirisuto Shinbun*. Even this authoritative source, however, is dependent on annual reports gathered from local churches and headquarters of the denominations. Analysts know that in some cases such reports are inaccurate due to differing methods of counting membership. Some groups file reports on a quadrennial basis, while others

are annual. It is not unusual for some bodies to submit the same headcounts for several years until the central offices feel there is a significant change worth reporting. Others, notably groups such as the indigenous Spirit of Jesus Church, count relatives of actual members in some locations, but not in others. All of which makes the accurate tracking of Japanese church statistics a challenging enterprise, with numbers not always to be taken at face value. Questions of whether raw numerical data for increase or decrease of membership can be used as a direct indicator of church vitality are increasingly problematic.

The combined membership total for the Roman Catholic Church and the more than 150 Protestant denominations and independent groups (exclusive of the Unification Church, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and various other sects) came to 1,057,088 believers, or about 0.855 percent of the general population. In actual fact, the popularly accepted statement that only one out of every hundred Japanese people is a Christian is a slight exaggeration.

As usual, mergers and schisms had some minor effect on totals for specific denominations, although these events generated no impact on overall Christian membership. Three very small evangelical groups (Liebenzeller Mission, the New Testament Church, and the Hokkaido-based Evangelical Church Association) joined to form the Japan Evangelical Christian Church Association, with about 7,000 members nationwide. Conversely, a few churches from the Holiness tradition within the

1992 STATISTICS FOR LARGEST JAPANESE DENOMINATIONS

DENOMINATION	MEMBERSHIP	CHANGE	CONGREGATIONS	CLERGY / RELIGIOUS
Roman Catholic	431,633	+12,927	1,072	10,089
United Church of Christ in Japan (<i>Kyōdan</i>)	204,260	+2,139	1,707	2,139
<i>Nippon Seikōkai</i> (Anglican)	57,052	-720	318	340
Japan Baptist Convention	29,933	-309	316	433
Eastern Orthodox	25,523	0	82	61
Japan Evangelical Lutheran	21,794	+369	138	160
Church of Christ in Japan (<i>Nikki</i>)	13,824	+61	141	160
Seventh Day Adventist	13,079	+186	156	129
Immanuel (Wesleyan)	12,288	+63	117	262
Jesus Christ Church	12,098	+202	127	262
<i>Kyōdaidan</i> (Holiness)	11,868	+514	160	108
Holiness Church	11,868	+514	155	339
Assemblies of God	10,577	+243	169	323
Reformed Church in Japan	8,692	+28	124	148
The Evangelical Alliance (<i>Dōmei</i>)	8,228	+188	166	277
Japan Evangelical Christian Church Association (New)	7,275		157	162
Salvation Army	6,654	-593	70	220
Holy Church of Jesus	6,431	+147	100	208
Church of Nazarene	5,649	+56	76	100
Japan Baptist Union	4,799	-17	74	116
Churches of Christ (Noninstrumental)	4,562	-22	135	138
Independent Churches				
Federation (<i>Renmei</i>)	4,350	0	63	67
Korean Christian Church in Japan	4,215	+87	79	71

United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ) withdrew to form the Wesleyan Holiness Church. This long-anticipated schism included two sizable churches in Tokyo (Yodobashi and Asakusabashi), but the great majority of Holiness tradition congregations refused to become involved so that the net effect was the formation of yet another mini-denomination of a few hundred members nationwide. If the various Wesleyan-Holiness groups in Japan should ever merge, they would form a denomination

third in size only to the Roman Catholics and UCCJ, several times the size of the largest existing evangelical groups.

Another factor, by no means unique to Japan, is rotation of members from one denomination to another. Again, there is no net gain in overall Christian membership; although one denomination may appear to be growing, it is at the expense of loss on the part of other churches. The Evangelical Free Church, for one example, reported a gain of almost 500 persons, but only about half of

these were new baptisms. Most of the others were transfers from other evangelical denominations. The Evangelical Alliance churches and the Assemblies of God, on the other hand, baptized more than twice as many people as they took in as new members, indicating a healthy pattern of replacement for attrition while also adding completely new Christians.

The Pentecostal and Charismatic church-

es (with the exception of the Spirit of Jesus and the Korea-based Full Gospel Church, whose claims must be discounted) continue to experience little or no growth in Japan, despite explosive expansion rates in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere in Asia.

The *Japan Christian Review* will continue to endeavor to provide an accurate report of annual trends regarding evangelism and church growth.