

The Christian Year in Review

Significant Events of 1991

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JANUARY

- 3-5 Sophia University, the premier Jesuit institution in Japan, hosted a celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Society of Jesus and 500 years since the birth of Jesuit founder St. Ignatius Loyola.
- 13-16 Representatives of churches in Japan, Korea, the United States, and the Philippines gathered in Okinawa under the auspices of the National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ) to establish a network for dealing with peace and justice issues in the Asia-Pacific area.
- 15 The Nippon Sei Kō Kai (Anglican Church) installed John Okano as bishop of the Kyoto Diocese in a service at St. Agnes Church.
- 17 The Executive Committee of the NCCJ expressed concern over developments in the Persian Gulf and Palestine, calling for an International Conference for Peace in the Middle East.
- 17 The Christian Audio-visual Aids Committee (AVACO) opened the AVACO Book Center on the first floor of the Japan Christian Center in Waseda, Tokyo.
- 18 The Japan Catholic Bishops' Conference called upon churches to join in prayers for peace in the Persian Gulf.
- 21-23 Delegates from the fifty-three congregations of the Association of Independent Christian Churches assembled at the Tozansō YMCA Conference Center and issued a plea for peace in the Persian Gulf.
- 25 The Executive Committee of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyōdan) called for a cessation of hostilities in the Persian Gulf War.
- 31 The latest edition of the Shinkyōdō (New Interconfessional) translation of the Bible issued by the Japan Bible Society enjoys rapid distribution of over 630,000 copies immediately following its first printing, far exceeding previous sales records for any Japanese version. Many evangelical congregations are joining Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches in making the new version their standard Bible.

- 31 The Japan Catholic Bishops' Conference chartered a plane to evacuate children and other victims of the Persian Gulf War.

FEBRUARY

- 5 The Nippon Sei Kō Kai circulated an appeal for a peaceful conclusion to the Persian Gulf War.
- 5 NCCJ joined the Roman Catholic mercy flight project to evacuate refugees from war zones in the Persian Gulf.
- 8 The tenth session of the Protestant-Roman Catholic Dialogue Group met at Asagaya Church (Kyōdan) to discuss issues regarding the theme of the World Council of Churches General Assembly.
- 11 Four denominations—Association of Independent Churches, Liebenzeller Church, Evangelical Church Association of Hokkaido, and Japan New Testament Church—met to consider problems related to government pilgrimages to Yasukuni Shinto shrine and to a planned merger to form the Japan Evangelical Church Association. The new group will have 6,000 members in 100 congregations, and represents a reversal of the tendency for fundamentalist groups in Japan to shun merger.
- 18 The Japan Evangelical Association appealed to its member denominations to join in prayers for peace in the Persian Gulf.
- 20–22 The Japan Baptist Convention in session at Tozansō set a goal of 200 new congregations in ten years, expressed opposition to sending Self-Defense Force members abroad, and reiterated concern about the use of atomic energy.
- 22–24 The Japan Free Methodist Church projected a major goal for redoubling its membership by the end of the decade.

MARCH

- 1 Christians of many denominations gathered in 210 locations throughout Japan to participate in World Day of Prayer services written by Christian women in Kenya.
- 11–15 Twenty-six members of the Committee on Social Concerns of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan visited various Christian social work centers in Japan under the auspices of the Kyōdan.
- 15–21 After a twenty-two year hiatus, the Kyōdan's Tokyo District was able to convene a district assembly attended by 450 delegates.
- 17 Japanese Catholics celebrated the opening of Nakamura Memorial Center in Sao Paulo to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the sending of Father Nakamura Chohachi to Brazil as a Japanese missionary.

- 18-19 The NCCJ held its thirty-first general assembly at the Tokyo Lutheran Church. A call was issued for compensation for Asian "comfort women" forced into prostitution by the Japanese imperial army. The NCCJ was one of the first major groups in Japan to give critical attention to this issue.
- 19-20 The Japan Church of Jesus Christ commemorated its fortieth anniversary and unveiled plans for a home and center for retired clergy.
- 20 The Ochanomizu Christian Center, which houses several evangelical agencies and para-church ministries, opened a new wing and chapel, more than doubling the floor space.
- 31 The Roman Catholic Diocese of Tokyo announced that it would set up a diocesan committee on the problems of discriminated-against Buraku people.

APRIL

- 2 A student group from Seventh-Day Adventist San'iku Gakuin formed the "Solidarity With Asia Association" and constructed a church building in rural Thailand. The first service featured baptisms of local villagers and members of the Japanese group.
- 6 A Fund for Asians, headed by Kyōdan member (and Japan Social Democratic Party chair) Doi Takako, sent a donation to assist relief work among Kurdish refugees from Iraq.
- 6 The Kyōdaidan (Brethren) Church in its forty-seventh Annual Conference made plans for stronger ties with Asian churches, and called for Japan to repent for sins that had victimized other Asians during the war.
- 12 The Japan Bible Society sponsored a concert of the Schola Cantorum chorus attended by 800 at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Mary in Tokyo. Proceeds went toward purchase of Bibles for distribution in Eastern Europe.
- 19 Nakajima John Masaaki, who served for a total of twenty-two years as general secretary of the NCCJ and then as Kyōdan general secretary, was honored on his retirement with a reception attended by 180 people who expressed gratitude for his ministry.
- 22 The Tokyo Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends issued a proclamation calling upon Japan to pursue the path of world peace and to desist from the notion of ever sending Self-Defense Force troops to other countries for any purpose.
- 25 The Asian YMCA in Suidobashi, Tokyo, celebrated the eighty-fifth anniversary of its founding by Korean residents in Japan.
- 27 Pastor Koide Shinobu, long-time leader of the Holiness movement within the Kyōdan, died at age 76.

- 27 St. Mary's Cathedral in Tokyo hosted The International Festival of Church Organists for World Peace.
- 29 The Japan Ecumenical Association held its annual meeting at Matsubara Church (Roman Catholic) and heard reports by youth observers to the World Council of Churches General Assembly.
- 29 The Japan Evangelical Covenant Church celebrated its fortieth anniversary during its annual meeting at Covenant Seminary in Tokyo.

MAY

- 6 A Christian Mental Care Center was established in Tokyo under the auspices of a foundation including prominent Christian psychiatrists.
- 8 The NCCJ International Cooperation Committee set a goal of 3,000,000 yen for offerings to be sent for relief and development projects following cyclone devastation in Bangladesh.
- 12 The Roman Catholic Committee on Refugees joined with the NCCJ in a meeting at the Mejiro Sei Kō Kai Church for a service of prayer for Asian refugees, centering on the thought that "Jesus Was a Refugee."
- 15 The Roman Catholic Diocese of Tokyo celebrated its 100th anniversary with a pilgrimage to sites related to the "hidden Christian" movement in old Edo.
- 20 World Vision Japan, in a rally at Kyōdan Yodobashi Church, reported on its relief programs in Bangladesh.
- 21 The Japan Society for Ministries with the Sight Impaired observed its fortieth anniversary and announced a program in conjunction with the Japan Bible Society for cassette distribution.
- 23 The Annual Meeting of Japan Christian Women adopted a theme opposing militarism and protesting use of Self-Defense Forces overseas.
- 24-26 The Nationwide Interdenominational Early Morning Prayer Fellowship, consisting of 166 local groups, held its annual meeting in Sendai. Protestants, a majority of the 350 delegates, were welcomed to communion in a Roman Catholic mass at the host church.

JUNE

- 4-6 The Third Japan Congress on Evangelism in Shiobara attracted more than 1,000 participants. A "Shiobara Declaration" was adopted, affirming a new spirit of cooperation among member churches of the Japan Evangelical Association.
- 4-28 The Salvation Army and other groups coordinated relief efforts after volcanic eruptions in the Shiobara area of Kyushu.

- 6 Kyōdan-related Ferris Girls' School in Yokohama commemorated its 120th anniversary.
- 10 King's Garden, a Christian retirement community patterned after a similar center in the United States, opened in Mie Prefecture.
- 11 Five medical specialists dispatched to Chernobyl by the NCCJ reported on their service there.
- 21 Kyōritsu Christian Research Institute sponsored a symposium in Tokyo addressed by Kenneth Kantzer, president of Trinity College in the United States.
- 25–28 The Catholic Bishops' Conference studied problems related to discriminated-against Buraku people and endorsed a nationwide evangelization initiative.
- 29 Donations were sent from a 3,000,000 yen fund for relief efforts among Iraqi children. The founders of the group sending the funds were Iranian Christians residing in Japan.

JULY

- 1 Over 150 Kyōdan pastors attended a study meeting sponsored by the Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship with the Kyōdan. Speaker for the session was John Hesselink of Western Theological Seminary in the United States.
- 4 The Japan Church Growth Institute sponsored a nationwide seminar in Omiya.
- 6–10 The Japan-North America Commission on Cooperative Mission (JNAC) met in Santa Fe, New Mexico, reelected Patricia J. Patterson as coordinator, and decided on plans for a major Mission Consultation to be held next year in Hiroshima, October 30 through November 3.
- 9 The Korean Christian Church in Japan welcomed 40 pastors from the Jesus Presbyterian Church in Korea at a meeting in Tokyo to consider issues related to peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula.
- 11 Amnesty International's Japan Branch sponsored a forum in Tokyo on abolition of the death penalty.
- 14 The Okinawa Ecumenical Music Committee held a meeting on hymnody attended by Roman Catholic, Sei Kō Kai, Kyōdan, and Baptist Church representatives.
- 17 The second meeting of the NCCJ Executive Committee decided to press even more vigorously for a just resolution to the issue of "comfort women."
- 20 The Revival Praise Mission of Japan sponsored a "Jericho Japan" rally in Tokyo that was attended by 8,000 people.

- 24 The Roman Catholic charity Caritas Japan initiated a major relief fund to help flood victims in southern China.

AUGUST

- 1 The Australian film "Blood Oath" was released in theaters nationwide, based on the true story of the war crimes trial and scapegoat execution of Lt. Tanaka Hideki, a Christian.
- 5 The seventieth anniversary of the founding by Kagawa Toyohiko of the "Friends of Jesus" was commemorated.
- 6 Kishimoto Yōichi, pastor of the Kyōdan Momijizaka Church in Yokohama, personnel secretary of the Committee on Cooperative Mission, and former Kyōdan vice-moderator, died in Yokohama at age 59.
- 9 The forty-sixth annual memorial for victims of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki was observed with a mass. Local leaders issued a proclamation calling upon Japanese to uphold the nation's "peace constitution" and resist the sending of Maritime Self-Defense Force mine sweepers to the Persian Gulf region.
- 14 The NCCJ Special Committee on the Issue of Yasukuni Shrine protested official visits to the shrine by cabinet ministers, pointing out to Prime Minister Kaifu that such government participation in the Shinto ritual of commemorating imperial military war dead is an irresponsible insult to the peoples of Asia and the Pacific.
- 16 Japanese Protestant and Roman Catholic advocates testified before the United Nations Select Committee on Human Rights, urging that the rights of foreign residents in Japan be recognized and protected.
- 22 NCCJ announced a fund for relief of flood victims in China.
- 23 The Japan Baptist Union, at its thirty-fourth annual convention, called for continual vigilance by Christians regarding developments after the enthronement of the emperor Akihito.
- 24 The Kyōdan Committee on Gender Discrimination Issues hosted a national consultation in Kobe to consider problems of gender discrimination within the church.
- 28 Olympic sprinter Carl Lewis, speaking to 650 delegates at a meeting of the Full Gospel Businessmens' Fellowship in Tokyo, stated that stars and gold medalists come and go, but "our Lord remains the Star."

SEPTEMBER

- 1 Amnesty International opened its thirtieth annual world meeting in Yokohama.

- 3 The Japan Catholic Committee on Peace With Justice joined civic groups to host a meeting in Tokyo calling for freedom for the people of East Timor.
- 4 The historic Roman Catholic church in Yamaguchi was burned, with arson as the suspected cause.
- 9 The Pacific Broadcasting Association, a radio evangelism fellowship, celebrated its fortieth anniversary.
- 10 The NCCJ Committee on Peace issued a statement opposing Japan Self-Defense Force participation in the United Nations Peace Keeping Operations (PKO).
- 11 Four representatives of the Lubicon and Cree indigenous people from Canada went to Hokkaido in a Christian-sponsored visit to enlist Ainu support for resistance to plans of Daishowa paper company to cut the trees from Lubicon lands.
- 11-15 The Asia Missions Association, meeting in Utsunomiya, announced a vision for evangelism by Christians "from all the world to all the world."
- 23 A large group of missionaries and representatives of Kyōdan-related universities gathered at the missionary grave sites in Aoyama Cemetery for a Service of Thanksgiving and Commemoration.
- 30 The Japan YWCA proclaimed opposition to Japanese involvement in PKO actions.

OCTOBER

- 1 Kyōdan ministerial qualifications were passed by 98 candidates at sites in Tokyo and Kyoto, with 23 to become licensed preachers and 75 to become ordained ministers.
- 7 The NCCJ Committee on Issues Related to Yasukuni Shrine called on government ministers to desist from official visits to the shrine.
- 8 The Japan Church of Christ (Presbyterian) considered editorial revision of the confession of faith and church regulations during its forty-first annual assembly in Kyoto.
- 11 The Fellowship of Evangelical Churches within the Kyōdan, at their thirteenth assembly, voiced opposition to proposed changes related to the 1969 merger with the Okinawa Kyōdan.
- 15-17 The Korean Christian Church in Japan convened its General Assembly in Osaka, renewing a commitment to spiritual depth, evangelism, and justice.
- 17 Representatives of the Kyōdan, the Korean Christian Church in Japan, the Korean Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church in Korea, and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea met in Osaka to update their 1967 covenant.

- 19 The telephone life-line counseling service *Inochi no Denwa* celebrated its twentieth anniversary at an event attended by 700 people.
- 20 Representatives from international Christian groups, including NCCJ General Secretary Maejima Munetoshi, met in Capetown with eighty delegates of the South African Council of Churches.
- 29 Twelve delegates from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan met with Kyōdan leaders for consultation on the cooperative mission agreement between the two churches.

NOVEMBER

- 1 The Liberal Democratic Party Leadership Forum announced determination to gain passage of a law to allow Self-Defense Forces to be sent to Cambodia for PKO assignment. Christian leaders denounce the notion as militaristic.
- 3 Shinkyō Publishers released the first edition of *Scandalous People*, by the late Kishimoto Yōichi, in which he describes the witness and persecution of foreign Christians in 1941.
- 7 The National Council of Churches in the Philippines appeals to Prime Minister Miyazawa to stop the drive for posting Japanese forces abroad for any purpose.
- 9 Ron Fujiyoshi, former United Methodist missionary who refused to be fingerprinted for alien registration, told supporters at a reception in Osaka that there is an ongoing need to deal with fundamental racist contradictions in society even if fingerprinting is abolished.
- 15 The Kyōdan declared "resolute opposition" to Japan's participation in PKO, calling instead for "suitable compensation" to victims of aggressive wars.
- 22 A Mission Policy Consultation was held in Kyoto by the Commission on Mission of the Kyōdan to project mission themes and concerns for the beginning of the next century.
- 25 On the International Day for Protesting Violence Against Women, thirty women involved in the work of rescuing foreign women in Japan from the "sex industry" gathered at Waseda Hoshien to support legal struggles, to promote educational awareness, and to exchange information.

DECEMBER

- 1 The Japan Evangelical Association announced the selection of Inagaki Hiroshi, director of the Japan Scripture Union, as its new general secretary.
- 8 A 2:55 a.m. ecumenical candlelight service was conducted at Nagarekawa Church in Hiroshima to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Har-

bor and the suffering caused by World War II. Simultaneous services were held at Pearl Harbor and elsewhere.

- 12 The Kyōdan announced a fund drive to provide training for Christian adult leaders to work with aboriginal children in Taiwan.
- 18 NCCJ moderator Takeuchi Kentarō criticizes premature lifting of economic sanctions against South Africa by the Japanese government as encouraging the continuation of violence.
- 21 Fujiwara Takanori, vice-moderator of the Tokyo District, was proposed as new general secretary of the Kyōdan, and later approved by the Executive Council.