



## Pastoral Letter of the House of Bishops on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (NSKK, Anglican Church in Japan)

### ● **Beginnings of the Anglican Mission in Japan**

In June 1859, the Revd Channing Moore Williams, missionary priest and later missionary bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, landed at Nagasaki in southwestern Japan. Williams joined the Revd John Riggins, who had docked at Nagasaki one month earlier, and the Anglican mission in Japan began. This year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that beginning.

Thirteen years before Williams' arrival, Dr. Bernard Jean Bettelheim arrived in Ryukyu (now called Okinawa), having been deployed by the British-based Ryukyu (Loochoo) Naval Mission. With his wife, Dr. Bettelheim devoted himself to Christian evangelisation and medical work in Okinawa, as well as rendering the Bible into the local Ryukyu language.

Although the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (NSKK) traces its formal origins to the evangelisation initiated by Williams' arrival, we cannot forget the prior work of Bettelheim, or the efforts of many others who worked tirelessly alongside Williams, recognising the importance of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Japan.

Eventually, other missionaries arrived and began working in Japan. Particularly active were the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Christian Missionary Society, from England, the Department of Foreign Missions of the Episcopal Church in the United States, and, later, missionaries from the Anglican Church of Canada. These missionaries helped establish a rich and broadly catholic and evangelical tradition within the NSKK.

The common vision of the missionaries was always the formation of an independent Japanese church supported by Japanese Anglicans. Owing to their insights and efforts, the first General Synod of the NSKK was held in Osaka in 1887. Now formally organised, the NSKK began pioneering work throughout Japan, in an environment of still considerable misunderstanding and prejudice against Christianity. In addition to planting churches, the NSKK was active in the fields of preschool child-care, secondary education, medicine, and social welfare. This work continues to this day, thanks to the efforts of the overseas missionaries as well as countless Japanese clergy and lay people. We express our heartfelt gratitude for their dedication.

### ● **A Regrettable and Troubled Era in Japan and in the Church**

Roughly fifty years after Williams' arrival, Japan began a marked turn towards becoming a militaristic nation, as symbolised by the forced annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910. The flow of events during this period was indeed overwhelming, as Japan engaged in armed conflict and undertook a program of occupying and colonising neighbouring Asian countries. The church, lacking a clear understanding of the Christian faith and the Gospel, proved unable to speak out against these events. Moreover, the unity of the NSKK itself was shaken by the disparate reactions to the government's attempt to force all Protestant churches together into a single umbrella organisation. Even as we are mindful of the hardships faced by our brothers and sisters in the church during that period, we must also continue to remember this painful history.

After Japan's defeat in 1945, the country entered a period of rebuilding "from the ashes." Free at last from long years of oppression under a militaristic government, there was a period when Christianity attracted the hearts of many Japanese people, and the Church once again found a role as a means of contact with Western culture. However, as the nation rallied the populace toward accelerated economic growth, and with the emergence of a materialistic consumer society, the identity of the church, too, underwent a dramatic transformation.

## ● **Growing Into Maturity as a Province**

The Pan-Anglican Congress held in 1963 in Toronto, Canada proposed to the Anglican world the idea of the "mutual responsibility and interdependence" of the various Anglican churches worldwide. By 1970, missionaries from overseas Anglican churches, who had contributed so much to the work of evangelisation in Japan, had nearly all returned to their home countries. The NSKK, both as a province and at the parish level, was no longer a "receiving church" dependent on overseas support, but rather was called to bear mutual responsibility and become a spiritually, administratively and financially independent church among many in the global Anglican Communion.

At the same time, influenced by ongoing changes in the world social order as well as in thinking about mission, the NSKK searched for a renewed ecclesiological shape. A new Prayer Book (1990) and Hymnal (2006) arose out of this quest. Also during this period, while respecting the differences in theological convictions, the NSKK also recognised the ordination of women to the priesthood (1998).

## ● **Turning Toward Reconciliation With Our Neighbours**

At the same time, the NSKK began to look back over the events leading up to the Asia-Pacific War. We especially felt called to repent and seek reconciliation and deeper engagement with our neighbours in countries throughout Asia who had first suffered under Japanese occupation and colonisation, and then been made subject to economic control under Japan's post-war development.

We were especially blessed by our fellow Anglicans in the Anglican Church in Korea (ACK), who opened their hearts to us even before Japan had come to terms with and apologised for its role in the colonisation of the Korean peninsula. As brothers and sisters sharing the same faith, even as the ACK drew our attention to the inadequacies and errors of Japan's historical awareness, they also opened the door to exchanges between individuals, churches, dioceses, and at the provincial level. A celebration marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of joint Japanese-Korean Anglican missionary work was held in Fukuoka, Japan in 2004. Since 2007, through an inter-provincial agreement, clergy from the Anglican Church in Korea who sense a calling to evangelism in Japan

are now serving in areas throughout this country. We have welcomed over 10 such missionaries to date.

With regard to the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, and other countries which also suffered under Japanese wartime occupation, the NSKK has sought reconciliation and a restoration of our bonds under the same Lord. At the same time, we have been blessed by the wealth of faith-filled experiences of our brothers and sisters in these countries.

In 1972, after walking a path of suffering separated from the Japanese mainland for 27 years, Okinawa was returned to Japanese control, and the Diocese of Okinawa became part of the NSKK. Even now, though, the Okinawan people continue to suffer under the intense strain of the presence of U.S. military bases. We take seriously the challenges to peace pointed up by their struggle, and are keenly aware of being called to work toward realising the peace that is in Jesus Christ.

### ● **Disappointments and Signs of Hope**

As we mark this 150<sup>th</sup> year of an Anglican presence in Japan, in many ways it seems that we have failed to adequately sustain the tremendous energy that the missionaries first brought to mission and evangelisation in this country. It seems we have not yet been able to give adequate expression to our faith as those who live in Japanese society. We face declines in the numbers of both lay members and clergy, and our congregations as a whole are ageing—problems which cannot be solved overnight. Throughout the country, the lack of priests has meant that at many churches, Sunday worship has continued to be carried out by a small number of lay people. We give thanks for the dedicated service of these people, and ask for the Lord's special blessing on them.

And yet, in the midst of these conditions, there have continued to be enthusiastic, energetic gatherings of young people in this church, both locally and at National Youth Conferences. On this day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended, Peter drew on the words of the prophet Joel, lifting up his voice and saying: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2:17).

As well, we heed St. Paul's words to Timothy to "be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2) as we continue seeking to read the Scriptures, to teach, and to work.

### ● **The Shape of the Church Going Forward**

As we have looked back over the great blessings God has bestowed on the NSKK over the past 150 years, we have reflected on what this church has accomplished, on what we intended but failed to do, and on many things we simply did not consider.

Just as worship is called "the work of the people" (*leitourgia*), the church is above all the community of the people of God. We are called to be instruments carrying the Good News and the love of Christ to the world. As such, wherever we might be, we are gathered together in worship, nourished by the Word and the Eucharist, and sent out into society. The work of the laity is therefore equally as important as that of the clergy. The church does not exist only for its own sake, but is also called to seek the presence and action of God in the world, particularly among the least in society, and to serve the world. This work is carried out not only within the NSKK, but also in dialogue and mission collaboration with churches in other traditions.

Even though the NSKK is a small flock, in the midst of a world experiencing deep pain and division, the rest of the Anglican Communion looks to us to continue proclaiming a message of peace and reconciliation, grounded in our own repentance. At the same time, as we saw at the 2008 Lambeth Conference, we believe God is asking us to walk together with the worldwide Anglican family, with all its diverse gifts. We must be willing to share with one another, willing to take the time to listen to one another's different experiences. We believe this is the shape our church must take in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As we mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NSKK, we ask the blessing and guidance of the Holy Spirit over this whole church, and over all the ministries connected with this church. Our Lord Jesus said "put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Taking His words to heart, and with tremendous gratitude, it is our desire to celebrate this important milestone, and renew our commitment to mission as we "put out into the

deep" of the next 150 years.

"And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.' And Simon answered, 'Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.'" (Luke 5:4-5)

Feast of Pentecost

May 31, 2009

**The House of Bishops of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai**

The Most Revd Nathaniel Makoto Uematsu, Bishop of Hokkaido and Primate

The Rt Revd John Hiromichi Kato, Bishop of Tohoku

The Rt Revd Zerubabbel Katsuichi Hirota, Bishop of Kita-Kanto

The Rt Revd Peter Jintaro Ueda, Bishop of Tokyo

The Rt Revd Laurence Yutaka Minabe, Bishop of Yokohama

The Rt Revd Francis Toshiaki Mori, Bishop of Chubu

The Rt Revd Stephen Takashi Kochi, Bishop of Kyoto

The Rt Revd Samuel Osamu Ohnishi, Bishop of Osaka

The Rt Revd Andrew Yutaka Nakamura, Bishop of Kobe

The Rt Revd Gabriel Shoji Igarashi, Bishop of Kyushu

The Rt Revd David Shoji Tani, Bishop of Okinawa

**A Collect for the 150th Anniversary of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai**

Lord God, you loved this world and sent your Son Jesus Christ for the salvation and the unity of all people: We give thanks to you as we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai. We give you thanks also for the many missionaries you sent to this country, and for all the lay people and clergy over the years who have served the mission of the church throughout Japan. Although the church receives its life and its strength from you, at times we have been weak. We have erred. We have been swept along by the powers of this world. Strengthen and guide our churches as we repent and renew our determination to put out into the deep. In the midst of a world caught up in

conflict, division and strife, fill our churches with your love and with the power of the Holy Spirit, and make us instruments of your peace and reconciliation, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever Amen