

# Frode Leth-Larsen (1928-2014) in Memoria

Danish Christian Mission in Japan IV<sup>1</sup>

Christian M. Hermansen

## **Frode and Anne Marie Leth-Larsen in Japanese sources**

In the beginning was the heart (*mikokoro*). At first there was no church building, so the services began in a kindergarten classroom. It thrived in Ichikawa City, Nakayama Ward, between Buddhism and horse racing.

Thus begins *Genesis*, the first of three chapters about the history of Tsudanuma Lutheran Church as it is called today. The storyteller is Mr. Torikai Kazunari, one of the editors of *Nihon Fukuin Rūteru Tsudanuma Kyōkai, Kyōkaishi, 1951-2013* (Torikai et al eds., 2013, Part 1, p. 1). This *The Japan Evangelical Lutheran Tsudanuma Church and Its History* is in the genre of institution's history, where a group of insiders spend effort and energy on gathering documents and memories of people affiliated with the institution and outline its development. This particular booklet is quite thoroughly done, and includes a very detailed chronology. Torikai not merely states the facts but does so with passion and a touch of humor. His text about rev. Fukuyama's English Class, for example, has it that "It is not crystal clear to me, but Rev. Fukuyama's pronunciation of English was, like his hymnal voice, not very good. However, the

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1 This article is the fourth in a series based on my ongoing research on Danish Christian Mission in Japan. Combining interviews with people involved with visits to the places Danish missionaries worked and archive studies, the idea is to get a multifaceted picture of the effects of mission.

boys and girls participated in crowds. Listening was not important, reading the Scripture was. Rev. and Ms. Leth-Larsen, missionaries from Denmark and living in the missionary house in Tsudanuma in those days, too, participated in that English Class.” (Torikai 2013a).

The church was established in Nakayama in 1951, growing of seeds sown in 1949 when the Japanese pastor Watanabe and the American missionary Pawlas started a Home Assembly. (Torikai 2013, Part 1, p. 1). Only later would it move to Tsudanuma. After the summary of the history in 9 pages, follows a section on *Witness* in 23 pages. The first entry in the subcategory *Missionaries* is on Rev. Paul C. Johnsen (1925), who came to Japan in 1952 and worked at Chiba Church and Nakayama Mission Outreach. The second entry reads:

“Rev. Frode Leth-Larsen. Mrs. Anne Marie Leth-Larsen. Rev. Leth-Larsen arrived in Japan in 1961, worked with Rev. Ishii Noboru at Chiba Church and Chōshi Mission Outreach and established the Yokoshiba Mission Outreach. Rev. Matsubara [of Nakayama Church] was also temporarily responsible for the Chōshi Church.<sup>2</sup> / In 1967 (Showa 49) they moved to a missionary house in Tsudanuma and were engaged in mission work in that area. They returned to Denmark in 1974 after 13 years of work. Frode Leth-Larsen was active in the Lutheran Hour [broadcast] and prison visitation. / The missionary house in Tsudanuma they used is now Tsudanuma Church. / Those who used to worship there are now living and practicing members of Chiba Church, Tsudanuma Church, as well as in involved in mission in other areas in Chiba, Yokohama, and Saitama. / The newly wed couple was blessed with four children during their 13-year stay in Japan. Even after their return to Denmark, the couple has appeared in the Lutheran Hour. This year (2013) Rev. Leth-Larsen is 83. (Torikai 2013b)

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<sup>2</sup> The Japanese first refers to the Chōshi place as *chōshi dendō tokoro* 銚子伝道所, then as *chōshi kyōkai* 銚子教会。



Map 1 Leth-Larsens places in Japan; ① Denenchofu, ② Chiba ELC, ③ Narashino-Tsudanuma ELC, ④ Yokoshiba, ⑤ Choshi ELC.

In the subcategory *Other supportive works* are mentioned three works: the Shōdadai Home Assembly 勝田台家庭集会 and the Bible study group at Natsumi Single Mothers' Home 夏見母子ホーム聖書研究会 are grouped under one heading lastly, but the first work to be introduced is the Tsudanuma Assembly 津田沼集会 *tsudanuma shūkai*.

Home assemblies *katei shūkai* are common in churches where some members live far from the church or cannot participate in the regular Sunday worship service. When the Nakayama Church still had no building, the reverend Yokoyama opened his home every week for worship service and prayer meetings, and that could be categorized as a home assembly. But it was the Leth-Larsens' who provided their home in Tsudanuma for regular worship services, bible studies and other mission activities and through this home assembly began the Tsudanuma Church. / The Leth-Larsens continued the Tsudanuma home assembly for seven years from they moved into the missionary house in 1967 (S 42) and till they returned to Denmark in 1974 (S 49). / Their activities were exactly like a church: weekly worship service, Sunday school, bible class, etc. At Christmas celebrations, their home could not house everyone, so they reserved the Narashino Public Hall *narashino kōminkan* 習志野公民館 (in those days in Narashino City, Ōkubo 習志野市大久保) and celebrated there.

Among those who were attracted by Leth-Larsens' Home Assembly some are now in Tsudanuma Church, including Ms. Ōtsubo (now Itamura)

Naoko, Mr. Tanabe Shumyo, Mr. and Ms. Inoue Gakihisa and Inako (now Tsukuba Church) and Mr. and Ms. Torikai Kazunari, while others have transferred to Chiba Church and other churches where they happily lead their faith lives. (Torikai 2013c).

Nakayama Church was moved to Tsudanuma and worship took place there for the first time on Easter 1989 (26 March) (Torikai et al, 2013, Part 1, p. 5). At first, the pastor lived in the old missionary housing, and the service was held in a prefabricated building. In other words, 15 years lapsed before the church moved into the premises formerly housing the Leth-Larsens. Yet, according to Torikai, the seeds they sew and grew were important for the formation of the present day church.

The last quote by Torikai therefore describes a result of the work Frode and Anne Marie Leth-Larsen did in Japan. When asked to contribute to a *festschrift* on the occasion of celebrating Chiba Lutheran Church' 50 years in mission, Frode wrote a greeting in one page and a half.

He began “Watashitachi ga saisho ni aishita mono 私たちが最初に愛したものの” (What we loved first)<sup>3</sup> by recounting his and Anne Marie's feeling of fitting in with pastor Ishii Noboru and his wife because the couples were equally young and at a comparable stage of establishing families. Next, his message has two points: First a picture of his eldest daughter standing at the entrance to Chiba Church with the eldest daughter of rev. Ishii talking to a dog that to him illustrates Jesus' words “Let the children come to me” and the fact that the doors of Chiba Church always are open to children. The second point for him is the numerous ways for Christians to witness.

A very old woman witnessed her faith with her back. Many years of hard work had resulted in a stooping back. Everyone in the Inage district of Chiba City knew her, and anybody who saw her walking down the street

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3 This resembles 1 John 4:19 “We love because he first loved us.” except the ultimate agent of love is “we” rather than God and the object of love is unspecified and not explained in the letter.

her back pointing to the sky on a Sunday morning knew she was heading for Church. (Leth-Larsen 2009, 66).

The openness of the Church and the witness of Christ according to capacity are two of Frode Leth-Larsen's characteristics as I have come to know him over the years. They were evident in the interviews he and Anne Marie gave me on two occasions, in August 2009 and in April 2014, the details of which will be recounted below.

In Chiba Church's Festschrift, a letter of congratulation testifies to the work of the Leth-Larsens. The author is a retired leader of several old people's nursery homes in Denmark, Mr. Mukai Yasumitsu 向保光. Frode and Anne Marie's instrumentality in his going to there is evident in the first few paragraphs of his three-page letter, logically written in 2006 though published some years later.

“From Denmark to all of you in Chiba Church”

This is Yasumitsu Mukai, living in Denmark. / Congratulations on the fiftieth anniversary of the Mission of Japan Evangelical Lutheran Chiba Church. / I was born in 1946 in Yachimata Town, and in my late teens I met Frode Leth-Larsen, who had been sent to Chiba Prefecture as a missionary.<sup>4</sup> On his introduction I went to Denmark in August 1966. / Till 1968 I studied first at Haslev Højskole, then at Rydhave Ungdomsskole and finally at Løgumkloster Bible School<sup>5</sup>, and was adopted by Anna and Oskar Nielsen Ejstrupgaard, who took very good care of me physically and spiritually. / On New Years Day, 1967, I was baptized by Leth-Larsen in Helleruplund Church, Copenhagen. On that day, I decided to live as a Danish Christian. It is no exaggeration to say this is the most important day in my life. I still feel

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4 Yachimata City is located roughly in the middle of Chiba Prefecture. The status as city was acquired in the 1990s. Mukai first met Frode at Yokoshiba Church (personal conversation, Jan. 2015).

5 Haslev Højskole was a prominent Danish Folk High School located in the south eastern part of Sjælland; Rydhave Ungdomsskole, a boarding school for teenagers located in the western part of mid-Jutland; Løgumkloster Bibelskole, a boarding school located in the southern part of Jutland.

so as I approach my fortieth anniversary for that occasion. / Later, in April 1968, I returned to Japan and till March 1971 I worked at the municipality of Yachimata Town and belonged to Chiba Church. (Mukai 2009, 91)

Mr. Mukai then relates how he went to Denmark to study social welfare for the elderly and was introduced to Danske Diakonhjem<sup>6</sup> by Villy Malmgren Jensen, another DMS missionary. In Denmark, he successively studied at Diakonhøjskolen in Aarhus<sup>7</sup>, married a Danish woman, settled in Denmark working as a leader of care homes for the elderly. The last part of his greeting introduces the Fønnesbæk Church he belongs to in Denmark, describing its organization and activities and ending with a wish for closer contacts between his current congregation and his older one in Chiba Church. (Mukai 2009, 92-93)

Evidently, his encounter with the missionaries had a great impact on Mr. Mukai and in turn on everyone who has benefitted from his presence in Denmark. In my interviews with Anne Marie and Frode Leth-Larsen, they mentioned Mr. Mukai as one of the persons they got to know and stayed in contact with since they met first. In the 1960s, the care for the elderly was not the hot issue in Japan as it has been the latest 30 years, and yet Denmark attracted the young Japanese.

Anyone listening to our conversations would immediately have noticed a couple of facts. First, it is “them” I am talking with. By this I mean, I got the distinct impression that they were equal and equally much engaged in the mission in Japan. This showed in the way they spoke ... none of them being the dominant informant.

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6 “Danish Deacon Homes is the leading independent, non-profit care provider in Denmark,” DDH 2015

7 Diakonhøjskolen i Aarhus is a higher educational institution specializing in social welfare for the children, the sick, the mentally ill, and the elderly, rooted in a strong commitment to Christian witness. It was founded in Aarhus, Denmark’s second largest city, in 1920 and till 1962 a men’s school (Diakonhøjskolen 2015.) Den danske Diakonissestiftelse, established in Copenhagen in 1863, serves a similar purpose, educating women and being a *Motherhouse* for a fellowship of deaconesses.

On my second visit in their home on 7 April 2014, Frode immediately made it clear, that he had cancer and though under good treatment was no longer as fit as he used to be. Compared to our initial talk in August 2009, Frode was obviously weaker, not in his voice but otherwise. Therefore, Anne Marie more often took over and supplied the details, but they would still discuss some of those details among themselves as they did in the first interview. Second, in line with Frode's letter to Chiba Church, openness and witness characterized our conversation. My focus of our talk was on the past, but Frode and Anne Marie kept asking about the mission I am personally involved in, the situation of the Lutheran Church in Japan and of Japan. Several times during the first interview, Frode, then 79, eagerly got on the phone to establish facts we were discussing or to help me getting resources for my research and my work in Japan.

I have edited the interviews using chronology as the guiding principle. In 2014, I visited Chiba Church, Chōshi Outreach, and Tsudanuma Church, and interviews with pastors and lay people have helped me getting an idea of the work in Japan by Anne Marie (born Gregersen in 1934), and Frode Leth-Larsen (1928-2014).

### **Preparations**

Hermansen: Frode Leth-Larsen, where are you from?

Frode Leth-Larsen: I was born on the east coast of Jylland in Stouby village east of Vejle Town, north of Vejle Fjord. And my wife is from Holte (a town north of Copenhagen City).

H: What made the two of you want be missionaries in Japan?

Anne Marie Leth-Larsen: As a YWCA Girl Guide, I heard much about mission and about India in particular, and I felt a calling to go there myself. Before I graduated from the teacher's college in Aarhus, I contacted the Danish Mission Society (DMS) in the autumn of 1955, and after my graduation I worked as a youth secretary for DMS between 1957 and 59. The secretaries' job was to inform about DMS' work and we did so by visiting the hundred and several dozens of supporters'

circles throughout Denmark. Besides the regular circles, I particularly targeted the teacher's colleges to prepare the students for teaching about overseas mission in their classes on Christianity, a compulsory elementary school subject in those days. DMS decided to begin work in Japan in 1955. Before, I had been thinking of going to India, but rather than working in a Christian school, I wanted to be involved in direct proselytization. I wanted to go to Japan. However, DMS would not to send out single women missionaries. An old lady told me, *if God wants you send to Japan, He will send you a husband*.



Map 2 Frode Leth-Larsen's places in Denmark; ① Stouby, ② Aarhus, ③ Herning, and ④ Herlev.

F: My parents were active supporters of the work of the Sudan Mission, focused in West Africa. In high school I felt a call to go to Africa. I thought of studying forestry but ended up in theology [at the University of Aarhus]. At university, I got involved in DMS's programs for college students and when the organization decided to take up work in Japan, I felt I ought to go. In 1956, I had a talk with Rev. Rendtorff, the general secretary, who strongly encouraged my idea. The World Council of Churches granted me a one-year stipend for studies at Chicago University School of Theology, so in 1957/58 I studied Japanese Religions and English. Anne Marie and I did not know about each other.

AM: Then, we met at a camp I had organized, and got to know each other and our calls to go to Japan. How fortunate we matched. We married in 1959. DMS policies did not permit married woman secretaries, so I took up school teaching again. In preparations for our sending, I had three month of English language training in England. Not much, on the other hand English is easier than Japanese.

### **Work in Japan**

The Leth-Larsens were met at Haneda Airport by Rev. Koizumi Jun of JELC in 1961.<sup>8</sup> He took them to an apartment in Daikan'yama in Tokyo that had been organized for them by Rev. Melchiorson, DMS' sole missionary in Japan at that time.<sup>9</sup> The couple thought it too expensive, and transferred to a missionary housing in Den'enchōfu. Busy with Japanese language studies they participated in the local Lutheran Church and organized a Bible class in English. After one year, they first moved to a missionary's house in Narashino 習志野, Chiba Pref. and a year later again JELC sent them to Chōshi 銚子 town.

The house in Narashino was owned by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and had originally been purchased for Rev. Paul C. Johnsen, a Danish-American from Iowa, serving in Japan 1952-1962. In 1956, when the Chiba ELC was founded in Inage district 稲毛区 of Chiba City, Johnsen was its first missionary, and he also established an outreach in Yokoshiba 横芝 town.

F: JELC wanted us to take over Johnsen's commitments. I vividly remember how he took us around to introduce us at various places. Coming back to Chiba City by train, we alighted while he was going further west. He took off his hat saying,

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<sup>8</sup> Rev. Koizumi had studied under the Danish missionary Rev. J.M.T. Winther at Kobe Lutheran Theological Seminary and his first calling had been to the Shugakuin LC in Kyoto with Rev. Harry Thomsen, another Danish missionary.

<sup>9</sup> In a separate interview I conducted with Melchiorson in April 2014, he mentioned, "On one of his visits to Japan, DMS general secretary Erik W Nielsen told me, *You can go home now, if you like. If you do, we will cancel the sending of the Leth- Larsens.* So of course, I stayed."

*Keep the fire burning*, and left. He returned to the States and did not come back to Japan.

When DMS first made its agreement with JELC, the ideas of mission were colonial, so the DMS missionaries went in search for a territory. After years of deliberations and advice from JELC, the Danes went to Hokkaido, perhaps a natural choice given Denmark's status as a role model of agriculture quite popular in Hokkaido. As the age of colonialism came to an end around 1960, the World Council of Churches and other church bodies began to work for a change of mission structures. DMS' newly appointed general secretary, Erik W. Nielsen, was among the proponents of the new age. Policies were changed accordingly, so missionaries were to go where the local church wanted them to go. This caused frustrations for some, but the Leth-Larsens thought the situation natural. They were expected to have English Bible Classes in their home and to tend to the small congregation in Yokoshiba. Together with pastor Ishii of Chiba ELC, Frode got involved in the radio program *Ruuteru awaa* (Lutheran Hour).

Listeners of *Ruuteru Awa* were encouraged to apply for a correspondence course. A pastor or a missionary would then be advised on the applicant's name and address, and were to follow up with visits to the him or her.

F: When I visited the listener, we sat down and had a nice talk. One hymn we often sang was ♪*Itsukushi mi fukaki* ♪ (What a friend we have in Jesus). It was very nice. And sometimes such visits lead into the establishing of a church.”



Picture 1. The Church in Yokoshiba inspired by The Lutheran Hour Radio Program. The Leth-Larsens in the middle. (From FLL's private archive).

### **Case one – Mr. Koshikawa and the Yokoshiba Church**

Mr. Koshikawa was a listener. He had a farm in Yokoshiba and thanks to his perseverance a church was started there. It was probably he, who bought the land and put up the building, Frode said.

AM: Koshikawa was an exceptional man. He glowed with faith in Jesus. When his mother developed dementia, he asked for her to be baptized because now she is like a child, he said. Baptized she was. When she died, the funeral service was conducted in the church, and the mourners filled it as it had never been full before. A cross was put on her grave in the Buddhist cemetery, the only cross there till we left Japan. Mr. Koshikawa was very concerned about his sons, so he gave my husband and me a memento and asked us to pray for them.”

F: He was dedicated as few. Unfortunately, his farmhouse burned down, so he left for Kobe to study at Kobe Lutheran Bible School. We carried on the responsibility for Yokoshiba congregation. Sadly, neighbors have informed us that it has ceased to exist.”

Mr. Mukai Yasumitsu, whose letter is quoted above, was a member of Yokoshiba Church. This was where he first encountered Frode.

### **Chōshi**

“Japan’s earliest sunrise” is one of the attractions of Choshi City, which “is located on the eastern tip of the Kanto plain, and is about 100 kilometers from Tokyo. (...) It is a city with fishing, agriculture and tourist industries.” (Chōshi 2015). Frode told me that back in the early 1960s the climate of Chōshi was attractive to elderly people, including a former president of JELC and his wife, Rev. Miura. He was among the first Japanese to join the Lutheran Church when Danish missionary Rev. Winther began his work in Kurume in Kyushu in 1901. According to Anne Marie, Rev. Miura Inoko (1886-1964) had attended a gathering and been attracted by the phrase *You have the words of eternal life* to the extent that he had asked for baptism.<sup>10</sup> Winther

had baptized him, and having served the church in various capacities, “Miura sensei wanted to work in a difficult area,” and thus started the church in Chōshi.

F: We moved to Chōshi in 1964. It was hard to find a residence, but eventually we moved into an apartment building newly built on top of a steep cliff facing the Pacific Ocean. There were four one-room apartments with toilet and kitchen on the two floors, and we rented three of those on the second floor – one for our living, one for our bedroom and one for my study.

AM: Contact to DMS was *thin* because at more than 3 dollar @ minute, telephones prices were exorbitant. Only once did a staff from the DMS headquarters visit us. He was a big person in every sense of the word, so he had to back in when using the bathroom. He seems to have found our living conditions below standard for DMS missionaries and reported about it at home. A woman in Denmark donated the equivalent of 30000 US dollars (200.000 Danish Kroner) to acquire a better property. The money was spent on a piece of land and a building in down town Chōshi and used for the living of Miura and the church. We lived in the apartments till we went on furlough in 1966.

Asked how they attracted people to the church, Frode answered that at Christmas, “We put a loudspeaker on the top of our car and drew through the city announcing our Christmas gathering.”



Picture 2. The Church in Chōshi in the 1960s. (From FLL's private archive).

Chōshi is known for its soy production companies with histories stretching back to the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Leth-Larsens held Bible study classes in English, and among the participants were also engineers from the factories.

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10 John 6:68 “Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (NIV)

The apartment building where they lived is gone now, but the Chōshi ELC building is still there and is served once a month by the pastor at Chiba ELC. I visited the premises on a Sunday afternoon in September 2014. The gathering is small, about five people, but they want to keep it up. Going to Chiba City by train takes about two hours one way, and public transportation has a low frequency. The man who showed me the rooms told me, he began coming to the church as a result of the Ruuteru Awa, long ago. Sometimes, if not recently, the facilities have been used for camps organized by Chiba ELC youths.

### **Furlough and other relations to home**

Before moving to Japan, the Leth-Larsens had wanted children with no success. However, Japan proved a fertile land and they had two during their first term, and two during their second. Giving birth in Japan was not particularly challenging, but the deliveries took place on the west side of Tokyo at the Adventist's *Eisei Hospital*. Frode noted that being a young family when they came to Chiba for the first time put them on par with the local pastor, and sounded as if it had been an advantage.

The contract with DMS stipulated a one-year furlough for every five year served. When the Leth-Larsens left Chōshi in 1966 it was with the understanding and expectation that they would return to the city a year later. Of the one year, the missionaries could spend one-fourth on private affairs, while the rest was reserved for meetings with supporters. It was to their liking, and people showed interest in their work and in Japan. The interest might have stemmed from Frode's prolific writings in the DMS' magazines and from the media attention Japan had in Denmark in the 1960s. The Tokyo Olympics was one occasion for that attention, and coincidentally, though probably unknown to most, one of the people carrying the Holy Flame on its journey to the Olympic Stadium, was a youth member of Chiba ELC (Tominaga 2009, 63). During their stay in Denmark, Frode baptized Mr. Mukai, as mentioned above.

### **Narashino – Tsudanuma**

The Leth-Larsens came back to Japan in 1967 and were assigned to Narashino some ten kilometers west of Chiba City in the direction of Tokyo. They moved into the missionary house they had used some years earlier located a twenty-minute walk from local Japan Rail station in Tsudanuma. The move may have been motivated by the better living conditions for the missionaries, but it was also strategic for in the immediate neighborhood a new housing complex (Jp. *danchi*) had been erected on the former seabed. *The day we moved in, 10,000 people moved into the danichi*, said Frode. Anne Marie remembers feeling a bit displeased with having to move away from Chōshi, but Narashino turned out to be *the place in Japan we feel we have our deepest roots* as Frode phrased it. “We moved in and had a lot of activities, while I also attended to Chōshi,” he continued. ELCA, the owner, conditioned the lease would be terminated had a church not been established in seven years. It had not, wherefore the Leth-Larsens had to leave in 1974.

Visiting Narashino in March 2014, even a casual stroll took me past farmhouses, temples and churches. There are broad thoroughfares yet many narrow winding lanes and stretches of fields left remain. The *danchi* area has a quiet atmosphere despite an expressway runs right in front of it. The Leth-Larsens found it an easy area to work in thanks to the good reputation left by the missionary who lived in the house before their second stay there. So what did they do? In short, they opened their home for and went out to meet and invite people around them.

F: We went to the *danchi* for home visits, and some Christian ladies agreed to let us in. A few more people would gather, then we sat around a table and had a Bible study.

H: What made you start those visits?

F: We simply felt like doing something. Sometimes we and the family were the only ones.

AM: When we planned to start classes of Bible English, a woman next door

advised us, *We Japanese do not like to get something for nothing. You do not have to ask for much, but you should ask for some.* We agreed with DMS that the income would be used for the worship services, and so we charged a low fee. Because many came to participate in our Bible classes for children, our expenses for our church activities were covered. I taught the younger children up to 11 years and Frode took care of the junior and senior high school students. We would teach English for twenty minutes, have fifteen minutes in Japanese focused on the Bible, and then eighteen minutes more in English. On some days I had five classes. We openly told everybody that our main goal was to introduce them to Christ and the church.



Picture 3 Leth-Larsens' missionary house was used for many kinds of gatherings all the time. 1967-74.

F: In classes for older children and adults, I simply used the New Testament as our textbook. We advertised a little. At our entrance we had a display box with an open Bible in it. People passing by would stop and read, and some came in for more explanation.

AM: The best advertisement was the recommendation by participants.

F: We observed that many of those who joined us, had a childhood experience of a Sunday school of other Christian encounters. Like seeds buried deeply in the mud may grow again when given care even after many years, we do not always see the fruit of what we sow.

### **Case 2, Ms. Saito, as told by Anne Marie.**

At our local bank by the *danchi* I would always encountered a certain woman. Sometimes she had her children along, sometimes not. Her name was Ms. Saito. As you know, in the Japanese bank you hand in your account book,

ask for the amount you want, and then wait a while. One day I asked her, if she cared to come visit our church. As a matter of fact, yes, she replied. In the street where she grew up, there had been a church at the other end, and she had always wanted to get inside it, she told me. So she came, and her children came along. Her husband did not come. He was working for a big company where everybody had an annual check-up. One year, the check-up results were fine, but soon afterwards he fell ill and was diagnosed with cancer. During the operation, we waited outside, and when they had finished, the doctor came with a plate of steel to show us what they had cut away. Quite a lump it was. He explained where they had cut and details of the disease. Some find this repulsive, but I think it is fine. Subsequently, Ms. Saito and the children were baptized. Mr. Saito was not but he actively consented. We met them again when we visited Japan in 1991.

AM: Besides the bible classes in English, we initiated a pre-kindergarten program twice a week. Some experienced kindergarten teachers in the congregation volunteered to help out, so we would play with the children and use a lot of English. Children's programs aside, I organized a weekly women's circle. The oldest participant was 70 but most were in the twenties or thirties. Some came with their children. It grew to the point where everybody agreed we did not sit well anymore so it was better to split it into two.

F: Everything took place in our home, including the Sunday service. Saturday evening we pushed all our furniture aside, laid out floor cushions for sitting, put up an altar and a pulpit and our church was ready. We had an electric organ that served us well.

AM: After the service, we often served tea for twenty or thirty sitting around our sofa table. Two years in a row, we organized a Christmas celebration for all participants in the various programs. We rented a local community hall and all together we were almost 400 participants. It was quite a feast and Frode preached, of

course. We decided not to continue, because we felt it became a bit impersonal.

### **Case 3, Harumi Yoshikawa, as told by herself**

I met Ms. Harumi Yoshikawa in Chiba ELC in September 2014. She knew the Leth-Larsens during their second term, their children being her piano class students. They would visit her in her apartment in the danchi. They stayed in contact after the Danes went back to Denmark. Asked about her impressions of them, Ms. Yoshikawa gave a most favorable evaluation. For instance how Frode would always pay attention to and encourage anyone feeling down or being weak. His positive, humorous approach to life had been inspiring. Anne Marie, too, has left a good impression. As they were about to move back to Denmark, Ms. Yoshikawa wanted to present her with a book of recipes. Anne Marie wanted it, *but, not a new one; I would rather have one you have used, with stains of soy and everything*, she had said.

### **Relations to home**

In my interviews, the role of home support got less attention than the actual work and its results, but reports to the DMS network and visits by friends meant much to the Leth-Larsens. They were not homesick, but when the American mission board insisted on following its contract's stipulated seven-year limit and the time coincided with their eldest daughter reaching her teenage years, the couple decided to go back to Denmark. The decision evidently was not easy for Anne Marie and Frode. Talking about it almost forty years later, they did so in tearful voices. Shortly before they were to leave Japan, Anne Marie wrote home, and Frode read the letter to me.

“Dear Friends,

Last Sunday we participated in the inauguration ceremony of a new church. A Tokyo congregation had had its old church rebuilt and changed into a big beautiful Church. Tokyo has a number of Lutheran churches, but this one is at the end closest to

where we live, wherefore we thought it appropriate to go. From far away the church is visible, big, white and with a cross on top of its tower. Many churches are really small, insignificant buildings. The ground floor has shop areas to let. The incoming rent will be spent on paying down the construction costs. The parsonage is at the first floor, the sanctuary on the third. The remaining two top floors of decreasing area have a number of smaller rooms suitable for Sunday school and other circles. We understand the congregation's joy with its new church building. The celebration was a big event. A program had been prepared and printed, including the full inauguration liturgy step-by-step and the hymns to be sung. Everything was good. However, later, when we took a closer look at the program and reflected on the situation, our situation, we wished one more hymn had been included in the program. Grundtvig's "Kirken den er et gammelt hus" [Eng. *Built on the Rock*] has recently been translated into Japanese [as *tatoe tou wa kusure* – Even Should the Tower Collapse] and will be included in the Lutheran Church' forthcoming hymnal. We did not want it on the program because it is Danish but because it makes us think of many important points when we are Church building. Let us keep this hymn in mind as we return to our own small "cottage" in Narashino. We had a dream that we would be permitted to build a church on that spot. For a long time, as many things have taken place here as in many churches. But they always take place in our living, which constantly morphs from living to chapel to kindergarten to classroom to meeting room and in the summer even to a camp house. We had hoped this "tent church" would be replaced by more permanent structures. This may still happen in the future. [Frode, reading the letter commented, *it did, but we did not know it back then. Today there is a church building*]. However, to build a church is not easier or cheaper than in Denmark. Our congregation cannot manage it on its own. We cannot expect assistance from the national body, as its finances are very tight at the moment. You in DMS at home, too, find it impossible to shoulder this burden, as we very well understand. DMS is not Japan only. So, what do we do, realizing that we have little time left in Japan? We have sought consolation and aid in

the word of God, where one always will find much aid. 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel tells us how David wanted to build a temple for our Lord, but was prevented from doing so. He instead had a vision of the eternal home the Lord would build for David. We are no longer absolutely certain that we are in Japan in order to build a church in bricks and wood. We must say, with Peter and John, *we do not have the silver or the gold but something much more important – the word of God*. We are happy we have been permitted to sow the seeds of the word in many hearts, big and small. Our time is short. We shall be going back home in a year from now. [In a tearful voice] Our children's future requires us to do so. We already know [barely audible] it will be hard to say goodbye. A great part of our hearts has been buried in the soil of Japan. Besides, there are so many practical things we must settle before leaving. Pray, that we may get the power and wisdom needed to get on the way correctly. When we arrived in Japan 12 years ago, we were greeted with the word, "May God bless your entrance and you exit." Our entrance God did bless. Therefore, we believe he will be with us, as we think of going home to Denmark."

Having read this letter to me and referring to the case of a missionary couple, sent by DMS to Japan, whose work was suddenly terminated in 1997 due to financial circumstances, Frode concluded, *We have been lucky indeed, in our relations with our Japanese sisters and brothers, but actually also with DMS. We returned while the situation was still good. We might easily have faced the fate of the Christensens, but were fortunate so we did not.*

AM: Our relations with JELC were good, I believe. As a missionary wife, I felt I ought not to impose on the pastors' wives. I organized a circle with them and at that time they seemed quite surprised by the idea, but we had a good time. I sometimes sensed, they were not allowed to use all their talents. A neighbor pastor's wife, for instance, could easily have led the local women's circle, but her husband, the pastor, did it. But I accepted the Japanese were thinking differently in that matter.

**The other missionaries**

The 1950s witnessed a decade of massive missionary activity of all Christian denominations in Japan. While the Leth-Larsens were the only ones sent by DMS for most of the 1960s, there were other Danish missionaries in Japan. The oldest and the first was Rev. Jens M. T. Winther, who had arrived in Yokohama in 1898 and in the 1960s was a very active retired missionary teaching a full load at Kobe Lutheran Theological Seminary, organized by the Norwegian Lutheran Mission. Quite a legend in those years, the Leth-Larsens, of course, knew him and met him on several occasions, for instance at the inauguration of the Danish Seaman's Church in Yokohama and in his summer cottage. Anne Marie visited him shortly before he died in 1970 and Frode attended his funeral. Harry and Ene Marie Thomsen was another couple, sent by the Nordic Christian Mission to the Buddhists and in the 1960s working on building up a center for religious encounters combined with an agricultural school near the town of Fukuroi in Shizuoka Prefecture. The Thomsens eventually left Japan in 1966/67 but the Leth-Larsens had visit them and also met them and other missionaries at a yearly All Lutheran Missionaries' Conference or at Lake Nojiri, where many had a summer cottage. Outside the Lutheran denomination, they had good relations with a Danish couple sent by the Pentecostal Church and many non-Danes of other denominations.

AM: In Chōshi, I wanted to start a group of Girl Guides. In the neighborhood there was a Holiness Church and I thought it better to have good relations with it, wherefore I went and told the pastor's wife about my plan and suggested I invited the girls and she invited the boys. She got very offended and told me off, so I went home quite disappointed. Some days later, she came to apologize and we agreed on my suggestion. What a joy. A group was formed and things worked well until I went on the furlough, then it dissolved, unfortunately.

### Back in Denmark

After their return to Denmark, Frode Leth-Larsen served as pastor in the Danish Evangelic Lutheran Church. First in Herning City in mid-west Jutland, and then in Herlev City till retirement. Anne Marie Leth-Larsen worked as a schoolteacher for more than ten years.

I have attended several Annual Meetings of DMS in the 1980s and 1990s, where the two would bring the audiences' attention to the church of Japan. While I lived in Denmark, my wife, she is Japanese, formed a Japanese Bible circle and when it needed a place for celebrating Christmas, Frode immediately opened Herlev Church for the occasion. The couple has stayed in contact with many Japanese friends, some of whom have benefitted from its hospitality on visits to Denmark. Among them has been Dr. Hashimoto Jun, professor emeritus of the School of Theology at Kwansai Gakuin University, who, as a student, first studied Danish with Frode and Anne Marie in Chiba, in his wish to read Søren Kierkegaard in Danish. Many years later, in Denmark, Frode would take Hashimoto to places he wanted to visit in Nordsjælland for his research on Kierkegaard (cf. Hashimoto 2013).

In sum, all the time and until the present, they have worked diligently to *keep the fire burning* – for Japan and for Christ.

Frode Leth-Larsen went to our heavenly father in August 2014. Denmark, Japan and Christ were well served by him.

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