

“DMS Sent Two Missionaries,
But JELC Only Received One.”
Marit and Erik Wengel DMS in Japan
Part 4, 1979–1988. Diakonia 2

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The Danish Missionary Society (DMS) had sent pastors as missionaries to Japan since 1957 (Cf. Hermansen 2014a and Hermansen 2018). In 1969, instead of pastors, it heeded a call for nurses and deacons from Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JECL) and sent Birthe and Villy Malmgren followed by Anne Sofie and Leif Holm in 1978 (cf. Hermansen 2019a).

In the late 20th century Denmark, *diakon* (deacon) is a gender-neutral term for a person who undergoes training at a deacon school or the deaconal college and then is ordained to serve the church and community in other ways than preaching, the prerogative of the pastor. Besides the directly church-related services, the *diakon* has professional training in nursing, social welfare or teaching.¹⁾ I use *deacon* in the sense of *diakon*.

Marit and Erik Wengel was the third couple of deacons sent to Japan by DMS.

1) For a theological discussion on diakonia see Collins 1990 and Foss 1992. On diakonia in Denmark, see for instance Iversen 2001. Morimoto 2018 is an unpublished thesis about pastor Harald Stein one of the Danish pioneers of diakonia.

A. Introduction of Marit and Erik Wengel and their childhood & youthful decisions to be missionaries

“DMS sent two missionaries but JELC only received one,” Erik Wengel told me when I interviewed him for this project²⁾ in his southern Jutland home in Christiansfeld on 27 August 2009. This was actually the second time I heard him say so. The first time was when Erik, his wife Marit and I met in their home in a Tokyo suburb a day in September 1987. I had just arrived as a volunteer to JELC sent by DMS and Marit and Erik were DMS missionaries to JELC. What follows is based on that 2009-interview and combined with another interview I did with Erik but especially with Marit on 22 April 2014 in at that time their new home in Hedensted, the east side of mid-Jutland.

Marit Wengel was born in Norway in 1949.

Marit: My parents were dedicated to mission. They were particularly concerned with Formosa (through *Misjonssambandet*) and *Norsk Santal Mission*. So I was introduced to mission at home, in the Sunday school, and in my Christian junior high school. My senior high school was not particularly Christian, but I joined a group under the Norwegian Christian student movement *Laget*³⁾. As a Christian freshman, one dedicated to spend her life on doing good rather than on alcohol and parties, I went with my group to Telemarken, held meetings, and fundraised for the work of

2) This project=A History of Danish Christian Mission in Japan, cf. Hermansen 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019a.

3) ”Laget Norges Kristlige Student- og Skoleungdomslag (NKSS), founded in 1924 when a conservative and pietistic group broke away from the Norske Studenters Kristlige Forbund (now Norges Kristlige Studenterforbund) and formed their own organization of a stronger revival and conservative bend.” (Partial translation of Rasmussen 2019)

Muhammedaner Misjonen in Pakistan⁴⁾. That gave me an in-depth, first hand introduction to overseas mission. I then went to Denmark for studies at the Deacon School in Dianalund and the Nursing School in Holbæk, two towns in the mid-west part of Zealand.

Erik: Initially, she wanted to be a teacher, but a daughter of a Danish family, friends of her family, made Marit aware of the Deacon School at *Kolonien Filadelfia*⁵⁾ and that women could be ordained as *diakon*, not deaconesses, and work in mission.

Erik Wengel was born in 1946 in Herlev, then a village north-west of the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen. His family, too, was involved with mission.

Erik: As a child, a China-missionary Helen Madsen⁶⁾ visited my Sunday School. She came in a wheelchair and had no legs. That alone made her exotic to children of my age, 8~10 years. It made me interested in mission, and I asked her for more information. She sent me some articles. I replied with thanks, and I visited her at the retirement home *Sarepta of Diakonissestiftelsen*⁷⁾, Frederiksberg, where she lived till she died. She revisited my Sunday school and we had visits by other missionaries. They would say, “Who knows, perhaps God will call you”. I don’t know what happened. It wasn’t like they pointed at me, but I wanted to be a

4) Norsk Muhammedanermisjon (Norwegian Mission to the Mohammedans), founded in 1940 by the Norwegian theologian Otto Torvik (1901-1988), then missionary to Chinese East-Turkmenistan. In 2001, the organization was renamed Kristen Muslimmisjon, cf. Weihe 2018.

5) “‘The Philadelphia Colony’—Kolonien Filadelfia (which stands for love of one’s brethren).” (Shubart and Jensen 2003:9)

6) Helen Madsen (1888-19??), teacher and missionary for DMS in China 1920-1946.

7) Diakonissestiftelsen, the motherhouse of the first Danish deaconess fellowship founded in 1866, cf. Morimoto 2018. Sarepta was first established as a home for the sick (da. sygepensionat) in 1886, cf. Dietz 2013:140.

missionary. Of course, it was a naïve resolve, but I wanted to go and tell them about Jesus! From that starting position and to my going to Japan and my work there was a long journey. Jesus is the same but when I arrived in Japan, my perspectives had changed and I did not preach or hand out Christian pamphlets.

B. Preparations — education, professional background, and Selly Oak

Erik: At first I wanted to be a teacher, because I knew teachers could be missionaries, and I applied for *Frederiksberg Seminarium*, a teachers' college in Copenhagen. However, I had a summer job at *Kolonien Filadelfia* and the chief deacon said, "Since you like this job so much, you should be a deacon. As such you can also work as missionary." I said no, because I planned to be a teacher. But he told me of the options for deacons and that I could combine it with a study of nursing. In 1964 I applied and, filling in the form, my answer to the question: "Why do you want to be a deacon?" was, *Because I know that way I can become a missionary*. In other words, I chose a career with the missionary option, and knowing that missionaries needed a good education and experience it took time before I was ready to go. Then, I met Marit. Besides becoming a deacon, she wanted to study nursing. She partook in my graduation celebration in Ringsted on a Friday, and the following Monday she started at the nurse school in Holbæk. We had to wait before we could go abroad, and later, when I was a mission secretary, I have used that experience to tell candidates, who wanted to go abroad the moment they had finished their professional training: "Don't rush. Get half a year of experience, figure out what area you want to specialize in ..." On the other hand, we did not postpone getting married. We met in the autumn '69, were engaged at Easter '70 and married in August '71. Before I

proposed, I told her, I wanted to be missionary. She replied, her intention was the same.

I went on to study leadership in nursing, administration and nurse training at *Danmarks Sygeplejerskehøjskole*⁸⁾ of Aarhus University, and some years later Marit did likewise. We wanted to be well prepared. For the same reason, I taught at the deacon school as well as nursing, and worked as leader of the *Amtsplejehjemmet* (:prefectural nursing home) in Dianalund from 1976 to 1979. That gave me valuable experiences in teaching and administration.

Christian: Erik, you have told me you wanted to go as missionary to somewhere in Africa?

Marit: No. We agreed that we wanted to go somewhere with a need for us, two nurses.

Erik: Treating the poor and the ill.

Marit: We had only one condition for our commission: We would go wherever the Board wanted us, as long as our children could live with us. We knew of the experiences of boarding schools from others and didn't want them for our family. That condition prevented DMS from sending us to Tanzania or Madagascar, for instance, where the schools were far from potential areas of assignment. Besides this condition, we had told DMS that, we would like to go together with two of our closest friends who were nurses, too. DMS was looking into the options. All four of us were accepted as missionaries but our destinations were still unknown when we went to

8) The first version of *Danmarks Sygeplejerskehøjskole* (The Danish Nursing College), was established in 1937 and affiliated with Aarhus University in 1938. It continued as an independent institution of higher education in nursing until 2001, when it incorporated as a section of the Faculty of Health at VIA University College, Aarhus. (Cf. *Dansk Sygeplejeråd* 2020 and *Kjærgaard* 2003: 8–9)



Photo 1 Marit and Erik Wengel, deacons commissioned by DMS 1 Spt. 1979; sent to Japan 25 Aug. 1980. DMS' archives.

England for language and mission training at Selly Oak⁹⁾.

Erik: We went for ten months.

Christian: Why did you chose Japan?

Marit: While we were at Selly Oak, DMS informed us they had identified a place for the four of us. I cannot remember if it was Isfahan in Iran they said first or Kabul in Afghanistan. In Kabul, we were to work for an Eye Clinic. Let us say, Kabul was the first suggestion, but then the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Next DMS wanted to send us to Isfahan in Persia, to work at a US hospital. Again, all four of us were to go. But then Ayatollah Khomeini lead the Iranian Revolution. Again DMS had to rethink

9) *Selly Oak Colleges* near Birmingham, England, was an ecumenical federation of educational facilities, primarily concerned with theology, social work and teacher training, that existed between 1922 and 2001 (cf. Wikipedia 2019)

the opportunities and told us that we probably could not go together. Our friends were to go to Taiwan, while a call came from India: In Madras, we should assist the construction of an orphanage for children with disabilities.

Erik: Street children included. We had a letter of calling from the president of Arcot Lutheran Church, Rev. Dorairaj Peter (1919–1999, president of Arcot Church 1960–1981, bishop of the same 1981–84, cf. Nielsen 2019:201).

Marit: Every time the destination was changed, we started all over with area – and cultural studies. DMS negotiated to get us to India for a long time, but eventually it turned out to be impossible to get us visa. India had enough common nurses so it did not need us, was the reason for the rejection.

Erik: Had we been specialists in speech therapy, for instance, we might have been qualified, we were told.

Marit: Next, DMS asked Japan.

Erik: One day, the mission secretary Rev. Karen Berntsen¹⁰ called to inform us that DMS had also sent our papers to Japan and that JELC wanted us. In those days, we were thinking traditionally and did not associate missionaries, nurse or deacons, with Japan. Such missionaries would naturally be working in Africa or other such places with the sick and the poor. I didn't know that DMS had been sending missionaries to Japan for two decades. But JELC wanted to train students in diakonia to serve church and society, and also wanted to learn from the Scandinavian welfare systems, wherefore sending us made sense. And Tokyo had more American

10) Rev. Karen Berntsen “was the first woman pastor to serve on the board of directors for DMS (1973–1979). Next, she was the first female mission secretary 1979–1988, and then again member of the board 1990–1999.” (My translation of caption for photo of KB in Nielsen 2019:136)

schools. Marit and I discussed the situation, agreed on going, and informed DMS accordingly. That's why we went to Japan. You asked, why we chose Japan, but we didn't. We accepted Japan.

C1 Introduction to Japan

a. Selly Oak

Christian: When in the process were you asked?

Marit: Late. It must have been after Easter. We had been back in Denmark for Easter Vacation, and learned that India was definitely out of the question. Our friends had commenced their Mandarin studies. As it happened, a Japanese woman called Naomi came to the language school exactly for the spring term, and that was significant for us when we knew we were going to Japan.

Christian: Did Selly Oak have specialists on Buddhism, and did you get a Japan 101?

Erik: No, the purpose of the language school was to separate the sheep from the goats. The placement tests put Marit in the Cambridge advanced class and me in the more everyday language class. The mission school on the other hand had many learned teachers, former missionaries to many areas, who lectured on their specialties, e.g., prof. Lesslie Newbigin.

Marit: But there were no experts on Japan. Probably because few were destined for Japan. The Norwegian missionaries, for instance, were not sent to Selly Oak. They had their own place. The Finnish had another, too.

Erik: We had an introduction to Buddhism. All teachers had experienced struggles in the field, and that made their lectures so interesting. The Mission School was the core of Selly Oak.

Marit: The school offered area studies including the World of Islam or the Buddhist World. That introduced us to Buddhist and Chinese thoughts.

Erik: It was very stimulating, and it was encouraging that the DMS board thought that kind of preparation necessary.

Marit: We had our culture shock when we came to England, more so than in Japan. England's history as a pioneer of the industrial revolution, and its cultural and political position had made us anticipate something completely different from the reality we encountered — a deeply conservative and old fashioned country. After that, Japan couldn't surprise us as much. That was in 1979/80.

C 2 Introduction to Japan in Japan by ...

a. The Church

Erik: While we were in England we felt as real missionaries. But once in Japan,

Marit: it was made crystal clear to us who the missionary was and who the accompanying spouse was. It was emphasized by the church. I didn't react as strongly to that message as some of the Americans. I managed to find my way, and participated in tasks that made sense to me. I couldn't use my nurse training in Japan. My graduate degrees in nursing instruction and nurse administration were also of no use and that was frustrating.

Erik: It was also emotionally trying for us. At the first annual meeting of JELC, we got the list of participants including the missionaries. Under the heading "DMS" only my name was listed. Marit got upset, and I thought, "This must be a mistake," but it wasn't. I don't mean to be condescending towards housekeeping and care for the family, but that attitude felt wrong. Eventually she...

Marit: Yes, but I had many talks with God about the sense of it all. It sounds pious, but I had to ask for wisdom and strength to face the fact that I was seen as a nobody. Despite my university degree as a nurse instructor. I

told myself, somebody had to take care of the family. I don't think, I discussed it as much with him [pointing at husband] as with him [God] (laughs).

Erik: On the positive side, JELC welcomed us with an introduction program. It included the language course – four books in two years – and an assignment to a church. It also included interesting meetings with famous people like the Christian artist Watanabe Sadao, visits to temples organized by the vice director of the National Christian Council's Center for the Study of Japanese Religions, the Norwegian missionary Dr. Notto R. Thelle. We felt all of that to be most meaningful and helpful in a time that otherwise saw us confused about our roles and work. I am not sure, if JELC told us to participate in the tours organized by Dr. Thelle or if we heard of them from JEMA (Japan Evangelical Mission Association). Either way, JELC obviously knew about them. Upon second thought, I am convinced the church organized it, for it also took us to *Shinreisan* (then a Children's Home in Shizuoka Prefecture, cf. Hermansen 2016) and *Kamagasaki* (with the JELC Diakonia Center Kibo no Ie, cf. Hermansen 2005). They did that 30 years ago, but still at present (2009) there are churches in other parts of the world I would wish would do the same. That kind of introduction demonstrates an interest taken in the newcomers, coworkers, and partners.

Christian: Could you elaborate on the assignment to a church? Did JELC officials take you to the congregation?

Erik: We were assigned to Itabashi Evangelical Lutheran Church the first year, and to Hōya Evangelical Lutheran Church from the second year and onwards. No, I think they gave us the address. We then asked somebody at the language school for help to find it. We had to ride three different trains to get to Itabashi Church.¹¹⁾ The people were kind to us, but

11) 日本福音ルーテル板橋教会 〒173-0004 東京都板橋区板橋2丁目39-4.

few spoke any English, and we didn't understand Japanese. To stay "sane" and for the sake of the family, we attended an American church near our home once a month. The first year, our Japanese was so very limited and we progressed at a snail's speed. Our children had been to a local school in England, wherefore the English services were more comprehensible for all of us.

Marit: Every Sunday we walked from the last station up to the church. One time, walking up to the church, a person called out, "I hear you are talking in Danish." He was a designer called Watanabe who had studied at Copenhagen School of Design. He joined us in the church, and the church asked us to teach Danish.

Erik: We did not get very far (laughs).

Marit: We met several Japanese with a Danish connection. An organ builder who had trained in the little Danish port town of Aabenraa, famous for the pipe organ builders, Marcussen & Søn, and now had his own company. A Søren Kierkegaard researcher who is now a university professor. And a Viking researcher who translated Johannes Brøndsted Viking.¹²⁾

Erik: In Hōya Church¹³⁾, the congregation seemed much more prepared for us, and the atmosphere was more *at home* than it had been in Itabashi Church. There, people had appeared more formal, but we shouldn't forget the fact that our Japanese was so much better when we arrived in Hōya Church. At least we could exchange some phrases. Besides, Hōya may have been told that we were going to stay, as I would serve the nursing home

12) This could have been Arakawa Akihisa or Makino Masanori who co + translated the book, cf. ヴァイキング / ヨハネス・ブレンステッツ; 荒川明久, 牧野正憲訳 京都: 人文書院, 1988.

13) 日本福音ルーテル保谷教会 〒202-0022 東京都西東京市柳沢2-13-11

Tokyo Rōjin Home. They also seem to have been told that I was to teach at the Department for Christian Social Welfare [= *diakonal*] Studies (*Kirisutokyō shakai fukushi kōsu* キリスト教社会福祉コース)¹⁴⁾ of Japan Lutheran College after a couple of years at Tokyo Rōjin Hōmu.

3 b. *The Language School*

During both of my interviews, Erik often returned to the issue of language and his frustration with not mastering Japanese.

Christian: How much formal training of Japanese did you get?

Marit: For me as accompanying spouse half-a-year was considered sufficient, but I did the course at a reduced speed so attended school for one year.

Erik: I had two years at the language school. I knew I would need as much as possible. Marit was better than me at the theoretical level and did not speak before she was confident with the sentence structures. I more easily began using what I knew if far from perfect. We felt comfortable with studying languages, because we had studied English and German and mastered them somewhat. But, had it been possible to experience the challenges of studying Japanese through a video, we might have looked for an excuse to say *no thank you*. But we couldn't, and we went. DMS had asked for how long we were prepared to go, and we had answered we were thinking of six or seven years initially. It was a reason they dared sending us in the first place. The first two years were fully dedicated to language studies. Monday through Friday, five hours a day at school, followed by homework after our family time with our children. Sundays, we would

14) This department started in 1976 had its first eight graduates in 1980 (cf. Endo and Tokuzen 2009: X, 291). In 2020, the name of the department is “Department of the Human Studies, Social Work and Clinical Psychology (*Sōgō ningen gakubu ningen fukushi shinri gakka* 総合人間学部人間福祉心理学科)” cf. Japan Lutheran College 2020

always rest to go to church and have some fun. It was a huge investment and I was never satisfied with my achievements.

3 c. *Other Missionaries*

Christian: What were your relations with other missionaries?

3 c 1. US

Rev. Jerry Livingston was our contact person within JELC. He took care of the first housing and school. The first year we lived near *Tama Station* 府中市多磨駅 and next to *The American School in Japan*. Our house was about 140 m² on a 500 m² ground, and all the neighbors were Americans or Canadians if not Australians. They were embassy personnel, military personnel or business people who could afford the high costs. We sometimes invited people home from the church, but Rev. Livingston advised us not to do so, for “they know we live differently”. I felt provoked when I saw an American family, very nice people, move in with all their big furniture, refrigerator, and oven straight out of their home in the US. Put differently, we lived isolated from the Japanese we had come to meet, and so did the American missionaries. Sometimes, on a Sunday afternoon, a Japanese couple might stroll down our street simply to look at the American houses. We could get by in English, wherefore our Japanese language did not progress.

We also had a fellowship with the Americans in the JEMA conference – a very big gathering. We had DMS’ permission to attend them because our own contingent of Danish missionaries was so small.

3 C 2 NORWEGIANS

While we were living in the American area, we became acquainted with some Norwegian missionaries. They thought we were spending too much of the mission’s funds on expensive school fees and big housing, and they recommended us to use the Christian Academy in Japan (CAJ) and offered

to help us finding a house near that school. They belonged to the Pentecostal *Frie Evangeliske Venner*¹⁵⁾ or *Misjonsalliansen*¹⁶⁾ and actively befriended other missionaries. We are still friends with some of them and exchanging Christmas cards with most. Some of our children attended the same school. The school fee for one child at the American School was equivalent to the fees for three children at CAJ. When we relocated, we knew another DMS family would soon be joining us and needing a school for their son, so for the sake of the economy of the mission, we thought it justified to change school.

Our new friends also found a smaller housing for us in Katayama, Niizan City, Saitama Pref. 埼玉県新座市片山. In a letter home, our daughter Heidi told about the new place and mentioned that if she stretched her arm out of her window, she could shake hands with the neighbor. The relocation brought us in contact with the Japanese for the first time. Unlike in the Tama area, in Katayama we needed Japanese all the time and we were warmly welcomed in the Japanese fashion by our neighbors. At the language school we had been taught to bring a small gift for the neighbors when moving in. We gave them a box of Kjeldsen's Cookies. Then, while we were moving the furniture in from the van, our neighbors, still strangers to us, suddenly stepped in with two big trays of sushi to say welcome. That, we felt, is the other side of the Japanese characteristic, which we usually know to be formal and stiff.

Christian: Were you members of the neighborhood council (*chōnaikai*)?

Erik: No, we rented the houses for two years at the time. We moved

15) "De Frie Venner"(The Free Friends) a Pentecostal group in Norway, today known as De Frie Evangeliske Forsamlinger (The Free Evangelical Fellowship) (cf. Pinsebevegelsen 2020 and Free Evangelical Fellowship 2020.

16) Norwegian Mission Alliance, cf. Misjonsalliansen 2020.

three times in eight years, approximately in rhythm with our furloughs, i.e., every third year. The houses belonged to families whose breadwinners were sent overseas by their employers.

We gained much from this environment. When people in our neighborhood told us about their religions and customs, such as visiting the graveyard to clean the family tomb or, later, when we were invited into their homes and saw the family alters, we did not push our “Danish Lutheran Message” on them, but preferred to talk and learn. That way we had many fruitful conversations.

Our Norwegian missionary friends, on the other hand, always aimed for a permission to pray for those they met and for their early conversion in particular. Naturally, we shared their wish but not their approach.

3 c 3 DANES

Christian: You already mentioned, a new family was coming from Denmark?

Erik: Yes, Else and Kresten Christensen with their youngest son Simon. They arrived a year after we did and became our close colleagues, though we did not live near each other.¹⁷⁾

Outside of Tokyo, we met missionaries from all nations at Lake Nojiri where we rented a hut during the summer vacations. One summer, Marit worked as the camp nurse of Nojiri Lake Association.

17) I plan to compile the story of Else and Kresten Christensen in 2020, CMH.

283 ROBERT B. CARLSON July 15-August 31 Bob & Betty Carlson Robin 17, Debbie 16 Gordon 11	291 HAJIME KAINUMA August Hajime & Kaoru Kainuma Satoshi 3, Shigeto 1
*284 ALF IDLAND	*293 MONIKA AYUGAI
285 CARL LONG July-August Ken & Jan Wendling Paul 13, Tim 9 Mark 3	294 THOMAS P. RANDULFF July 20-August 30 Thomas & Jorjann Randulff Kristin 17, Brit 14 Tome 10 Anne Naerland 17 Toini Underhaug 14
286 HANS BOUWMAN July 13-August 28 Hans & Gerda Bouwman Marion 22, Monica 16 Robert 14	295 R. KEITH LEE August 3-27 John & Janet Cunningham Karin 3, Dana 1 Mike & Dorothy Wolf
287 TOMIJI HARADA August Tomiji & Usako Harada Yuriko 15	296 LEIF HOLM July 27-August 29 Erik & Marit Wengel Heidi 9, Oyvind 6
289 AUSULV LANDE July 21-Aug. 11 Rune & Gudrun Bergland Charlotte 18, Annette 17 Tore 15, Evika 10	298 GEORGE HANABUSA July-August George & Mitsue Hanabusa Yurie Tsune Irie

Photo 2 List of cottage owners (capital letters) and residents at Nojiri Lake Association, 1981. Leif Holm owned no.296 and the Wengels stayed there.

D. Works

D 1. Youth work at Hōya Church

Erik: Returning to my naïve childhood image of missionaries preaching the gospel of Jesus, it never became my main function. Japan is filled with Christian churches of all kinds of denominations that preach the good news. My task and our task was to bring [manifestate] diakonia. I am fully aware of the thousands of dedicated ordinary nurses doing a meaningful work throughout the world, but the deacon's motivation is different, because we have been encouraged to and promised to care for our neighbor. As a grown up, I realized that my task was not to duplicate or replace the preachers, and I was comfortable with that fact. As deacons alongside nursing in hospitals and teaching diakonia we thought ourselves to be missionaries when we worked directly for the church and its programs for the youth in particular.

This point was important to us. We mentioned JELC assigned us to Hōya Church in our second year in Japan. After a year, the language school was coming to an end, and we were able to give shorter, understandable talks about ourselves. Then the pastor asked us if we would help the church with a problem. They had Sunday school classes covering the ages up through elementary school. But once children entered junior high, all sorts of extra curricula activities and extra studies made it difficult for many to attend church on Sundays. The pastor wanted us to commence a junior high school level program and run it every Sunday. It was to be scheduled before the Sunday morning service and English should be the attraction. We started with a short meditation in English, using simple texts and hymns, and making sure that participants understood the language. It was followed by time for everyone to introduce themselves and talk about events of the past week. That was what we could offer of natural English. In fact children

came. The point wasn't that the first one was the son of the pastor, or that the second and third participants were children of members of the congregation. As you know, English education was a big thing, and so was English Bible Studies in the churches. The point was that those first children took friends along with them and that other members of the congregation introduced some, so more young people were attracted to and joined the junior high program. Initially, we were not very happy with what we could offer, but we observed the gradual progress in the participants' language. Our program compared well with many other programs on offer. Eventually, we carried on with it for as long as we remained in Japan, seven years all in all.

After our return to Denmark, I was made DMS' mission secretary for the Middle East and Asia. In that capacity I visited Japan every year. In 1989, it was a pleasure to revisit Hōya Church and learn that the pastor's son headed the youth program. He had just been admitted to Waseda University, a young man with an awareness of purpose. The other first two young persons were also still involved. It would not make [economic] sense to send a missionary family for such a task alone, but we understand it as a bonus on top of the other things we did.

We did not proclaim the gospel in our street, if I may say so, but people knew who we were and what we were doing in Japan. Occasionally, in particular around Christmas, we invited people to church and some joined us.

Marit: We recently got the Hōya Church, Jubilee booklet. We had been asked for a greeting for the publication and we sent it.

Erik: They gave us directions on what kind of greeting they wanted – not merely history but preferably with a Christian message and a Bible reference. We were asked in May last year [2013] and given a deadline in October. They also wanted a newer picture of us. We got the book in

November.

Marit: Ms. Furukawa, a member, was a secretary of JELC all the years we were there, and celebrated her 25-year of work, I believe. She has retired now. She included a greeting in English for our benefit. She likely translated our greeting to Japanese. The book was published last year. What Jubilee I wonder, could be 60 years?

D 2. Tokyo Rōjin Hōmu

After two years of language school, I was assigned to *Tokyo Rōjin Hōmu* (Tokyo Home for the Elderly), TRH.¹⁸⁾ I should like to add that, thinking of the language training I got and how I felt I had not mastered enough after two years, but was expected to ... that I would be working with HIDAOKA Noboru (1929–2005), an expert on and pioneer in elder care and retirement homes in Japan, the Japanese equivalent of Axel Johannesen in Denmark.¹⁹⁾ My personal experiences as nurse and leader of a nursing home in Denmark did not match his at all, yet he wanted to learn from Scandinavia. I was to study the technical language of Social Welfare (*shakai fukushi*), and I was asked to be a kind of consultant for the home.

Mr. Hidaka knew how to relate with media and made sure I was interviewed about differences of nursing homes in Denmark and Japan.²⁰⁾

18) Tokyo Home for the Elderly was founded by the Lutheran Church after the Great Kanto Earthquake in September 1923.

19) Axel Johannesen (1926~) was one of the first male nurses in Denmark, and the first leader of nurse administration. He is an ordained deacon (cf. Harding and Kruse 1979).

20) The Japanese “Financial Times” *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* carried several articles on its local Tokyo pages testifying to Hidaka’s innovative approach. See for instance 4 September 1982, morning edition 「在宅福祉」時代担うシステム “Zaitaku fukushi” jidai ninau sisutemu (A system that shoulders the age of “Social Welfare at Home”). *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 1982.

He took a strong interest in the floor plans of “my” nursing home and other Danish nursing homes I was asked to bring. He asked, “Are they all designed with single rooms?” and I could reply, “Yes, for that is the law.” It was a fact back then – no longer so in Denmark or Norway. In the end, when I visited Japan again some years after we had returned, Mr. Hidaka showed me Japan’s first nursing home with single rooms for all residents. The rooms were not that big and floored with tatami mats, but they were single rooms.²¹⁾

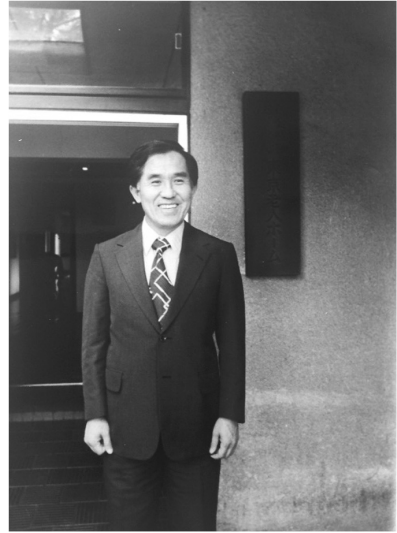


Photo 3 Tokyo Rōjin Hōmu leader, HIDAKA Noboru 日高登 1990s DMS photo archives.

It may not sound of much, yet in the cultural context, where such accommodation might have seen extravagant, it was a big step. He knew how to push forward under the technical and bureaucratic conditions.

I remember the first time I visited the old Tokyo Rōjin Hōmu; eight people sharing a room and, as I said, their life stowed into two cardboard boxes under their bed. Comparing the situation before and after, it seems clear that Mr. Hidaka gained something from our relationship that had an impact on the Japanese society. Of course, I don’t deserve all the credit for that, yet, it documents my stay was not for naught.

21) Cf. Headline on p. 24, local Tokyo news in *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 24 August 1990: 個室中心の老人ホーム、保谷市にきょう完成——プライバシーを尊重。(Nursing home mainly with single rooms, completed today in Hoya City. Respect for privacy.)

I gave a few lectures in English and was advisor on nursing matters based on my experiences as a nurse at an intensive care and a geriatric wards. Altogether I had a full workload. Sometimes we would watch video recordings of television programs, and I were asked to comment on them from my perspective. For instance, a program reported on a home for people with dementia. We saw them go out of doors in the night and pee in trashcans, their butts bare for all to see. It was very humiliating. For the sake of discussion, I may have been a bit dramatic when I declared that in Denmark, the producer of such a program would face legal charges as would the nurses of the institution who simply followed the camera crew instead of protecting the residents. There were also scenes of residents physically fighting with one another. The TRH staffs interestedly asked for more background information on the Danish position. On such occasions, my presence and our discussions seemed valuable to me.



Photo 4 Erik Wengel and a resident of Tokyo Rōjin Hōmu studies information about Danish Missionary Society (DMS).

D 3. Tokyo English Life Line

Marit: Going back to my situation in Japan, I first of all participated in the life of the congregation and the work for youth. Besides the English classes for juniors, I organized a class on English literature. In our last neighborhood, I met a Christian American woman married to a Japanese. We became friends, and together we organized a cooking class in English for women in the neighborhood. It was quite popular, and we always began with a short devotion. It was a different way of being a missionary's wife in the neighborhood. She and I had children in the same kindergarten and there we posted our invitation to "An English Cooking Class with a Christian Devotion".

Erik: I remember, in the very beginning when everything was void, you joined the Parents Teachers Association of the school.

Marit: Most housewives did. It was one of the few places we could demonstrate our talents. I didn't participate in any PTA clubs at the school. But as a PTA member, I was expected to help out with organizing the annual flea market and be present on the Sport Day, etc.

Then, I joined the Tokyo English Life Line, TELL. It was a very meaningful commitment. TELL was started by an American missionary, Olson [in 1973], and she was still the director when I joined. TELL was located in the same building (a church?) as its senior Japanese version *inochi no denwa*.

Erik: You had 60 hours of training, and then you worked



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counseling, every day.

many hours on the phone.

Marit: There are many foreigners and Japanese repatriates in Tokyo and Osaka.

Erik: I understand TELL to be a part of the diakonia, and diakonia to be mission. Marit worked so much at TELL that when Ms. Olson was about to retire, they voiced a desire to hire her as the successor. They also wanted to hire me for more practical functions. But by then, we were already talking about returning to Denmark, so our daughter Heidi could get into a Danish high school. Our oldest son, Øyvind, was seriously tired of the school. So we decided to go home. And then ...

Marit: Yes, you had exactly agreed with DMS to work in Denmark, when I got the invitation to become the director of TELL. It would have been interesting, but that is not how it was meant to be.

D 4. Japan Lutheran Theological College and Seminary (Now, Japan Lutheran College)

Erik: I again felt the inadequacy of my Japanese language skills, when I was moved to the Lutheran Theological College's Department of Christian Social Welfare (Diakonia). In Denmark, I had taught nursing and diakonia at the deacon school. And while I was at Tokyo rōjin hōmu I had studied the vocabulary of social welfare. In that sense, JELC had planned sensibly, I think. Still, what exactly could I teach in Japan, and how? At first, I was asked to teach an "I introduction to Scandinavian Culture" – course in English and another one, in English as well, on "nursing theory", writing articles in English, while getting ready to teach courses in Japanese.

I should probably have given myself more time to become a teacher relaxed in Japanese and able to prepare my lessons in Japanese. I never got that far. I would prepare my lectures in English, translate them into

Japanese and have the spouse of a colleague check the language. She gave comments like, “this is correct in writing, but spoken we would say it differently” and “here we would use different vocabulary.” It took a lot of effort to prepare the classes. I ended up teaching three classes in Japanese. I taught two courses in one term and one in the other.

Besides the class work, professor Ichikawa Kazuhiro 市川 一宏 asked me to help planning and executing study tours in Scandinavia. The college advertised the tours for students of social work²²⁾. I worked hard with the lectures and exams. I remember being on vacation in the cottage of my in-laws in Norway, and getting up at five to prepare. I knew I had to spend much time for that. Today (2009), I would not accept a missionary society sending anyone for that kind of teaching, unless the missionary had a very unique area of specialty. More than I had.

E. Relations to others such as ...

E1. Family

Christian: How did your families react when you told them of your decision to be missionaries?

Marit: As we said, our parents were strongly committed to overseas mission since our childhood. They found it important. But when we wanted to go, they had mixed feelings. Erik’s mother and my parents could see the need for mission but were not convinced that meant we were needed as missionaries. And Erik’s sister was enraged. Every time we were on furlough, she would reiterate, “How CAN you do it? Isn’t it gruesome to be

22) Denmark, and especially Sweden were popular destinations for Japanese involved in social work, both care givers and politicians, in the 1980s and 1990s. As a former volunteer of DMS and acquaintance of Erik Wengel, he asked me to assist with the tours when they came to Copenhagen.

there?” My parents have admitted they thought it challenging when mission moved that close in on them. Not just the uncertainty, but as much the distance it put between them and their grandchildren. Our children were six and eight when we moved to Japan.

Erik: And Marit’s paternal grandfather would every time see us off with the phrase, “God Bless; We don’t know if we will meet again in this life.” My in-laws were uncertain about our going, but they enjoyed visiting us in Japan the first time, and even more so the second.

Marit: A benefit of living away from the mother land, was that we exchanged letters with our parents every week. I had lived in Denmark for many years before we left, and during that time I talked with my parents on the phone a few times a year, and visited Norway once or twice a year. But once in Japan, we wrote every week. They have never been so well informed about our life as when we lived on the other side of Earth. Our parents kept all the letters and photographs we included – mine are in Norway. I could write out a weekly diary based on the letters. Eight years are documented.

Erik: An additional dimension was the fact that our correspondence with friends changed nature – it got to a deeper level. Some of our closest friends divorced and they consulted with us and asked for our prayers.

Christian: How were your families and friends involved in you, while you were in Japan? Did they visit you?

Marit: Yes, my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law and her family, my brother-in-law and his wife came.

Erik: And their two sons came individually, one for a month and the other for a full year. The latter wanted to experience Japan for a year and worked as a coach at our children’s school.

Marit: Two families of friends came. One of them had adopted children from India. They and our son Hans had a good time together. We also saw

many Danes with business in Japan, who got our address from DMS and then visited us.

Erik: And your parents came twice. First time on their own initiative, but the second time because we invited them some weeks ahead of our return to Denmark. They helped us packing up everything, and then all of us went in our comfortable car all the way down through Kyoto, Osaka, Hiroshima and to Nagasaki. It was a great experience for our children as well.

E 2. Sending organization

Christian: How were your contractual relations with DMS? They commissioned two missionaries, didn't they?

Marit: No, DMS, too, categorized me as accompanying spouse (dk. medfølgende hustru).

Erik: We had been in Japan about six years, when Rev. Karen Berntsen revealed this fact to us. It happened at the annual meeting for DMS missionaries in Japan, when she informed us that the board of DMS had decided, "from now on, the Society will pay into pension schemes of accompanying spouses."

Marit: Because I was technically naught to the mission, the organization did not pay into my pension scheme and I had not accumulated seniority in my profession. Others within DMS had protested²³⁾ and finally the organization had revised its policies.

Erik: The organization suddenly became more democratic and acknowledged the work of the spouses. We had not thought it didn't do so. We both worked and had an income before going to Japan. Our employers naturally paid into the pension schemes as stipulated by law. So we did not

23) For more on the protests, see Hermansen 2019a: Malmgren's story.

think of asking DMS about its policies. Consequently, Marit lost six years of her retirement age.

Marit: As for the intentions of DMS ...

Christian: Well, I understood that Japan was like the last choice after a series of attempts.

Marit: Yes, but we have also, both later and while we were in Japan, asked ourselves, "What are we doing here?"

Erik: I don't have a university degree, so at language school I would ask that question.

Marit: Not only there. We mostly felt "who will benefit from our presence/ our work?" We have said as much openly and directly asked DMS on a furlough. They told us JELC had said, the presence of foreigners was significant for the church. They were manifestation of overseas' support, and the presence of theologians and coworkers from abroad meant something for the church. However, most often, we felt our presence was not right. We were not theologians. Given our limited language, we wondered about the sense of it all. Once Erik was involved in organizing the study tours, it felt more meaningful, but in the darker moments it felt meaningless for us to be in Japan. At the personal level we appreciated and still appreciate our time in Japan, but how did it benefit the Church or the Mission? In our age, everything is measured by its economic value. I do not agree with that approach, but ...

Erik: As secretary for the missionaries in East Asia when I was still working for DMS, I observed the skyrocketing prices on housing in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan almost simultaneously. 16000-17000 Danish kroner a month was quite normal [in 1995, when the average house rent in Copenhagen was about 4000~5000 DKK, jf. Lund 1999, p. 39: Table 2]. Housing aside, there were costs for children's schooling, travels, etc.

Marit: ... and then balancing that with our contributions to the church, I really wonder about the worth for the church and mission.

Erik: I don't disagree with Marit. Looking at the cost-benefit balance, we may admit this could have been done differently. If for instance somebody who truly mastered Japanese were sent from Denmark to work in the church for half-a-year, boosting the theology or administration, it might have a similar impact? Thinking back at my own language limitations makes me angry. In my usual, diplomatic style I sought to convey this to Mr. Rendtorff, a member of DMS' board of trustees, during a furlough, after I had become teaching assistant at the Lutheran College. I was fully aware of my qualifications and position, and made that clear to him. Nevertheless, he transformed this information into a news headline: "Missionary - Now Associate Professor at a Tokyo University" (*Missionær bliver lektor ved fakultet i Tokyo*) - very much out of proportions. I did not follow up on the case, but it annoyed me. Rendtorff might be excused with the fact that my title could be translated as Lecturer, but I would much prefer a modest approach, in acknowledgment of the limited but not meaningless contributions our presence could give the church. Frankly, I did not mind our mission did not demand a monthly report on the number of saved souls resulting from our work. That would have been nauseating.

Marit: I agree, and I am not saying our presence was meaningless; the people to people encounters have value in their own right. It is probably true that a small church finds it encouraging to be reminded it is a part of a bigger body and is connected to churches in Denmark and Norway, more than we sensed.

Christian: Now you mentioned public relations from DMS related to your work in Japan. How were your information relations with DMS in the 1980s?

Erik: The regular contact went through Karen Berntsen. She handled official duties with JELC in a kind yet precise fashion, and our children always enjoyed her visits at our home. We had little contact with other parts of the organization. On furloughs we met with the board.

Early on, Karen Berntsen had asked for a newsletter article to be written in a diary style. I wrote it, sent it, and heard nothing back. Then, on our first furlough I noticed my letter on the bulletin board in the DMS office. I asked the editor of the newsletter why it was there, and he replied, he had felt it wouldn't fit in. Karen Berntsen had not heard any of this. So, the next thing I wrote, I sent to *Kristeligt Dagblad* (the Danish Christian Daily) and it was published as a full page with pictures the editors found fitting with the content. They were spot on. DMS board members and Karen Berntsen encouraged me to write more of the same kind. I would have liked the newsletter editor to have given me a feedback instead of simply ignoring me. Since then, I have written frequently and my writings have been published. That was also the case for me as mission secretary, for as such I was much involved with all parties – missionaries, their families, the mission board and the receiving churches. Therefore, I found it meaningful to share my observations and insights with our supporters once in a while. When Marit and I were studying at Selly Oak, we were encouraged also to be critical of what we saw and heard. For me this attitude is relevant when it comes to the tales of missionaries, too. Traditionally, their reports would end “and now, more people are joining our congregation” or “so and so many were healed and converted.” But, I find it important that the stories should also be allowed to conclude “wherefore I am in dire straits (da. *så jeg har det ad helved til*).” Missionaries are human beings, not saints, a fact to be shared with the friends of the mission. While we were studying Japanese I once wrote something like “Now and then I wish something would happen

in Denmark that would excuse our returning from Japan.” I had intended this quibble to be partially fun, but a friend of the mission sent me a very concerned letter, so I had to assure him, we were good after all.

Christian: Did you send private newsletters in order to keep interest for your work? I have heard some missionaries had a mailing list of a couple of hundred people.

Marit: Yes, we sent that kind of newsletter to DMS, who then forwarded it to a long list of people that had signed up for them.

Erik: Directly we sent letters to our families and friends.

Marit: We had a particular contact with a group within the SMF = *Sundhedspersonalets Missions Fællesskab* an organization that specifically supports health care personnel in mission.

Erik: It wasn't a weekly correspondence, of course. Our contract with DMS stipulated that we would write articles for the newsletters, when asked to. That happened regularly, in order to keep the general supporters updated on our work and DMS' involvement in Japan.

Christian: How often were you on furlough and for how long?

Erik: We had two furloughs, the first one for seven months, the second one for six. When we were home, I would usually be giving talks three or four days a week every week. It was quite hard. And Marit, too, got exhausted. She would give talks for all sorts of women's gatherings.

Christian: How did people respond? Was there any interest?

Erik: Many were very interested. The friends of the mission are predictable in a positive sense. I know them. They would listen carefully and then ask for more about the church and progress of Christianity in Japan. I had to inform them of the difficulties as well as the opportunities used to spread the gospel. On other occasions I lectured for groups of professionals, such as social workers, who wanted to learn from my

observations of the situation in Japan. I do not intend to ridicule this pattern, for those people were our sponsors, and they shouldered a heavy burden, as we said before.

E 3. Local Church

Christian: When you arrived, JELC officially welcomed you and organized an introduction for you. What happened when you left again?

Erik: We actually felt a stark contrast between the attention paid by local institutions and an indifference of the church leadership, both when we arrived and eight years later, at the departing time. Hōya Church and the college lavished us with heartfelt goodbyes, more than we had dreamed of, but the JELC headquarters did not plan anything. Only at our request did we meet, but there was little interest in us. I felt something was missing. And our colleagues Else and Kresten had exactly the same experience after 18 years of service ... actually, even worse, for the headquarters could not find time to see them at all.

F. Return and thereafter – Influence of the Japan stay onwards in life

F 1. Marit – as nurse and in the hospice movement

Erik: Back in Denmark, Marit could finally use her nurse training. She has made a career in the hospice movement in Denmark, being involved in building up Denmark's first and second hospices and being a chief nurse at a third hospice. But that is another story, and not in your current interest.

Christian: Actually it is, for one aim of the research is to hear if and how the missionary experience influenced life after the return. Would you, Marit, say the years as missionary in Japan have been beneficial to you?

Marit: In many ways, I think so, but not that I can say exactly when and how. I cannot point to anything in particular and claim that to have

been beneficial, but the experiences I made in general have shaped me. And the training I got at TELL has been of tremendous value for me as nurse, both at the general hospital and in the hospice work. Right after we returned, I volunteered for the Danish Life Line *Nikolaj Tjenesten* in Copenhagen. And at the hospital, I got involved in communication both in nurse training and communication therapy and I have made that my area of specialty. I might not have ended there, had I not had the TELL experiences. The general experiences made as a foreigner have also been of value.

Christian: Were you also asked to and were you willing to share your Japan experiences in the DMS context after your return to Denmark?

Marit: Yes, the first few years after we came back, we were sometimes invited to share. Even long time after our return, I have had a few invitations to talk about being “a mother overseas” or “being a missionary spouse”. On those occasions, too, I have focused on communication and relationships, because that has my concern. On a related note, as members of congregations where we have lived since, we have been aware of and paid attention to those in the church who seemed “not to belong” because we had that experience in Japan. We wouldn’t have done so, had we not had the experience of being the strangers who didn’t know the language or the culture. It least for me that experience has been valuable when we moved to new places in Denmark. Therefore, I believe everybody would benefit from living overseas for some time. More so as missionaries for as such one must participate in and relate to a congregation not of ones’ own choice. That would be valuable once one is home again.

Erik: Let me add, that when we returned, we involved ourselves also in the formal works of the congregations we joined. Emdrup Church, our first place, has a congregation council [*samfundsråd*] because the church was

built with support from Kirkefondet, besides the standard church council [*menighedsråd*]. One of us served in the former the other in the latter. And when we moved to Christiansfeld, Marit joined the church council and served for eight years as HR in the church. I followed her for four years in the same capacity before we moved to Haderslev, when I retired [in 2011].

Christian: All in all, was it worth going overseas?

Marit: Yes. I definitely do not wish I had not left for Japan. As a person, I have benefited much from the years and they changed how I see what a church is and what a congregation is. I would not have missed that, but of course it does not feel right that I have lost those years when it comes to my retirement seniority. Still, the economic loss is trivial compared to what I gained in my years in Japan. In the long run, they enriched our lives.

Erik: And the lives of our children as well. Because we went as missionaries we learned of other couples who had adopted children. Earlier, we had agreed we had the capacity to include more children in our family. We had been in Japan for slightly more than two years when we adopted Hans, and we cared for him like we did for our other children. We adopted Christian as well, but only four or five months before our final departure, so his integration into our family mostly took place here in Denmark. While I worked at TRH, director Hidaka wrote an article about me for a newspaper. His description of me as a coworker at TRH and his mentioning of our adaptation of Hans, attracted the attention of at least one family from the midland of Honshu. They wrote and invited us to visit them for a weekend during a local festival. They had an interest in Christianity, knew the Genesis' story of creation as well as the dichotomy of salvation by faith vs. by deeds, and wanted to discuss those issues with us. I was pleasantly surprised and we had an open discussion. Marit and I faced a challenge as missionaries when we were talking with highly committed Christians who

asked, “What is the purpose? *Mokuteki wa nan desu ka?*” in reference to our adoption of Hans. I’ll never forget that expression. We had expanded our family with a son. I know, I should hear something else in those words, but it so happened that I understood their literal meaning.

Erik: Christian only had fourteen years with us before he passed away ... at least he had a home with siblings, and room for what was characteristically him. We are thankful that we were allowed to share our home with those two boys as are Heidi and Øyvind.

F 2 Erik, mission secretary in diverse mission organizations

Erik: After our return to Denmark, I started as DMS’ mission secretary for the areas of the Middle East and Asia. As such I visited Japan for three or four weeks once a year having meetings with missionaries, partners, and the projects DMS sponsored.

Christian: Did that or your subsequent jobs as mission secretary in other organizations profit from your experiences as missionary?

Erik: Yes. I had observed the work ethics of Karen Berntsen and learned the importance of having time for the missionaries. So, as mission secretary I never ever planned on doing anything besides having time for them on my visits to the fields. I could have gone on a safari and seen rare animals, but it was important for me that none could say, “You did not have time for a late night talk.” I also used my experiences when interviewing new missionaries. Like we had done, they might say they would not send their children to a boarding school. Then I could inform them of the benefits of doing so nevertheless, including permitting them to go to a place where they would fit the best, and not to worry about the schooling, because a modern boarding school is so different from the image. Again, when talking about the length of commitment, I would sometimes be surprised by

answers of “maybe even two years”. Under certain circumstances a short term might be the right one, but... I remember hiring a woman as English teacher to China. She was from the Apostolic Church and as such highly dedicated to do mission, but I had to inform her and her church that in China street mission would not be tolerated and the words “mission and missionary” should not be used. She accepted and eventually she was given honorary citizenship where she worked.

One half of the job as mission secretary is to communicate between the board at home and the missionaries abroad. By default, I would be the spokesperson of the missionary. The other half is to communicate between the organization, the local church, and other church partners. It could be informing of the need to recall somebody from the field or introducing a potential family for a task. I would then do the casework and present the reactions to the board at home. That was an unthinkable approach for DMS. My job was exciting and I loved the travelling, but they took their toll on the family. While in DMS, as I got responsible for the work in Asia and the Middle East, I would be away three weeks in a row to visit all partners in one region. In the Sudan Mission (now Mission Africa), I travelled more frequently but for shorter periods. I never tired of the travelling but I had my fill. After DMS and Sudan Mission, I worked for the Brethren’s Danish Mission (BDM) and finally for the Danish Evangelical Mission. I would sometimes take Marit along on the journeys – it helped me that she got the insights and gave her patience with me being away from home.

G. Partnership – discussion

Christian: What were your experiences of working with the other mission boards in Japan, once you were the secretary of mission for DMS?

Erik: We went in 1980. Let me emphasize that, JELC was informed

about the potential candidates that DMS had found qualified for a task. And the church made use of me. If I had mastered Japanese, I am convinced many more parties could have used me far more thoroughly. That was the situation in 1980. Then, as mission secretary in 1990, in Hong Kong, I attended a meeting with the president and the general secretary of the Lutheran Church together with secretaries from Norwegian, German, and Finnish partners. Suddenly, a Norwegian partner declared, “I am happy to inform you that we have commissioned two couples as missionaries to Hong Kong!” I could see how the president and the general secretary exchanged looks at each other, while my Norwegian colleague went on to explain that, “one family is currently in England to ready their professional skills for the field, while the other family right now is attending our missionary college and will be send in a year and a half.” We are talking 1990! I was stupefied. That approach was an unthinkable for DMS. We colleagues discussed the attitude among ourselves later on. Terms like *partnership* and *inter-dependence* instead of “independence” were in vogue, but as long as I had Norwegian colleagues I was confronted with that old-fashioned approach. My last six years as mission secretary, I have worked for the Danish Evangelical Mission²⁴⁾ and did not have any Norwegian partners where we were involved. The Germans are clear cut in their ideas of partnership. They did not set aside a specific amount of money every year for a given area, but asked their partners, “What is it you need?” The Norwegian attitude I encountered in Hong Kong reminded me of the “good old 1880s” when missionaries simply appeared on the scene and began their

24) Danish Evangelical Mission, in Danish called Dansk Ethioper Mission, was renamed in 2014 as Promissio (cf. <https://globalnyt.dk/content/dansk-ethioper-mission-kommer-til-hedde-promissio>). The missionary company was formed in 1948 and initially focused its work in Ethiopia but later expanded to Liberia (from 1980) and Botswana (from 1989) (cf. Rønne 2020)

work without any invitation. I don't know how it works in Hong Kong today. Until recently, Norway had about 1000 missionaries, with roughly one third on furlough. Finland, too, used to be big and conservative in that the church insisted on a certain reading of the Bible, would not commission women missionaries, and not work with churches that accepted women pastors. They were up against the trends in the world. Today, another issue is homosexuality. Some partners will ask for guarantees that homosexual missionaries are not send to them. The Church of Sweden's Mission cannot make such a guarantee, because the civil laws of Sweden prohibit an employer from asking questions about the applicant's sexuality. I have witnessed an African partner church who would not accept that uncertainty and consequently cancelled a planned visit by a group of Swedish clergies. Yesterday, 26 August 2009, I read in *Kristeligt Dagblad* that a narrow majority of ELCA delegates has accepted the employment of practicing homosexual clergies. ELCA is a partner of conservative churches in Africa, too, so time will show how the changed situation will be handled. Anyway, these Christians must negotiate and work out their mutual incompatible understandings.

Erik: I gave you the example from HK earlier. I would meet most of the same partners in Japan as well. The case I mentioned earlier was the most shocking for me; that a foreign group merely reports on its decisions without negotiations or discussions with the local church in advance. I think, the foreign board must inform the partner in advance of its deliberations and ideas for future involvement, and for instance bring up the fact that a family would like to come. I felt the discussions in Japan were more equal. I don't recall any situation similar to what happened in Hong Kong. It was very sad observing how a Church almost lost its voice, when it accepted what may happen.

Christian: So, what do you think of the way DMS terminated its commitments in Japan?

Erik: I was fortunate that it was not me who had to pass on the message of the board's decision to cut back on the commitments in the East and close the door. On the other hand, I understand that the financial situation could not be ignored. It meant that DMS turned off Japan and the Far East.

Christian: Would you say DMS pulled the plug on Japan due to the financial situation? As you know, Else and Kresten Christensen felt the handling very frustrating, to say the least, and abrupt. They have told me, that in the morning they read the DMS newsletter about its strong and continuous commitment to Japan, but in the afternoon they got a fax from DMS, informing them and JELC that DMS would pull them home.

Erik: Fortunately, I wasn't involved. Jørgen Skov Sørensen was the secretary of mission at that time, so he had to deal with it. But I can understand the decision, when I recall the high costs. And perhaps, taking into consideration that multiple partners were involved at every location, can have led to the decision of pulling out. In my days, we always talked about the economy. Still, you are right; in an equal partnership, we would talk such matters over with the each other. If the church, for instance, finds that the missionaries are involved in an important project, the board ought to be open for a flexible way of ending the commitment in, say, three years or so. There has to be a "good" (soft / respectful?) way out, in particular if it is the final goodbye.

The American ELCA decided to donate their houses to JELC, telling that there would be no more funds from America, but the church could sell off the properties not in use and spend the money for the church. That way, JELC also knew how much it had on its hands, and when the money would

run out.

Conclusion

Thus ended the interviews with Marit and Erik Wengel. I found it interesting to learn how the couple met the sequence of challenges with a positive spirit and managed to let the experiences nurture their lives onward. The institutions that hired them as well as the congregations and communities they joined have benefitted from their eight years in Japan. My research will continue with the story of Else and Kresten Christensen and then compare these stories in an attempt to learn from them.

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