

Beginning from the End: Working Together in the Mission of the Church

(English summary of the Japanese explanation of the theme and purpose of JCE7 – Aug.30, 2021 revision)

Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert. (NKJV)
Isaiah 43:19

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (NKJV)

Revelation 7:9-10

The Japan Congress on Evangelism (JCE) has been held six times to date. We see this as a practical response of the evangelical church to the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that the Bible is "the Word of God, the only standard and foundation of faith and life." We hold this event in order to mutually strengthen and encourage one another in obedience as we live out our faith.

JCE7 has had a seven-year preparation period to create the original "Re-Vision" theme set forth in the previous JCE6, and has been on task to set a new direction for Japanese missions.

However, since the end of 2019, due to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a radical change in society as a whole. Daily life as we knew it, and consequently, the familiar culture of the Church and its mission has also experienced an unprecedented change.

Due to these mitigating circumstances, we sense the need take a re-assessment of the Church in Japan, its mission endeavors, and to rethink and re-examine our current strategies as we approach JCE7. In a sense, we have transitioned into a situation where perhaps the word "reset" might be a more suitable key word than "re-vision."

Of course, for Christians, this is a great opportunity to remind ourselves that we are in God's plan, bow before the Lord, seek His face and have listening hearts to hear His voice. We want to follow His direction in these matters. Indeed, this is an incredible opportunity we have before us.

Therefore, in summary, we believe the purpose of this JCE7 should not only be to evaluate the work of the projects so far, but also to be open-minded in exploring what new possibilities God may have in store for us. In other words, to see this as a potential "Copernican Revolution" moment, if you will, as we seek to align the pulse of JCE7 with God's heartbeat.

With this in mind, the program committee would like to propose the following theme for JCE7:

"Beginning from the end" - Working together in the Mission of the Church

What does the "end" mean?

First of all, the "end" refers to the seemingly "dead-end" of the current culture of the church. While the Corona Crisis has certainly highlighted the short-comings of the church, it is not the root cause of the crisis the church faces today. If we do not immediately make the adjustments necessary to circumvent the apparent social deadlock that this (Corona) pandemic has only highlighted for us, this very well could be the end of the church as we know it.

The second is to think "backwards" (in reverse) from the vision of the completion (the "end") of the church planned by God as outlined in the Scripture.

Thirdly, the "end," as we use the word here, is a play-on-words in Japanese. It refers to the actual name of the geographical area of * "尾張", where JCE7 will be held, which is in the Tokai region of Japan.

(*)“尾張”(This kanji is pronounced, “Owari,” which in Hiragana or Romaji (English alphabet letters) can also be taken (as a different meaning) to mean “End”).

So, let’s literally “be sent out from Owari (“End”) to accomplish our tasks in fulfilling the Great Commission, to carry out the “end” goal of God’s plan.

Let’s look at the meaning of “beginning.”

“Beginning” ... First of all, we want to look back on the history of Japanese missions. We want to examine the customs and cultures that have become embedded in the Japanese church. We want to take this as an opportunity to *begin* to sift these through the filter of the Bible, discarding what should be thrown away, and *begin* a movement to put an *end* to the customs and practices that don’t “make the cut.”

Second, we want to focus on the increasingly complex changes in society, natural disasters, environmental destruction, declining birthrate, aging population, digitalization and other pertinent issues. The church must firmly face these relevant issues, and others, including international political instability and multicultural coexistence, and *begin* to incorporate them into the strategy of missional endeavors of the church.

Finally, “beginning” means to “start anew and afresh.” Let’s approach the Corona crisis as an opportunity to remind ourselves that we can fully trust God’s plan, and to use this as an initiative to create a new “beginning,” ... a turning point in Japanese missions.

In this way, “beginning from the end,” JCE7 desires to deeply rethink the mission of the Japanese church, and seek to ensure that from the foundation up, our goals and practices align fully with the Word of God and His will for the church of Japan.

We must realize the possibility that God is beginning a new work among us. We must be willing to work together across denominational lines, even in the midst of trying circumstances in our respective organizations, and to work through other challenges that could easily work to divide us. We must diligently work together and stay on task in participating in what God is doing in our midst.

We desire to continue to dialogue together with open hearts and minds in order to overcome any rival mentality that might be tempted to surface among us. Our goal for JCE7 is to emerge with a single focus of the direction God has for the mission of the church in Japan!

Many years ago, during the period of many internal conflicts, the *Battle of Okehazama* (historical battle between Oda Nobunaga’s army and Imagawa Yoshimoto’s army) was a tide-turning battle. The JCE7 gathering will be held in the same Tokai geographical region. On an even greater scale, we yearn to see a similar turning point in the JCE and would love to see it begin as we gather in the same region for a much greater purpose.

In order to give opportunity for such a history-altering event not only in the Evangelical denominations but in all of Japanese Christianity it is our desire to purpose together to seek God’s heart, hear His voice, invite His presence, and work together cooperatively to boldly move forward and be an agent of change the church in Japan needs today!