



1. Sophia School of Social Welfare and Father Heidrich

The origin of the present Sophia School of Social Welfare can be traced to the



Peter Heidrich, SJ, the parent of the Sophia School of Social Welfare

Specialized School for Social Welfare founded by Fr. Peter Heidrich in 1964. During the period when Japan was experiencing rapid economic growth, there were many people who had been left out of the wave of growth and who were suffering very much. The mission of Sophia University as a Catholic educational institution and the conviction of one priest were united in seeing the needs for academic studies of these social problems along with simultaneous education of specialists who could give assistance to those suffering. But at this time, no one other than Fr. Heidrich

could see the set of problems very clearly, so his struggle was very difficult and very lonely. He had to make continuous appeals about the necessity of such education,

first of course to the University authorities, and to the Ministry of Education, to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, to the officials of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and to Japanese society in general. Employing suitable teachers, locating and securing classrooms, getting all the needed permissions from the Ministry of Health and Welfare and similar difficult tasks were overcome with his motto: where there is a will, there is a way. From the beginning, in the Specialized School for Social Welfare, courses were arranged in such a way that students could acquire both the qualification of a nursery teacher and that of a social caseworker. In 1966, the program became the Sophia Social Welfare Specialized School. This developed into the Sophia School of Social Welfare in 1977.

2. The relationship between Sophia University and the Sophia School of Social Welfare

Another mission of Fr. Heidrich was to establish a Department of Social Welfare within Sophia University. Many Protestant universities in Japan already had such a

department, where research about Christian social welfare and formation of Christian social workers were proceeding quite successfully. In Fr. Heidrich's home country of Germany, a very large Catholic group called the Caritas Social Welfare Organization cooperated with the Catholic Church. All over Germany, the group had established hospitals and social welfare institutions. They created specialized schools and research institutes to train the professionals who would work in such institutions. Such activities were pursued with great enthusiasm.

In 1966, a specialization in social welfare was set up as part of the Sociology Department of the Faculty of Humanities. For this specialization, Fr. Heidrich assembled an outstanding teaching staff. Among others, he employed Professor Takashi Kagoyama, the first name among Japanese researchers studying how to secure human living standards, and Professor Eiji Matsumoto, who possessed excellent ability and great devotion toward the education of social workers. Father Heidrich himself contributed lectures to the students about Social Ethics and Philosophy, and about the theory and practice of social welfare activities based on Catholic theology. This specialized course grew into a separate Department of Social Welfare in 1976. With the exception of some teachers employed only by the Sophia School of Social Welfare, the staff and faculty members of the School of Social Welfare held concurrent positions in Sophia University. The university and the school of social welfare cooperated in many ways that benefited the students. For example, university graduates could enter the school of social welfare to acquire specialized qualifications, while graduates of the school of social welfare could advance to a graduate program in the university. Such close cooperation continues up to the present day.



3. An institution where Sophia School of Social Welfare students could gain practical experiences

On the Feast of Mary's Assumption (August 15th) 1965, the Specialized School for Social Welfare opened a practical training center in the form of a nursery school called Umeda: A House for Children. The location was a ten-minute walk from Umejima Station on the Tobu Isesaki Line in Adachi City. Father Heidrich received a financial gift from the Catholic Church community in Cologne, West Germany. The nursery program was legally linked to Sophia University as an affiliated nursery school. Its first principal was Father Piovesano, the Chancellor of the Sophia School Corporation. Because this nursery school adopted the educational methods of Maria

Montessori of Italy, its influence became quite widespread. Since no other institution in Japan had yet adopted this methodology, many teachers and principals of nursery schools and kindergartens all over Japan came to Adachi City to inspect the facilities and classes. In this way, the Montessori Educational System became widely known for both its educational aspects and its welfare aspects. All the while, more and more well-qualified Montessori method teachers were sent out into Japanese society from Umeda: A House for Children.



A panoramic picture of Umeda: A House for Children

Later, a Montessori Teacher Training program



was set up within the Sophia office for Lifelong Learning. The Japan Montessori Association was established as a nationwide organization. Father Luhmer, a professor of the Department of Education of Sophia University, contributed significantly to the developments of the Teacher Training Course and the Montessori Association.

4. Giving the Light of Hope to Handicapped Children

The nursery school program at Umeda: A House for Children was acknowledged by the local families as an institution that was absolutely necessary for working mothers, and was thus highly evaluated. Additionally, though they were the same age as children going to ordinary schools, children who suffered from visual impairments, deafness or difficulties in hearing, cerebral palsies, autism or Down's syndrome could not enter ordinary nursery schools or kindergartens and suffered as a result. An institution to which such children could commute was badly needed. Father Heidrich took the lead in a fund-raising movement, assisted by Sophia School of



The picture shows the present Umeda: A House for Children.

Social Welfare students, graduates and faculty members, along with teachers and parents and children associated with Umeda: A House for Children. Over a three-year period, they collected money by standing outside in the Ginza and Yurakucho areas.



The picture shows the Umeda:Akebono School on the right in the rear and the Father Heidrich Memorial Building on the left in the foreground.

Thus in 1977 a new institution, Umeda:Akebono School, was born.

Akebono School was the first institution in Japan to provide a medical clinic integrated with an educational institution based on Montessori methods. From just-born infants to children aged six, suitable very young persons were provided with early diagnosis and early treatment. This program played a pioneering role in social

welfare in Japan. Akebono School was built very near Umeda: A House for Children nursery school, wedged in near a public park in Adachi City. The children going to either of

the sister institutions would frequently meet as they went to and from their schools. The first principal was Father Heidrich. The institutions sent many teachers to Germany and the Netherlands for training. They learned to think more clearly about how to help the children and their families. They learned to fight with all their energies to carry out the new programs.