



1. Beginning of the Jochi Catholic Settlement

Before World War II, Japan was a very poor country. The 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake

had added a miserable situation of about 105,000 dead or missing. To respond to these human sufferings, a Sophia University professor, Father Hugo Lasalle, developed a plan to create a Jochi Catholic Settlement in Mikawashima-cho in Tokyo, where many poor people lived. When the plan was announced at the university, it received a very favorable response from many students, teachers, and employees. The university set up a research committee. And in October 1931, a settlement was established by renting four barrack-like buildings in Mikawashima-cho where Father Lasalle and two students moved in.



Father Lasalle and students who worked with him (above).. Lasalle and Japanese families in Mikawashima around 1932 (below).

The Settlement is a form of welfare project where relief workers live among needy persons and provide clinic, nursery and



educational services. The Jochi Catholic Settlement's newsletter called *J.C.S.* expressed the three purposes of this program in 1934. The first purpose was providing aid for poor persons. The second purpose was for aid workers to live a life as close as possible to the lives of the poor neighbors, and use donated funds economically. The third purpose was to offer educational possibilities so that the

local poor people would come to live lives more worthy of human beings. The Sophia students, especially those baptized as Catholics, participated in these activities as

“settlers” who lived among them, and gained an awareness of social welfare.

The first Settlement activity started in November 1931. The staff members formed an official group of children and began to make home visits to local residents. From January 1932, the Settlement started to offer lunches to children who were malnourished. With the help of Doctor Saburo Ogawa of the medical faculty of Keio University, a health consultation center was opened. The Settlers started English education classes in the evenings three times a week.

The financial resources of the Settlement came mostly from donations. Sometimes the settlers would sponsor a bazaar or similar activity that would bring in some funds. The third volume of the six-volume set of historical data related to Sophia University records the story that the Settlement sponsored a Christmas Concert at the Hibiya Public Hall and raised 1,500 yen.

The property now being used, covering an area of 1,307 m<sup>2</sup> was purchased in 1933 in Machiya, Arakawa Ward. Two temporary barrack-like buildings were erected; the following year, a two-story wooden administration building was completed. Jesuit Father Alois (Aloysius) Michel was appointed to the post of vice-manager of the Settlement. In 1936, Foundation for Sophia Catholic Settlement was established, making the settlement independent from the administration of the Sophia Educational Corporation (Jochi Gakuin). These buildings were destroyed in the fires caused by the Allied bombings during the Second World War.

## 2. The postwar developments

The challenges of the postwar period were quickly addressed. In 1947, a new building was constructed and all the activities were restarted: the nursery school, the health support, and the children’s group. In 1952, the legal corporation was reorganized into Social Welfare Corporation for Sophia Catholic Settlement. Father Alois Michel was the first head of the board of directors. The connection with Sophia University continued with the election of Father Klaus Luhmer as the second head of the board of directors and Father Yoshinori Kono as the third head. Sophia student volunteers participated in service activities at the Settlement, notably leading the children’s group and teaching English.



Father Michel visiting children living in wooden barracks. Many people lost their homes in Tokyo air raids during the war.



Father Lasalle at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the settlement project

The Social Welfare Corporation for Sophia Catholic Settlement is operating nursery schools, children's clubs, hospitals and nursing care services. Some of the institutions, such as Jochi Koseikan Nursery School and Jochi Clinic, use the word Jochi in its title although Sophia University is no longer directly involved with the institutions.

The seed that was scattered has not withered; the original training that came from the university remains. As the Gospel of John suggests: “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains merely a single grain of wheat. However, if it dies in the ground, it will bear much fruit.” Thus, the seeds that Father Lasalle and the early student Settlers sowed have borne much fruit.



Sophia clinic attached to the Settlement (1956).



Sophia student teaching songs to children (1956).