

## History of the Church in Japan - Part 10: 1955-1962: Paul C. Andrus Presidency

By R. Lanier Britsch ()

In 1955 thirty-one-year-old Paul C. Andrus was called as the new mission president over Japan. In 1848 he had been among the first group of missionaries to enter Japan after World War II. President Andrus could see nothing but significant progress during the five years since his release from his first mission and magnificent opportunities for proselyting in the future. He wrote:

The growth and the progress of the Church in Japan seems striking indeed as I return after an absence of five years and compare our position now with our position at that time. Although the number of branches is approximately the same, they are organized and functioning much more completely; there are more good leaders serving in the branches; the Church owns more property, and meeting places in general have improved; our members generally have grown stronger in faith and in works as their experience has increased and their testimonies have congealed (MFSR, 1955).

Shortly after President Andrus arrived, he learned that there was no uniform teaching plan and that each pair of elders or sisters used whatever methods suited them best. President Andrus met with his traveling elders (later called supervising elders or assistants to the president) and asked them to create a uniform plan for teaching the gospel. A suitable plan was not accepted by the mission until late in 1956. In the meantime, President Andrus placed the missionaries on a strict work schedule and encouraged them to move toward uniformity in their teaching methods. These simple measures more than doubled the number of converts per missionary in 1956.

Toward the end of that year, President Andrus received a copy of Willard Aston's book, *Teaching the Gospel with Prayer and Testimony*. One of the basic principles taught in that book was that one teaches the gospel, bears testimony, and invites the investigator to be baptized. "At the end of 1956," said Andrus, "I called together our leading elders and talked about this. We came up with a six-lesson teaching plan that was geared for the Japanese. We incorporated into it these principles. We announced the introduction of this plan and began using it in 1957." (Paul C. Andrus Oral History, interviews by R. Lanier Britsch, 1974.)

For the first time, the missionaries realized that their former slow approach had been wrong. Moreover, there was no need to convert the Japanese investigators to Christianity. The important objective was to convert Japanese directly to the restored gospel and "and let them find out about so-called Christianity thereafter." (Ibid.) It was this idea that moved the mission forward and brought the great growth of the next five years. Convert baptisms jumped from 129 in 1956 to 616 in 1957. The average number of baptisms per missionary climbed to 5.8.

As the Church grew, President Andrus was able to an important change that helped prepare Japan and Korea for stakes. For reasons that were more Japanese in origin than American, very few Japanese men were ordained to the priesthood during the pre-Andrus years. In fact, by the end of 1955 there were only forty-one Japanese Melchizedek Priesthood holders.

As more members came into the Church, Andrus set up a two-year program for advancement in the priesthood which, over the years of his mission, brought the number of Japanese and Korean Melchizedek priesthood holders to over 350. This enlarged number made it possible for the mission leaders to place local men in almost all (75 to 80 percent) branch and district positions (Ibid).

The growth of the Church in Japan made it obvious to all concerned that chapels were sorely needed. To meet this need, President Andrus purchased twenty-three chapel sites. These properties, which were obtained at great expense and after considerable expenditure of time and effort, became the basis for a large building program during later years (Ibid).

Without question, the most important property purchase made during this time, and probably the most profitable in the history of the Church, was the acquisition of the Yoyogi Street property in Omote Sando, Tokyo. President Andrus described the background of the purchase in this way:

As we organized our five branches in Tokyo we wanted a good central location not only for a stake center, but someplace that would be a showplace for the Church in all of the country and represent the Church in all of the Far East. After all, this is Tokyo. It's the largest city in the world.

So for years I looked for a place and finally found one in Tokyo that we thought would fill the bill. . . . We found this property just at the time that Brother Hinckley was coming [to Japan as part of his first tour of Asia]. The interesting part of the story is that this property, which was about 30,000 square feet in size [186 feet in the street and an average depth of 138 feet], was selling for \$670,000, [plus \$12,000 real estate commissions] (Ibid).

When Elder Hinckley looked at the property he was impressed with its potential but staggered by the price. But before he had a chance to reject the property, President Andrus told him that the land President Mauss had purchased for \$20,000 was now worth \$500,000. On hearing this, Elder Hinckley immediately saw the possibility of gaining approval for purchase of this land. After prayerfully considering the matter and discussing it by telephone with President Henry D. Moyle of the First Presidency, Elder Hinckley recommended that the Church should buy it. President McKay approved, and on June 3, Elder Hinckley and President Andrus completed the transaction. (Gordon B. Hinckley, Journals, May 29-30, 1960).

Over the years, the house on the Omote Sando property served as the Central Branch meeting place. At the same time the land continued to appreciate in value. The Church finally sold the property in 1973 for \$24,150,943.40. The remarkable fact was that the net outlay from the Church was \$150,000. The principal and interest from the transaction became available to help with the acquisition of hundreds of other chapel sites throughout Japan or however the leaders of the Church were inspired to expend the funds.