

History of the Church in Japan - Part 11: 1962-1965: Dwayne N. Andersen Presidency

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In 1962 President Dwayne N. Andersen and his wife, Peggy, arrived in Japan to assume the reigns of leadership of the rapidly growing mission. His first mission to Japan had been during the Mauss era. He had served as a counselor in the mission presidency and had directed the affairs of the LDS servicemen's organization.

When President Andersen reviewed the status of the mission with President Andrus, he learned that there were now close to seven thousand Japanese members, seven times the number when he left Japan in 1953. He also learned that although only ten or twelve branches had been added during that time, existing branches were much larger than before and were attempting to carry on the full program of the Church. The number of missionaries had grown, too, from sixty-six in 1953 to over 180 in 1962.

Elder Gordon B. Hinckley made his first visit to Asia and Japan in 1960. A year later he was officially appointed supervisor of the Asian missions. During his second visit to Japan, in May 1961, he noted the serious need for chapels. "This is most urgently true in Japan. I think we must go forward with one good building in Tokyo." (Hinckley, Journal, May 20, 1961.) But he did not hold to that number. By the next spring, Elder Hinckley had arranged for Wendell B. Mendelhall, chairman of the Church Building Committee, to go to Japan and make arrangements to start a substantial building program. (Ibid., March 1962.) The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve approved construction of five buildings under the Building (or Labor) Missionary program.

When President Andersen arrived, he found Melvin Hales and Sam Kalama, who had arrived three days earlier, waiting to start on two chapels in Tokyo. In August, President Andersen began calling labor missionaries, and the program was soon underway.

The Building Missionary program proved to be a success during the Andersen years and continued into the late 1970s. Many of the building missionaries in Japan have developed into fine leaders in the Church, including Elder Kikuchi Yoshihiko of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

While President Andersen was in Japan, nine chapels were started. Two of these, the Tokyo North and Tokyo West Branch buildings, were completed and dedicated, and two, Naha (Okinawa) Branch and Gunma Branch, were completed. Two other buildings, Tokyo East Branch and Fukuoka Branch, were completely remodeled. Four other buildings were under construction—Abeno, Tokyo South, Yokohama, and Sapporo Branches. President Andersen also purchased seven building sites. (Dwayne N. Andersen Oral History, p.47)

The new buildings did much to establish the Church as a permanent part of Japan. The Saints took new pride in their membership. The Japanese, like most people, needed a material manifestation or physical proof of the Church's stability and respectability.

Moreover, the Japanese Saints were able to follow more completely the worship patterns of the Church in the new buildings.

President Andersen quickly recognized the need build local leadership as soon as possible. With the large membership base created before his time, he was able to choose from among the best prospects and train them for later roles as stake and mission leaders. Only by developing a strong local priesthood corps and women of equal ability to lead the auxiliaries could the Church find a permanent place in Japanese society.

At the top President Andersen chose Watanabe Kan and Yamada Goro as counselors. President Watanabe lived in Osaka and President Yamada lived in the Tokyo area. Whenever he traveled west and south, Andersen took Watanabe along. Watanabe served as translator for President Andersen, but Andersen included him in almost everything he did. Andersen constantly explained Church policies, procedures, and organizations. But when he held conferences in Tokyo or places north, he always took Yamada along and followed the same pattern as with Watanabe. It is important to note that both men have since served as mission presidents and in many other important capacities. Watanabe served as a Regional Representative over part of Japan.

At the other extreme, President Andersen saw the need to involve new male converts in meaningful Church activity soon after they were baptized. The missionaries developed several lessons for new converts which introduced the programs of the Church and explained the importance of the priesthood and its availability to worthy males. Within a month of a new convert's baptism, his branch president was supposed to interview him and ordain him to the Aaronic Priesthood. During Andersen's three years there was steady improvement. Six hundred and seventy males were baptized during 1964 and the first six months of 1965, and sixty-seven percent of these people were ordained to the priesthood. This was a significant rise from earlier years. Between 1962 and 1965, the number of Melchizedek Priesthood holders rose from 355 to 584. (Ibid., 45-47).

According to President Andersen, it was amazing to see the faith that some of the leaders developed. For example,

a district councilman would go to work on Saturday with a suitcase. As soon as he'd get off work he'd get on a train and travel all night to a district assignment, such as a branch conference or something. He would arrive at the branch Sunday morning, hold meetings all day Sunday, and take care of district business and matters, get on the train Sunday evening, travel all Sunday night, arrive back to his place of work Monday morning, work all day Monday and arrive home on Monday night. So he left home Saturday morning and didn't see his family again until Monday night. They were willing to make these kinds of sacrifices. (Ibid., 15).