

History of the Church in Japan - Part 13: 1965-1968: Visits from Apostles By R. Lanier Britsch ()

In 1965 Adney Yoshio Komatsu became the new mission president. President Komatsu's mission can best be characterized as a time of final preparation for the growth of the 1970s and 1980s. He saw it that way when he was there. When he had been in the mission for a year he wrote:

The Japanese people need stakes and wards. They need a temple. The full force and impact of the gospel on the lives of the Japanese will not be realized until the Saints here have the opportunity to receive their endowments and to perform other temple ordinances. The main thing which stands in the way of the organization of stakes and wards and the building of a temple in Japan is the lack of real strength in the Church here; not only in number of members, but in priesthood holders and real leaders. (Success Messenger, June 1966, 116, LDS Church Archives.)

Adney Y. Komatsu was different from previous mission presidents in several ways. He was the first "American of Japanese Ancestry" or first nisei to serve as mission president in Asia. He was the first product of the Japanese-Central Pacific Mission so to serve.

In addition to supervising the growth of missionary numbers from approximately 200 in 1965 to over 250 in 1968, completing and dedicating five chapels, starting three others, and guiding the labor missionary program, President Komatsu presided over or participated in other important developments and events, some of which follow.

Japan seems to have come into focus on the map at Church headquarters when President Hugh B. Brown, First Counselor in the First Presidency, toured Asia and Japan in April 1967. He was thrilled with the strength and numbers of members. The part of his visit that is most remembered by the Japanese Saints was his address at the dedication of Abeno Branch chapel in Osaka, Friday, April 21. He was deeply moved by the size and quality of the congregation and spoke of his amazement at the quiet but rapid growth of the Church throughout the world.

Among visits from leaders in Salt Lake City, the tour of Japan by Elder and Sister Spencer W. Kimball in February 1968 was a highlight. Elder Kimball stopped off in Japan in a non-official capacity. That is, he was not assigned to tour the mission or to hold any meetings. He came because of personal interest, choosing to return from an official visit to Australia and New Zealand by way of Asia. By that time President Komatsu was working hard to duplicate stake organization in the districts of the mission, especially in Tokyo. He had taught the leaders how to hold Priesthood Executive Meetings and other necessary meetings to correlate the programs of the Church. Elder Kimball arrived in Japan at a time when these programs needed encouragement from outside. In Tokyo Elder Kimball met with all district and branch presidencies—in fact, with all of the leadership at a general meeting. He addressed the congregation in a warm and comfortable way, saying, "I'm Elder Kimball. I'm seventy-two years old. I want to

introduce myself to you. . . . I have four children." And so forth. Then he had each leader stand and introduce himself. He then noted the ages of the leaders and said, "How many of you have been to the temple?" After counting the hands, he said, "I average the age of leadership here to be in the early thirties. And ninety-five percent of you have been to the temple. This is better than many stakes of Zion that I know of within comparable distance of a temple."

Elder Kimball then leaned over to President Komatsu and said, "President, let's talk stake now, not a year from now. Let's talk stake organization now. In the stake we do these things this way. What are we doing? How can we get closer to the stake program? How can we implement the program most closely with our best abilities?" Then he told President Komatsu that if he followed this procedure a stake would probably be organized two or three years earlier than was usual. From that time on, President Komatsu and President Bills, who succeeded him, constantly emphasized preparation for stakehood. Two years later, the Tokyo Saints were ready for Japan's first stake.