

History of the Church in Japan - Part 17: 1978-1982: Church Growth; Tokyo Temple Dedicated

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In February 1980, the Church announced that on July 1, 1980, the Japan Kobe Mission would be divided to create the Japan Osaka Mission, the sixth mission in Japan. A month later the Church announced that six area conferences would be held in the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and concluding in Japan (Tokyo and Osaka) during October 1980. Four weeks later, on April 19, the dates for the Tokyo Temple open house and dedication were made public. Only the final construction work and many local plans remained to be completed before the events of September and October 1980 could take place.

On September 13, 1980, ribbons were cut and "about 650 businessmen, politicians, university professors, ambassadors and media reporters" visited the temple as part of a VIP tour. In the opening ceremony, David M. Kennedy, special representative of the First Presidency, gave a message from President Kimball. On September 15, the public phase of the open house began. Between that time and October 18, 48,000 visitors walked through the ten-million-dollar edifice.

"On Monday Oct. 27 one of the most significant events of this dispensation will take place. It will be the dedication of the House of the Lord in Tokyo, Japan." So began an editorial of the "Church News". In a way the editorial seemed to exclaim, "THIS IS A WORLD CHURCH, A GLOBAL CHURCH. The Church is moving. Let's move forward with it!"

On that day the Saints in Japan and Asia gathered to hear words of counsel and the sacred prayer of dedication and sanctification that were offered by President Spencer W. Kimball. Six additional dedicatory sessions were held during the next two days in the Tokyo Stake Center in order to accommodate larger audiences. A total of around 7,500 people attended the seven sessions.

The first president of the temple was Dwayne N. Andersen, former missionary and mission president in Japan. His wife, Peggy, was called as matron of the temple. Andersen was the mission president who helped so much in the effort to take the first group of Japanese Saints to the temple in Hawaii in 1965.

Over the years since the temple opened, President Andersen was the only president lacking a Japanese heritage. He was followed in 1982 by Elder Adney Y. Komatsu and several other converts from the Japanese-Central Pacific Mission in Hawaii.

The entire dedication process was an exhilarating spiritual experience. The temple served as the engine to move the Church forward at an increasing pace. Not surprisingly, 1981, the year following the temple dedication, was the banner year for live endowments-1,247.

Following the dedication services in Tokyo, the visiting authorities held area conferences in Tokyo (October 30-31) and Osaka (November 1). The 10,000 in Tokyo's Budokan Hall and the 6,387 at the Matsushita Center in Osaka were enthusiastic and inspired by the messages from a large array of Church leaders. Elder Gordon B. Hinckley said, "This is a place where the Church has a tremendous future."

During the area conference in Tokyo, all 1,500 missionaries serving in Japan were blessed to meet with and hear from President Kimball and other leaders of the Church on the morning of the first day of the Tokyo conference. They were encouraged to move the work forward more rapidly.

Since the first stake was created in Tokyo in 1970, the Japanese Saints were blessed by frequent visits from General Authorities and general officers of the Church. The most important occasions for visits, Area Conferences, have been noted. But many regional and stake meetings have been important locally and, as is true throughout the Church, have kept the leaders and members in harmony with the movements, changes, and concerns of the leaders of the Church.

Unquestionably the greatest statistical Church growth in Japan was the period from 1978 to 1982. During those years official membership grew from around thirty thousand to near seventy thousand and the number of wards, branches, stakes and districts more than doubled.