

## **History of the Church in Japan - Part 20: 1996-2000: Fukuoka Temple; Five New Stakes**

**By R. Lanier Britsch (Author of *From the East: The History of the Latter-day Saints in Asia, 1856-1996*)**

When President Gordon B. Hinckley announced on October 4, 1997 that in order to make temple blessings available to more members, the Church would begin to build smaller temples, the members of the Church throughout the world were hopeful that a temple would be built in their area.

On May 7, 1998, hopes of Japanese members were realized when President Gordon B. Hinckley announced plans to construct a second Japanese temple at Fukuoka, on the western island of Kyushu. The temple was to be built on hillside property owned by the Church where a mission home and early meetinghouse were located.

Ground was broken for the temple on March 20, 1999 by Elder L. Lionel Kendrick, president of the Asia North Area. One of the smaller temples, it is unique in its construction. The main entrance of the white-granite faced edifice opens onto the hillside on which it is situated. Underneath the temple, opening to the bottom of the hill, is a dark-gray faced lower level that includes a new mission home, mission offices and an apartment for the temple president. ("Church Members rejoice over temple in southern Japan." LDS Church News, 17 Jun. 2000)

President Hinckley dedicated the temple in four sessions on June 11, 2000. In the dedicatory prayer, he asked the Lord to "Bless Thy Saints of this great nation. Magnify them, inspire them, bless them among the millions of this land that by the virtue of their lives they may stand as a city upon a hill whose light cannot be hid."

Masaru Tsuchida and his wife, Junko Wakamatsu Tsuchida, were called as president and matron of temple. President Tsuchida had previously served as first counselor in the Japan Fukuoka Mission presidency, as president of the Japan Missionary Training Center, as president of the Japan Sapporo Mission, as a stake president and as a district president. Both he and his wife were born in Nagoya, Japan. Michio Kurogi and Kimio Yoshioka were called as counselors to President Tsuchida.

The temple is a great blessing for the members in the temple district. The temple serves over 16,000 members from the Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Kumamoto, Okinawa Ginowan and Okinawa Naha stakes, Yamaguchi District (Japan Hiroshima Mission), Nagasaki and Kagoshima districts (Japan Fukuoka Mission), Okinawa Military District and Honshu Military District.

Since 1996, five new stakes have been created in Japan bringing the total number of stakes in Japan to 30. On May 18, 1997 Elder David E. Sorensen created the Kumamoto Japan Stake. A year later on April 26, 1998 the Yokohama Japan South Stake was created under the direction of Elder Rex D. Pinegar. Elder L. Lionel Kendrick organized the Asahikawa Japan Stake on September 20, 1998 and the Ginowan Japan Stake on January

24, 1999. Most recently on March 5, 2000, Elder E. Ray Bateman created the Kanazawa Japan Stake.

Missionary work in Japan continues to progress despite cultural and social hindrances. Religious beliefs in Japan remain a sensitive personal topic, even though few Japanese are deeply committed to any particular religious faith. In a country where only 1 percent of the population is Christian and Latter-day Saints account for about 10 percent of that number, bringing the church out of obscurity has been no easy task. (Don L. Searle, "Japan: Growing Light in the East" Ensign, Sept. 2000, 44)

The gospel continues to strengthen individuals and families in Japan in spite of their being faced with the many pressures of a prosperous and ambitious society. Long work hours and mandatory school activities on Sunday are the norm in Japanese society. Testimony, creativity and support from family and leaders are helping members of the Church in Japan to realize the blessings of the gospel.

Fortunately, in spite of the realities of contemporary life in Japan, there has been real growth of the Church in Japan over the years. Many priesthood leaders and sisters who are as knowledgeable, experienced, dedicated and spiritual as any place in the Church lead the Church in Japan.

The 1975 words of Elder Watanabe Kan, then a Regional Representative, are a fitting conclusion to the history and an accurate prediction of the destiny of the Church in Japan:

"We in Japan haven't scratched the surface yet. As the great concepts of Mormonism become better known and more fully understood among the Japanese people as a whole, the potential of the Church in Japan, and likewise throughout Asia, will be of unlimited magnitude. Thousands of testimonies witness that the sun of faith has risen in the Land of the Rising Sun; and in these testimonies the promise of the future is sure." (R. Lanier Britsch, "From the East: The History of the Latter-day Saints in Asia, 1851-1996" [1998], 166)