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The Eighty-Eighth Temple

With more than one hundred LDS temples in operation, it is difficult to fully comprehend the details of each individual structure. We are in awe of the beautiful buildings, yet often unaware of the sacrifices and hardships that come before, and during, the construction of a temple. Along with trials come the blessings and excitement of a new temple. Every temple has its own story. The focus of this research paper is the story of the Japan Fukuoka Temple.

The intent to build a temple in Fukuoka, Japan, was officially announced in the Church News on May 23, 1998. The Japan Fukuoka Temple was to be one of the first constructed with the new “small-temple” design. This economical design provides a temple with all the necessities—baptisms for the dead, the endowment service, sealings, and all other ordinances of the temple (Ensign Nov. 97, p. 49)—yet is simple enough to allow for quick and less costly construction. Small temples rely on the local saints to keep them clean and operating. Because this new design requires less money, the church is able to build numerous temples spread across the world. “We are determined,” President Hinckley says, “to take the temples to the people and afford them every opportunity or the very precious blessings that come of the temple worship” (ibid). The saints of Japan, having only one temple, located in northern Japan, felt an immense increase in their opportunities as the Japan Fukuoka Temple was announced.

The story of the Fukuoka Temple goes back many years to when the ground was first acquired by the church. Until the temple was announced, many assumed the land—now a temple site—was purchased as the result of an accident. In 1962 an elder was in his apartment cooking when the room caught fire. The building burned down leaving the elders without a

home and the members without a meeting house. The search began for a new building that could house the elders. With the assistance of Elder Gordon B. Hinckley—then an Assistant to the Twelve, assigned over the Asian area (Church News June 24, 2000)—land was acquired “out in the boondocks” (Church News, June 17, 2000).

Located on the property was an old hotel/restaurant which would come to serve the people as a meetinghouse and mission home. In the early 1970’s, the building was torn down to allow for a new mission home and office complex (personal journal). Only once more would this property see the destruction of another building. In June of 1998, shortly after the announcement of the Fukuoka Temple, a site was selected for the temple property. Again the mission home would be torn down, but this time it was to make room for the House of the Lord (ibid). The elder’s accident with fire, which forced the Church to buy new land, turned into an incredible blessing.

This piece of property, now worth more than one million dollars, is presently located a short distance from the center of the city, next to the local zoo and botanical gardens (Church News, June 17, 2000). The zoo and gardens bring many families to the area adding yet another asset to the location of the temple. The temple site, purchased years before, could not have been in a more perfect spot.

In preparation for the groundbreaking, set for March of 1999, the mission home was bulldozed down and the land cleared. As March 20th approached, the day of the groundbreaking (Hawkins, p. 237), Fukuoka was in the middle of a storm. As I recall from my own personal journal, it had been raining all night and morning. When escorting Elder L. Lionel Kendrick—the General Authority presiding over the ceremony—to the temple site, he was quite worried about the rain. The sky was a gloomy grey and not a break in the clouds could be seen

anywhere. We had prayed with him that morning for the elements to cooperate. “An hour prior to the ceremony the rain and wind stopped and for the first time in a few days, the sun broke through the clouds” (personal journal). The weather remained beautiful for the ceremony and within thirty minutes of the land being dedicated, the rain started again and continued for three more days. Many individuals commented that it was as if the Lord’s presence was there shining over the groundbreaking services.

During the ceremony, Elder Kendrick referred to the groundbreaking as “the beginning of great blessings that will come” (Church News, March 27, 1999). This was exactly what happened as construction began on the temple. The building was completed and turned over to the Church within eleven months of the groundbreaking. Only minor errors and complications arose during the construction. A couple of these complications dealt with language and cultural barriers.

For example, a missionary couple was called to assist with the construction as the Temple Site supervisors. Elder Charles Blackburn and his wife began their mission unable to speak Japanese. This barrier was soon overcome with pencil sketches and the translating abilities of the full-time missionaries (Hawkins, p. 237). The cultural barriers weren’t overcome quite as easy. The granite being used for the temple’s exterior was being imported from China. However, Taisei—the Japanese construction company building the temple (Church News, June 17, 2000)—refused to deal with the Chinese. In order to work around this, a company in Taiwan purchased the granite from China then turned around and sold it to Taisei Construction Co. (personal journal). Only a few incidents like this occurred. For the most part, construction was completed with few difficulties (Hawkins, p. 237).

The design of the Fukuoka Temple was something new to Taisei Construction, but it was atypical of a traditional LDS temple. This was because of its two-story structure which included a temple on the top floor with a temple president's apartment and mission home/offices located on the bottom floor (ibid). In order to differentiate between the temple and other sections, two different types of granite were utilized. An Empress White granite was used for the temple level with a darker Majestic Gray used on the lower half (ibid). The stark contrast of the differing stone created a striking sight for those driving by.

Another unique characteristic of the Temple was the composition of its structure. This temple had to be built to withstand the many earthquakes that frequent the island. The foundation consisted of forty circular cement columns, 6-8 feet in diameter. The building lay atop this foundation, completely unattached. Constructing the foundation in this way would allow the building to roll with any movement of the ground. The frame also was built to the highest earthquake standards. It consisted of a combination of cement and rebar built around steel. "Not a two-by-four was used in the entire building. . . . Concrete and steel were chosen to make the structure virtually earthquake proof" (Hawkins, p. 237).

The exterior of the temple was nearly completed by November of 1999. Only one thing was missing at this point—Angel Moroni. A small group gathered in front of the temple on November 8th to watch the statue be set in place. Elder Kendrick, of the Seventy, also flew in for the occasion. As the statue was placed—facing directly east—onlookers wept with joy. This unfamiliar statue would soon become the focal point of this well traveled area.

Eleven months after the groundbreaking, this 10,800 square foot structure, built upon a one acre plot of land, was completed and ready for furniture (Blackburn). Tyler Young, an interior designer employed by the Church, selected pieces of furniture to fit an Asian culture. He

spent many months planning and deciding the right pieces to put into the temple. The furniture was air freighted from the United States to Japan.

Many forms of art were hand made for the Fukuoka Temple. These various pieces of art were made by specially selected natives (personal journal). One of these Japanese artists was well known for his sacrifice to join the Church. Taiichi Aoba had a passion for ceramics. The “primary marketing methods for ceramic artists. . . was the traditional Japanese tea ceremonies on Sunday afternoons” (Church News September 9, 2000). After joining the Church, Aoba had to forego this marketing tool. Not wanting to give up his ceramics, he turned his focus to religious art forms. One of Aoba’s creations, two large ceramic plates depicting the tree of life, now sit on beautiful chests on each end of the Fukuoka Temple Celestial Room (Church News, September 9, 2000).

By April, 2000, the temple was completed. However, the dedication would not occur until June eleventh (Church News, May 27, 2000). The sacred structure is equipped with a Celestial Room, two endowment rooms, two sealing rooms and a baptistery. It will become a place of worship for nearly 7,700 members in nine different stakes and districts (Church News May 27, 2000). Presiding over the temple as its first president would be Brother Masuru Tsuchida (ibid).

Shortly after Brother Tsuchida was called, the temple opened its doors to the public. The open house, which ran from June first through third, brought a change of heart for many of the 4,800 individuals attending. One VIP commented, “Before I came to the open house, I determined that I would not change my preconceived ideas about this Christian church. As I walked through the temple, I repeated this to myself over and over. But when I entered the

celestial room, I felt my preconceptions change” (Ensign, September 2000, p. 72). Testimonials such as this VIP’s were not uncommon as the dedication approached.

On June 9, 2000, just days before the dedication, President Gordon B. Hinckley returned to the land he loved so well. On this special occasion, President Hinckley would dedicate a temple which stood upon the grounds he helped purchase thirty-eight years before. Many of President Hinckley’s fondest memories stem from his experiences in Japan. Having made dozens of trips to Japan over the last 40 years, President Hinckley’s love for the Japanese people grew deep (Church News, June 17, 2000). This was later confirmed by Elder Jeffery R. Holland during the first dedicatory service.

On the morning of June 11, 2000, the temple grounds were filled with numerous saints who had come to participate in the sacred event. Much like the miracle on the day of the groundbreaking one-year before, rain clouds were cleared from the sky during the dedication but quickly returned following the event. Saints were anxious to participate in one of the four dedicatory services presided over by President Hinckley. Nearly 3,280 saints were able to participate in this historical event.

Speaking from a first-hand experience, June 11, 2000 was a sacred day never to be forgotten by those who participated in the dedication. I was fortunate enough to be in the Celestial Room during the first dedicatory service. After hearing from current and former Fukuoka Mission Presidents, we were privileged to hear from Elder Holland. He spoke of President Hinckley’s love for the Japanese people and the Lord’s desire for Japan to have another temple. As Elder Holland spoke of President Hinckley’s love for his Asian brothers and sisters, President Hinckley sat in his chair with tears streaming freely down his cheeks. Words cannot express the immense amount of love that was felt from our Prophet at that moment.

Following Elder Holland's address, President Hinckley proceeded with the dedicatory prayer. After the prayer, Elder Holland led us in the "Hosanna Shout." At this point, the choir and congregation sang "The Spirit of God." Tears filled the eyes of everyone in the room as we sang this sacred hymn. The chorister, a native of Fukuoka, was unable to finish the song because he was trying so hard to fight back his tears. The spirit of the moment was so strong one could hardly comprehend it. For me personally, it felt as if angels had filled the room to join us in welcoming in this new House of the Lord.

After the dedication was complete, men and women worked through the night to have the building ready for temple services the next morning. Fukuoka City was never going to be the same. "When a temple is built in an area it lessens the evil influences of the adversary. It brings blessing to the area and to its people," said Elder L. Lionel Kendrick during the temple's groundbreaking. "These blessings come not only to the members of the Church but also to all those who live in the bounds of the temple district" (Church News, March 27, 1999). According to Jason Nelson, a returned missionary who served near the temple during its first six months of operation, "The temple really made a difference for both members and non-members. The members were really thankful to have a temple nearby to help strengthen them."

Brother Nelson also commented on how the new temple helped "open doors for missionary work." People wanted to know the difference between a temple and a regular church, which led into a discussion of eternal marriage and families. The Japanese people were also interested in LDS views of ancestral worship. This allowed missionaries to speak about work for the dead that takes place inside the temple. The above statement by Elder Kendrick became a literal truth—all individuals living within the temple district have truly been blessed.

The construction of Japan's second temple, and the Church's eighty-eighth, was a huge effort on the part of many individuals. There were ups and downs, but the blessings that came from building this structure will continue to increase—far outweighing any hardships that were faced. This two-year project created the details of the Fukuoka Japan Temple's story. It is a story that will be retold time and time again by all those who took part in its creation.