Into All the World
PRESIDENT LEE DANIELS - JAPAN

[BEGIN MUSIC]

REID NEILSON: Hello, my name is Reid Neilson and I’m an assistant professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, where I teach on the international Church. Today I’m interviewing President Lee Daniels of the Japan Sapporo mission. President Daniels, thank you for being willing to visit with me today about the Church in Japan. Will you please introduce yourself and tell us about your calling.

LEE DANIELS: Hi, Reid, this is a pleasure for me to participate in this interview. As you mentioned my name is Lee Daniels. I was actually born and raised in Utah county in a small town just south of where you’re teaching at BYU in Mapleton Utah. After graduating from Springville High School, I submitted my papers to go on a mission. I was called to serve in the Japan Kobe mission and that was my first exposure and experience in Japan. After I returned from my mission I continued my studies at Brigham Young University where I graduated with a degree in business management and I started my career where I ended up working for AT&T. At the time I was living in Los Angeles with my family and AT&T approached me to see if I would be interested in returning to Japan and represent their office in Tokyo. I wasn’t sure that my wife and my 3 small children would appreciate that type of austere life style so I actually turned the position down. A year later they asked again and said before you give us an answer would you please take your wife over to Tokyo and let her see what it would be like to live there as an expatriate. So we took advantage of the opportunity. We came to Japan for a week. I still intended to turn the job down. But when we attended church on Sunday, there was one international branch, we were invited to dinner by one of the members of the bishopric and my wife had a wonderful time and after the dinner she said “I think I would like to have this experience for our family”, and so I thank my wife for her insight and inspiration and we did elect to take the job with AT&T. We returned and lived in Tokyo for 4 ½ years. Then they asked me if I would return a second time to Tokyo and once again welcomed an opportunity to return to a land we’ve grown to love and a people that we enjoy their association with. We returned to Tokyo and this time we lived 10 years and we had a variety of experiences both in the Church and in the community and at the end of 10 years, three of our children were graduated from high school and in the United States and we agreed that we wanted to be a little closer to our children and we ended up moving back. We moved back to Park City about 5 years ago where I began teaching at BYU and the last year we were asked if we would return to Japan for a fourth time for me to serve as the head of the Japan Sapporo mission.

REID NEILSON: Wow, sounds like Japan has been a major part of your life and your children’s life. How have your children and your spouse enjoyed living in Japan?

LEE DANIELS: Well, Japan is home for them. They’ve actually lived in Japan, my children, longer than they have in the United States. It creates a kind of an identity crisis for them when
people ask them where they’re from and half of the children are blond hair and when they say, “Well, we’re from Japan” They get some very strange looks, but Japan will always be dear to the hearts of our children and will be perceived as their home for the most part.

REID NEILSON: Now you were called to the Japan Sapporo mission. For our listeners, tell us where the Japan Sapporo mission is located in the archipelago there in Japan.

LEE DANIELS: Japan is a series of 4 islands. The largest where Tokyo, Kobe, Osaka is located is called Honshu. The northern island is called Hokkaido and Hokkaido, the largest city in Hokkaido and the fourth largest city in Japan in called Sapporo. Hokkaido is about the size of the state of Montana and that is the Japan Sapporo mission. The Japan Sapporo mission covers the island of Hokkaido. There are currently seven missions in Japan with Hokkaido being the northern most island.

REID NEILSON: Well, when most people think of Japan, they think of urban sprawl. They think of tall towers. They think of bullet trains and subways. What’s Hokkaido like? Is it like the rest of Japan? Is it different? What’s it like geographically and landscape wise?

LEE DANIELS: Hokkaido is less densely populated than many of the other areas of Japan. It’s one of the most scenically beautiful places that we’ve ever been. It reminds a lot of, what we left to come here where we lived in Park City, Utah. Sapporo is surrounded by mountains. It offers all of the outdoor entertainment that you would find in the mountains of Utah and a climate that is very similar to what you would experience in Park City Utah. You have a good 5 months of heavy winter snow, but during the summer it’s beautiful. We usually avoid the rainy season. It’s a nice temperate climate to be outside.

REID NEILSON: Well, I’ve heard of President Monson refer to the missionaries of the Sapporo mission as the “frozen chosen” because of the weather there and the cold winters. What exactly is the church like there? How many stakes, wards, branches, just sort of a general overview of what’s going in the Japan Sapporo mission on the island of Hokkaido?

LEE DANIELS: We currently have three stakes, and I would guess maybe an average of six to seven units per stake. We also have one district that encompasses four branches. The branches from the heart of Sapporo would be about six or seven hours. I have found the people of Hokkaido to be more warm and welcome and receptive than I’ve found in other more densely populated busy areas of Japan. The Church has a strong base and we have members that are returned missionaries. In fact, the majority, our mission is a little bit unique in the fact that just about 50% of the missionaries are Japanese. The majority of them come from very large families that are second and third generation members where their parents were also missionaries and sometimes even their grandparents were missionaries. And so there is a base of strength in the church. We’ve seen that reflected in second generation, third generation missionaries now coming and serving their missions.

REID NEILSON: Well, President Daniels, it sounds like a remarkable place to do missionary work there in northern Japan. What is it like to be a Latter-day Saint in Japan? What challenges do they face? What successes is the Church having? How does Japanese culture impact the way the way that the Church is operated in that part of the world?
LEE DANIELS: That’s a very good question, Reid. Japan is steeped in tradition and they place a high value on their ancestors and this is a result of their basic religious belief both in Shinto and Buddhism. Shinto is a unique religion to Japan where they believe that their emperor was a direct descendant from the sun goddess and therefore their society was deified and a chosen people. Buddhism continues to thrive in Japan and most homes that you visit will have a little Buddhist temple or shrine within their home which they use to worship their ancestors. And although you do not see daily application of their religious teaching in their lives most of the Japanese when you ask about their religion they will mention that they are Buddhist. I believe population wise there are less than 2% that profess to be Christian and so the large population has not embraced Christianity and continue to hold to their traditional beliefs in Buddhism and Shintoism. So that makes it a little bit of a challenge as you talk and teach and introduce Jesus Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people because they do not really have any grounding in Jesus Christ. They’ve heard of Jesus Christ but there’s not a real understanding of the divinity of Jesus Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ. In terms of the society and the challenges that the Church members have when they do embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, it makes it a challenge because of our emphasis on family and service within the Church. Pretty much the pervasive view in the business world in Japan is that the company comes first and you will find that the working hours are very long, usually 8 to 9 o’clock in the evening and then after work it is not uncommon for the men to go out and have dinner or drinks together. You also find most of the corporate executives have entertainment requirements with their clients on the weekends playing golf and doing dinners and so most of these men have very limited family time and so any church member that is involved in a business in Japan is going to be challenged in terms of having time to spend in the evening with their family or even on the weekend. The educational system is structured similarly where the students after they study will usually go home and have dinner and then a lot of times they will go to specialized schools to continue to focus on specific subjects in preparation for exams to get into the next level of school. If they are going to participate in any clubs or activities, sports or marching bands, almost all of those activities are Sundays. So that creates a conflict with their ability to attend their Church meetings and participate in the extracurricular activities in school. So I admire the Japanese saints who embrace the gospel and live a gospel oriented life because it does require sacrifices both in terms of potentially how they are able to work within a corporate setting and how are they are able to work within a school and an educational setting for the children.

REID NEILSON: Well, it sounds like the Church in Japan is facing some unique challenges there. But at the same time it sounds like many of the members are rising to that occasion and remaining faithful. How does missionary work actually happen on a regular basis there in your mission? What types of missionary approaches? Are they talking to people on the street? Are they going home to home? How does missionary work actually happen there?

LEE DANIELS: The traditional ways of sharing our message with the people of Japan are consistent with the way it was done 30 years ago when I was a missionary with the majority of the activities focused on street contacting or going house to house. In Japan we also do a service once a week of teaching English conversation classes and that also can become a
conduit of potential investigators as people are exposed to the Church by the missionaries through English conversation class. Obviously, the best way is through member referrals and we actually do receive a large number of member referrals as the members also recognize their responsibility to be a missionary and to assist in introducing their friends.

REID NEILSON: So the missionaries are among people all day long if they’re in neighborhoods. Basically any opportunity they have to share the gospel they take that opportunity is what it sounds like to me. How many missionaries are there in your mission and describe a typical day of a missionary in Japan? What do they do and how does Japanese language study factor into their preparation?

LEE DANIELS: Well, we have currently approximately 80 missionaries serving in the mission Once again; the mission is about the size of Montana so that means that our missions are very spread apart. In most of our apartments, they are 2 person apartments. We have the 80 missionaries, there are 18 sisters and out of the 18 sisters, three of them are from the United States, and 1 is from Mongolia, and the other 14 are from Japan. Out of our elders, we have many from Japan, but we also have missionaries from the Philippines, from New Zealand, from Peru. We’ve had them from Brazil, from Australia, from Canada, and so we have quite a variety of missionaries that are all internationally based in terms of coming and sharing the gospel here in Japan. The typical day in the life of a missionary in Japan is according to the Y handbook. We get up at 6:30 in the morning, we do 30 minutes of exercise. We then spend 30 minutes of getting ready with showers and getting dressed and then it’s breakfast and we do our morning prayers and then at 8 o’clock we start 1 hour of personal study time, from 8 to 9, from 9 to 10 it’s companion study time and then we have language study time from 10 to 11. And we encourage the Japanese missionaries to also be studying English during the same time their international companions are studying Japanese. From 11 to 12, 11 o’clock they are to leave the apartment, or they have the opportunity to have their lunch a little bit early and so they can either eat their lunch from 11 and be ready to leave and start the day’s activities at 12. Once they go out we try to get them, obviously, to teach as much as possible. But they are expected to be out of the apartment between 12 and 5. Between 5 and 6 is their dinner time and as they’re preparing and eating their meals, many of them will be calling and confirming appointments, continuing to do their missionary work and then from 6 to 9, once again they are outside teaching lessons. If they have an appointment, they are permitted to stay out till 9:30, but they are to be back in their apartment by 9:30. And then from 9:30 to 10 o’clock they update their area book, they do their planning for the next day, they call in their report and then they have time to write in their journals and to get ready for bed, they have their night prayers and then it’s lights out at 10:30 and they’re to sleep for the next 8 hours.

REID NEILSON: Sounds like your missionaries are working hard. Going back for a minute to Japanese language study for those from outside Japan, non-native speakers. What level of fluency do they gain, about what time do they become effective as missionaries in preaching the gospel? I know with the new Preach My Gospel missionary plan it’s not merely memorization but it’s learning how to preach gospel concepts in your own words and how is that impacted by having to actually do it not only in your own words, but doing it in a foreign language for many of these missionaries.
LEE DANIELS: Well, there’s obviously Preach My Gospel is an inspired document from our apostles and prophets and one that we embrace in the mission and we follow the instruction of being able to teach by the spirit by putting the gospel principles in our own words. As new missionaries come out the Japanese language is one of the more complex languages in the world, and therefore the missionaries spend an extended period of time in the missionary training center prior to coming in country. And it’s very difficult for them to be able to have the ability to put the Japanese into their own words initially. So we still encourage the missionaries to memorize the outline of the lesson plan for ideas for teaching so that at a minimum they can express key concepts and then they can fill in that skeleton with their own words, and to that, missionaries first coming into Japan are still able to participate in the teaching opportunities and in their approaches, although their comprehension level is months before they actually understand really what is happening and what the Japanese people are saying. Each missionary, obviously, is different, some are gifted with gift of tongues at a faster pace than others, but it’s amazing to see the gift of tongues showered upon the missionaries that are serving here in Japan. I’ve had many years of experience of living in Japan and I’ve had many business associates and friends who have elected to try to study Japanese and rarely will you see someone be able to develop the fluency in a language as quickly as missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I would say that typically it is about 1 year in country before missionaries really start feeling comfortable in being able to handle most social situations. I’ve lived in Japan for 17 years and there are still times when I get lost in conversations with Japanese when they talk faster or get into subjects that I’m not familiar with, and so it’s a constant challenge. We have some missionaries that have been senior companions when they’ve only been in country 5 or 6 months, and that’s a big challenge for them as they continue to develop their language skills and be responsible for leading another missionary. But I would say it’s right around that 9 month to 1 year when a missionary starts hitting their stride with the comfort with the language of being able to really interact effectively with the Japanese.

REID NEILSON: So at that point it really starts to click, they’re able to probably as some missionaries describe they start thinking in Japanese, even perhaps dreaming in Japanese and really become even more effective as missionaries. I’d imagine up to that point along with senior companions the role of member missionaries would be important in terms of bringing them to lessons, to help explain concepts in fluent Japanese, native Japanese, so are the native members there, are they pretty responsive to the call to do missionary work? Are they involved? How have they responded to all this?

LEE DANIELS: The members have been wonderful and we’ve had increased focus on trying to get members to participate in every lesson that is taught in our mission.

REID NEILSON: I see.

LEE DANIELS: Obviously, many of members work during the day are not available when missionaries are teaching lessons, but I’ve been overwhelmed with appreciation of how often the members are willing to team up with the missionaries in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. They bring a new dimension into the room. Obviously the missionaries are ordained ministers of Jesus Christ and they have the ability to teach through the spirit of the Holy Ghost but the members have actually gone through the process within the
culture and can speak from personal experience how they were able to gain their testimonies and some of the things that they have found beneficial in their life as a result of being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

REID NEILSON: And for the Japanese saints you mentioned about families, the importance of families there as the Church in Japan is really expanding and putting down its roots, what role does the temple play for Latter-day Saints who are living an entire island apart from the nearest temple down in Tokyo Japan. What’s temple activity like? Are they able to get there often? Do wards and stakes organize temple trips? Do they fly? Do they take trains? Do they drive? Describe that process to us.

LEE DANIELS: Well, we just had a stake temple excursion that was extremely well attended by the members here in Hokkaido. They usually plan each stake a multiple excursion during the year. Our district has an excursion planned for May and I believe that they will have 30 to 40 members from our small district that will fly to Tokyo. Some, most of the members when they plan on going on a temple excursion, it will be a 1 to 2 night affair where they will go Thursday or Friday and spend the weekend. They will fly into Tokyo. At the Tokyo temple they have an annex located adjacent to the temple where they offer lodging for about $10 an evening and so this makes it very affordable that it opens the door for many members to have the opportunity to visit Tokyo and to attend the temple. One of our last stakes that went took about 20 to 30 youth with them and the youth were able to participate in ordinances in the temple and have that experience as well. So when they have the temple excursions they also include the young men and young women and have them travel with them to Tokyo. It would normally be an hour to 2 hours from their homes to the airport here in Sapporo, about an hour and half to 2 hour flight, and then another hour to get into Tokyo near the temple and so it is a sacrifice of time, of money that they are dedicated members who go to the temple often and maintain their current temple recommends. Currently there is a temple in Tokyo and then there is a temple in Fukuoka which is a southern island of Japan and someday the saints here pray for a temple here in Hokkaido that will be in the northern island of Japan.

REID NEILSON: Won’t that be wonderful that to have the temple there in their midst there in northern Japan. Are there any unique challenges for Japanese women, and just family life, there within a more secular society in Japan? Of course, it’s not Christian, pretty strong Buddhist influence, but what are some of the unique challenges do you think to Latter-day Saints in Japan that perhaps aren’t found in most other parts of the world.

LEE DANIELS: What you find in Japan which is somewhat unique to Japan is that the mothers usually control the budget, the finances of the home, and that they are usually the disciplinarians in terms of raising the children and seeing that their needs are met, and so it’s almost similar to being a single parent because of the lack of involvement or the lack of time for the husband to be involved in the family setting because of the long hours that he’s putting into work. So there’s obviously the stress of managing finances, of raising children, of taking care of the household and the home, and then additionally in Japan it’s not uncommon for the parents as they age and become elderly to live with the oldest son and so many of the women may also have to care for their parent or their husband’s parents in addition to their own children and that also puts some additional challenges and stress into their life.
REID NEILSON: Let’s shift gears a little bit and talk again about your experiences as a mission president. Describe a typical day in your life. Are you traveling much? Are you holding regular zone conferences? What do you as a mission president in that part of the world?

LEE DANIELS: Well, it’s interesting as I received the call to be a mission president and I talked with many of my friends who were currently or who had served a mission. They said life as a mission president occurs in 6 week increments and that’s associated with the transfers, the new missionaries coming in and the departure of the missionaries that have served. And that’s a very consuming demanding week. That is also a very wonderful week. The following week is in preparation now for getting ready for your zone conferences, and for your training of the missionaries and your zone leader meetings where you bring your zone leaders in and occasionally your district leaders. Then we spend the next 2 weeks traveling around the mission conducting zone conferences. Once we’re done with the zone conferences, the next 2 weeks are dedicated to individual interviews with each of the missionaries and I try to schedule about 30 minutes with each missionary and that consumes pretty much the majority of your days for 2 full weeks. Once you’re done with the interviews then the new missionaries come in and you start the cycle all over again. So as you think about your life, you really plan it in 6 week increments and every day is filled with interviews, with zone conferences and with managing the daily affairs of the mission. And so that does make it a bit of a challenge on a family as we try to manage and balance family requirements with mission requirements.

REID NEILSON: Well, it sounds like you’re doing the whole thing as a family. In fact, I was curious, Sister Daniels, I imagine, there are many things that she’s involved with in terms of helping to run the mission home, traveling with you, etc. What has her experience been like?

LEE DANIELS: She has loved the experience. She takes care of all of the medical issues with each of the missionaries and that is always a challenge and a lot of fun for her, but as I mentioned previously, 50% of our missionaries are Japanese and the majority of them don’t speak English very well and so it’s always a challenge when they consult with Sister Daniels relative to medical concerns, but it’s amazing how they communicate and how well it all operates. So Sister Daniels is the mission mother and we hear that all the time from the missionaries how much they love her mission mother and how much they love speaking with her and talking with her so she relishes her role as mother to the missionaries, she is always helping them with understanding what cleaning supplies they should, giving them details on how to keep the apartment clean, giving them tips on how to prepare meals, how to get along with their companions, and how to take care of their medical issues and medical concerns and she’s just been wonderful.

REID NEILSON: Well, President Daniels, we appreciate your time today in sharing with our listeners what it’s like to be a mission president in the Sapporo mission, what it’s like to be doing missionary work, what it’s like to be a Latter-day Saint in that part of the world, the unique challenges and opportunities that Latter-day Saints face there. Before we conclude, I’d like to ask you if you would share your testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ, first in English, and then conclude in Japanese. And at that point we’ll say good-bye and wish you well in your mission.
LEE DANIELS: Well, thank you Reid, I always cherish the opportunity to share my feelings about the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe that Genesis of my testimony resulted from the appreciation of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and reading that I still remember the first time I read it from cover to cover in the 9th grade and at that time gaining an appreciation of the truthfulness and spirit of that work. As I’ve continued to try to focus on reading that wonderful volume every day, it continues to reinforce the core testimony that I have of Jesus Christ, that he came to the earth, that he established his Church, that he taught the gospel which is necessary for our understanding to be able to prepare to return to our Heavenly Father. He has taught us the way to be able to be exalted in terms of living eternally with our family and he has given us daily insights into how we can maximize our happiness while we’re on this earth. Through following the gospel of Jesus Christ I’ve been able to, I believe, be a better father to my 6 children and to be able to teach them correct principles that govern their lives and help them attain the happiness they have achieved in their lives. It has given me great insights into how I should conduct myself, both in business and with my friends and by following the gospel of Jesus Christ, I’ve found great joy and happiness in my life. As I was called to serve as mission president, obviously that is an intimidating calling in terms of being worthy to receive inspiration for each missionary relative to transfers and companions and I remember being intimidated when I first arrived recognizing that within 2 weeks I would be responsible for a major transfer as we saw 12 of our missionaries leave and a number of missionaries come in when I didn’t have the opportunity to really spend a lot of time with the missionaries and know them. It was then that I really realized that the scripture in Doctrine & Covenants 112 verse 10, where it says be thou humble and the Lord thy God will lead thee by the hand and give thee answer to your prayers. In those humble circumstances I prayed to Heavenly Father for the necessary inspiration to conduct the first transfer and I was amazed to feel the inspiration that was available to mission presidents as they conduct transfers and as it seems as a big puzzle with that first piece being directly revealed on what the Lord would see fit for companions and areas and then each subsequent piece of the puzzle fitting together to create a beautiful picture. And that was a strong, edifying experience for me in giving me the confidence that the Lord is in charge and that he does know his missionaries and that there is a plan in place for each of them, and if I am humble and live worthy to receive his guidance he will inspire me to make those transfers and to lead this mission in harmony with his will. And that has been a wonderful testimony as I’ve serve in this unique capacity as a mission president and dedicate the next 3 years of my life to know that I’m just an instrument, that I’m just a tool in the Lord’s hands in trying to conduct the work and see the work move forward in the island of Hokkaido and to the people of Japan. I know the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. I know that Jesus Christ is my Savior and my Redeemer and that he has taught me the way that I need to learn to be able to return to my Heavenly Father. And I say these words in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

REID NEILSON: Thank you. And now if we could hear it in Japanese as well. It’s a beautiful testimony and I’m sure there are listeners would love to hear what it sounds like in Japanese tongue.

LEE DANIELS: Thank you. I will be happy to share it in Japanese. [TESTIMONY IN JAPANESE]
REID NEILSON: Thank you President Daniels for that beautiful testimony. It’s been a pleasure to visit with you today, to hear again what’s going on in your part of the vineyard of the Lord’s work and we hope that the Lord’s choicest blessings will be upon you, the missionaries, and the Latter-day Saints there in Hokkaido Japan. Thank you and we look forward to talking to you again.

LEE DANIELS: Thank you very much.

REID NEILSON: Bye Bye.

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