

WHERE WE WORSHIP

'Shrine beside H-1' offers Shinto blessings

By [Mary Kaye Ritz](#) Advertiser Faith Editor

Name of church: Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha - Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu.

Denomination: Shinto.

Where we are: 1239 Olomea St., in Kapalama.

Our numbers: Though there is no regular congregation, an estimated 5-6,000 people take part Jan. 1 in the annual New Year's celebration, which begins at midnight and continues for 18 hours. Others also undergo many Shinto blessings, including blessing of children, places and even objects.

Our pastor: The Rev. Masa Takizawa from Nagoya, Japan, ordained in Japan at Kogakkan University.

What's special about us: Best known as the "shrine beside H-1," the Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha - Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu's complex of shrines was renovated by volunteers in 1980-82. Aside from the two main shrines, five other shrines are on the premises: Suitengu, Otaki Jinja, Shirasaki Hachimangu, Inari Jinja and Watatsumi Jinja.

What we believe: Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion, "is a complex of ancient rituals and beliefs that perceives the presence of a life force or an essence in all things," said Irene Takizawa, who is married to the shrine's priest. They also have "reverence for the land and its natural elements that give life to human beings." The type of Shinto practiced here is shrine Shinto, which differs from other forms such as sect Shinto, folk Shinto, and Shinto of the Imperial House. Shrine Shinto has no sacred text.

"We're keepers of Japanese culture," said Takizawa. "Some argue it's not a religion at all." Many Shinto rituals evolved from rice cultivation, "from which the Japanese people have learned the values of diligence and perseverance," she said. "Since rice cultivation requires a high level of labor input, it also demanded the values of cooperation and harmony."

Shinto shrines are important community centers in Japan and, to a lesser extent, in the more diverse Hawai'i. Here, a variety of festivals were carried out as the sacred order taught "the spirit of gratitude, and harmony through their interaction with people and nature," Takizawa said.

Shinto emphasizes gratitude, respect for humans and the environment, modesty, intellectual development, diligence and the continuity of growth. "Our goal is to inspire our present and future generations to acknowledge the past through a variety of activities to celebrate and share our Japanese heritage for all ethnic groups of present and future generations," Takizawa said.

Shinto followers do not worship God the way Westerners do. In fact, Takizawa said, there's no direct English translation for their closest concept, "kami."

The nearest translation, she said, would be "awe, reverence and gratitude for everything in the universe," equating it to the Hawaiian concept of 'aumakua - family or personal gods.

While they don't pray to a grain of sand, per se, they do have deep reverence for the purpose a grain of sand serves. There is a hierarchy of reverence. As in Taoism, the elements of nature - such as the sun, the moon, rain - are very important. Each of the temple's shrines has a goshintai, or sacred relic, that is shrouded. Only the priest knows what the sacred relic.

Our history: Each of the seven shrines on the premises has its own founding history, but the first was Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha, established March 24, 1920, as a branch of Kotohira-gu in Kagawa, Japan, by the Rev. Itsuki Hirota. After Pearl Harbor was attacked, the shrine priests were interned at Mainland camps. Sixty years later, the shrine was restored, despite the absence of the priests, but on June 6, 1948, its property was seized by the federal government. Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha - Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu was the first foreign entity to sue the U.S. government and win a ruling to have its property returned. On May 18, 1950, the shrine once again was able to continue all activities.

What we're excited about: The Dazaifu Tenmangu, a well-known shrine dedicated to Sugawara no Michizane, the god of learning, recently marked the 1,100th anniversary of its founding in Japan. About 70 guests from Japan came to Hawai'i for the festivities. Next year also marks the 50th anniversary of the Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu shrine.

The two events were co-celebrated with an elaborate service earlier this month. The colorful outfits worn by the visiting Japanese priests were modeled on 9th and 10th-century garments with patterns preserved through the years. Ancient techniques are used to dye the silk garments. During the service, a ceremonial dance was performed, thanking the spirits for the last 1,100 years and the last 50 years in Hawai'i and asking the spirits to bless the followers with another 1,100 and 50 years, respectively.

Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha - Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu is planning a Bazaar and Family Fair on Sept. 1. A Children's Shichigosan Festival, with participants dressed in kimono, will take place in November and, of course, next up is the Japanese New Year's.



Adherents of the shrine Shinto tradition in Honolulu seek blessings at Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha - Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu. The complex in Kapalama comprises seven shrines, the first of which was established in 1920.
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