

Self-Guided Tour of the Sacramento Gedatsu Church

Sacramento Gedatsu Church
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WELCOME TO THE GEDATSU CHURCH

We appreciate your interest in the church and hope you enjoy the tour.

A Common Thread: Expressing Appreciation

In the Gedatsu Church, we believe that the key to a happy and peaceful life is developing and expressing appreciation for our lives and all of the people and elements that sustain our lives. By developing an appreciative attitude, we become humble and are able to express and receive love from our families and friends. This practice allows us to develop loving families, enjoy our professions and find peace in our daily lives. Therefore, you will find that the concept of “expressing appreciation” is a recurrent theme throughout the tour.

Open-mindedness

Our objective is to help practitioners develop peaceful and happy lives regardless of their religious faiths and cultural backgrounds. We encourage practitioners to continue practicing their home traditions and religions while in the Gedatsu Church. Integrating religions, instead of having to choose one or the other, reduces conflict and nurtures a harmonious way of life.

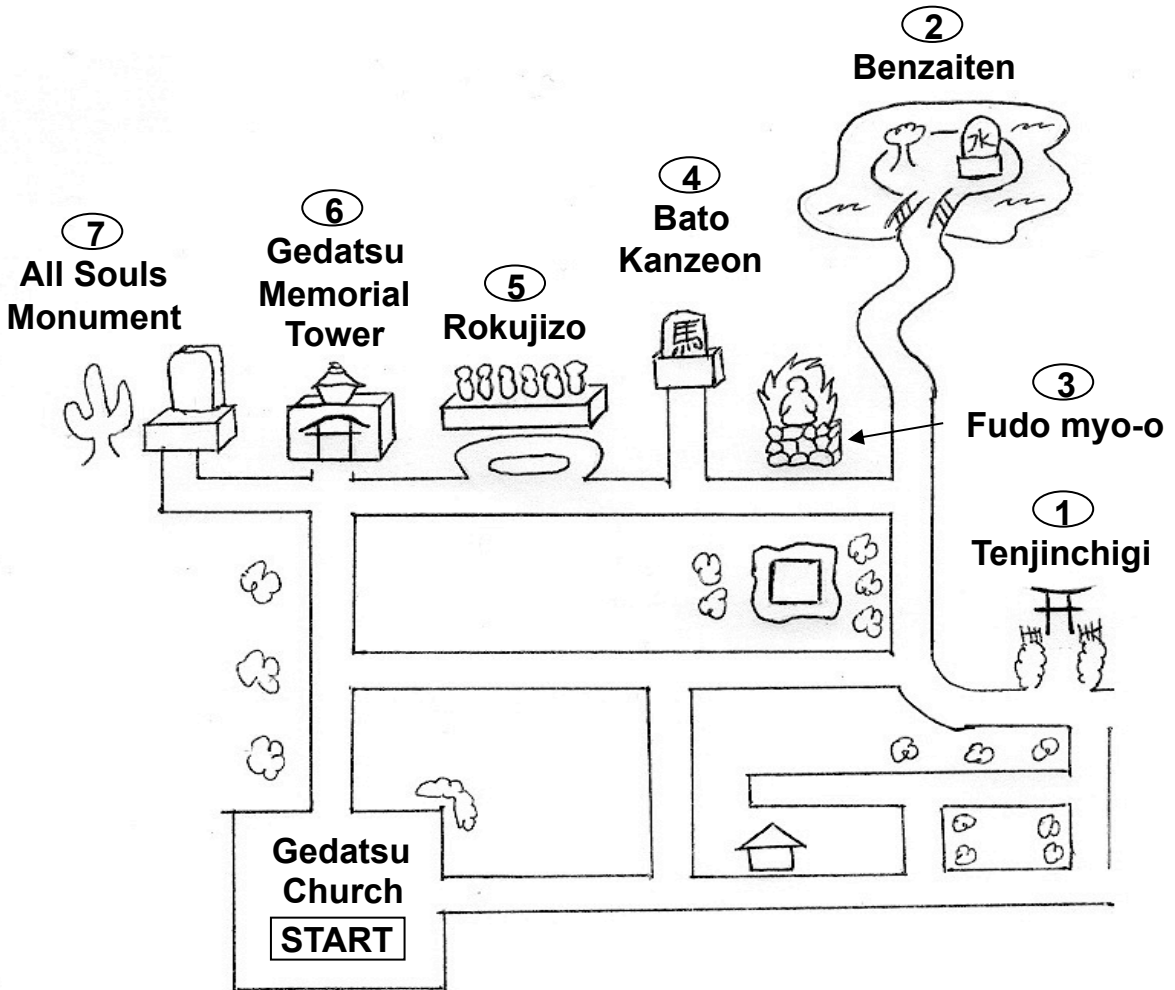
Church Tour Instructions

The Church Tour begins in the church then continues outdoors around the church grounds. To the right, you see a map of the church grounds. Exit the church and walk toward “Tenjinchigi” which is indicated by a #1 on the map and is located to the west of the silver half dome building. Continue toward the pond (#2) where “Benzaiten” is enshrined. Follow the numbers indicated on the map to continue the tour.

Thank you for coming on the tour and enjoy! Please feel free to contact us with any comments or questions.

Warmest regards,
Sacramento Gedatsu Church

Map of Church Tour



INSIDE THE CHURCH

Explanation of the Altar

The Altar was designed by our Founder, Gedatsu Kongo, to be simple and unornamented. It is divided into three sections.

- In the middle, we have enshrined Tenjinchigi, or the Supreme Spirit. We believe that the Supreme Spirit is the source of all life and unconditional love. We express sincere gratitude to the Supreme Spirit for our lives and for all of the elements (ie. family, food, water) that sustain our lives.
- On the left, we have enshrined Gochi Nyorai which is the spiritual energy that fuels the cycle of life. Here, we acknowledge and appreciate the progression of all life, including our own.
- On the right, we have enshrined our Founder, Gedatsu Kongo. Gedatsu Kongo emphasized appreciation as a way of practicing esoteric Buddhist teachings that are deeply profound but can be difficult to apply to our daily lives.

What are those birdhouses?

Many visitors to the church ask this question referring to the wooden boxes with holes found on the altar. These “bird houses” are actually trays on which we place our offerings. The holes on the sides of the trays represent the flame of a candle. Candles are lit on the altar because light represents the wisdom that can illuminate our lives. When these trays were developed, it was time consuming and expensive to make candles for the altar. So instead of offering lit candles with the offerings, the shape of a candle flame was carved into each wooden tray.

Offerings

All of the offerings are an expression of our appreciation. We offer rice and water to express gratitude for the food and water, respectively, that sustain our lives. At our home altars, we offer a small bit of our daily meals for the same reason. If children do well in school, we place their report cards or certificates on our home altars to acknowledge and express appreciation for their achievements.

What are those triangles?

A single pattern of a concentric triangle, circle and square is repeated within the church. The triangle, circle, and square represent human, universe, and earth, respectively. This pattern symbolizes the interconnectedness of our life with the life of earth and the universe.

AMACHA KUYO (HOLY TEA BLESSINGS)

In front of the altar, you will see a circular wooden bucket containing tea, a stupa and a ladle. This is where we offer Amacha blessings. Amacha kuyo was developed by our Founder, Gedatsu Kongo, and is a core practice of the Gedatsu teachings. Amacha means “Holy Tea” and “kuyo” means blessings. Amacha kuyo is offered by pouring holy tea over wooden plaques or stupas and expressing appreciation for all humans, animals and vegetation. In the Gedatsu Church, we believe that developing appreciation for our lives and everything that sustains our lives is the key to a peaceful and happy life.

Symbolism of Amacha Kuyo Stupa

The octagonal Amacha kuyo stupa is rich with Buddhist symbolism; however, we will only explain one of the symbols here. The red character that you see on the top of the stupa is called “Goho” . Simply put, this character means that all life depends on many elements in order to live and grow. For example, an apple tree requires soil, sun, water, and air. This teaching applies to our lives as well because we require all of these elements to live and grow. Further, we need the love of our friends and family in order to live happily. Therefore, this red character reminds us to express appreciation for all of the people and elements that sustain our lives.

TENJINCHIGI (SUPREME SPIRIT OF THE UNIVERSE)

In Gedatsu, Tenjinchigi is the source of all life and unconditional love. We are extensions of Tenjinchigi and all of our love stems from this Supreme Spirit. The word Tenjinchigi is derived from Shintoism and refers to the God of Nature. However, in Gedatsu, it embodies the Buddhist concept of emptiness and is also called the Supreme Spirit of the Universe. Many of our church members also refer to the Supreme Spirit as God.

We strive to develop appreciation for the Supreme Spirit, because it is the source of all life and love. By paying our respect to the Supreme Spirit, we are expressing gratitude for our lives and for all the people and things that sustain our lives.

Symbolism at Tenjinchigi Shrine

All of the symbolism at the Tenjinchigi Shrine derives from Shintoism. Shintoism is a Japanese religion that emphasizes respect toward nature and ancestors.

- Torii** – This wooden structure symbolizes a gateway to a sacred place. In this case, the sacred place is the Tenjinchigi Shrine
- Folded white paper** – The paper is a marker that designates sacred places. You will see it decorating Shinto shrines and other sacred places in Japan.
- Wooden house** – The house-like structure is a small replica of a Shinto shrine. Since Tenjinchigi is derived from Shintoism, we represent it with a Shinto shrine.

BENZAITEN (WATER DEITY)

At Benzaiten, we express appreciation to water, because water is absolutely essential to sustain life. Although it may be difficult to imagine “thanking” inanimate objects, such as water, we believe that it is an important practice.

On hot summer days, we become thirsty and want a cold glass of water. When we drink water at these times, we experience how refreshing it is. In Gedatsu, we try to take this experience one step further by being grateful for water.

Not only is water refreshing, but it is a vital part of our lives. Water makes up 70% of both our bodies and of the surface of the earth. When we consider how important water is in our lives, it is natural to express appreciation for it.

By thanking water, we also become more mindful of our water usage, making us more careful and less wasteful with water. This encourages a more respectful approach to nature and to our belongings.

Benzaiten was placed in this man-made pond so that Gedatsu practitioners can see water while expressing appreciation to it.

FUDO MYO-O (FUDO DEITY)

The Fudo deity originates from Buddhism and represents the state of wisdom in which we are not affected or moved by illusions such as anger, jealousy or greed. The *fu* in Fudo means “undo”, and *do* means “to move”; together, *Fudo* means stability or peacefulness.

Symbolism of Fudo deity

The stone Fudo deity statue also originates from Buddhism. The man who sits in front of the flames represents this peaceful state in which we are not affected by illusions. In the statue, these desires, illusions and conflicts are being burned. The sword represents a cutting away of obstacles that impede our path to enlightenment and the rope is tying the obstacles down. The man also has one open eye and one closed eye that represent two aspects of the guidance we receive from the Supreme Spirit. The open eye represents the unyielding and disciplinary nature of the Supreme Spirit’s guidance that is determined to lead us to a more peaceful life. The closed eye shows that Supreme Spirit is also compassionate and forgiving if we make mistakes. Through this strong and compassionate guidance, the Supreme Spirit leads the practitioner toward a state of wisdom.

Why is there a fire pit in front of Fudo deity?

The square-shaped fire pit in front of Fudo deity is used in our annual spring and fall festivals. During these festivals, we express appreciation for all of the blessings within our lives. If you are interested in seeing how the fire pit is used, we welcome you to attend our festivals. Every year, the festivals are held on the second Sunday of April (Spring Festival) and on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend in September (Fall Festival).

BATO KANZEON

Bato Kanzeon, or “Horse-Head Kanzeon” originates from Buddhism and is the bodhisattva of animals and humans in severe states of suffering. A bodhisattva is a spirit or person who has foregone enlightenment so that he/she can help others attain happiness. Bato Kanzeon is often depicted as a human figure with a horse-head crown. In the stone tablet before you, the Chinese character for “horse” is carved into the stone. Bato Kanzeon is associated with the horse, because its desire to save mankind from suffering is analogous to the appetite of a hungry horse.

How does Bato Kanzeon fit into our daily lives?

Bato Kanzeon is enshrined here, on the Sacramento Church Grounds, as the Guardian Spirit of traffic safety because it is associated with the horse. Before cars, trains, and buses, horses and other animals were the principal mode of transportation.

When the Gedatsu Church was established in the U.S., many church members were involved in car accidents and asked Bishop Kishida, their spiritual leader, for guidance. Bishop Kishida advised members to develop appreciation for their cars, their capability to drive, and their lives. He told them that without their cars, and other forms of transportation, they would not be able to travel from home to work. Instead of taking this convenience for granted, it is important to appreciate it as a privilege. As members developed appreciation for their cars and their lives, they stayed calmer in traffic and drove more carefully. As a consequence, they encountered fewer traffic accidents. Expressing appreciation for our cars is still a part of the Gedatsu Church of the U.S. today.

ROKIJIZO (SIX JIZO)

Rokujizo originates from Buddhism and is the bodhisattva that guides humans out of the six states of human suffering. In Gedatsu, Rokujizo is an extension of the Supreme Spirit's unconditional love.

Symbolism of Rokujizo

•**Why six Jizo?** Rokujizo is one spirit, or bodhisattva. However, Rokujizo are represented as six Jizo, because they guide us out of the six states of severe human suffering.

•**Human figures** – Due to the abstract nature of Rokujizo, and other spirits like Fudo myo-o and Tenjinchigi, Rokujizo is represented in human form so that it is easier for us to relate to it. After seeing the Rokujizo and Fudo myo-o statues, we may remember them more than the other statues and find them more interesting, because they are represented by tangible, human forms. Further, Rokujizo is represented as a humble and undecorated human because one must possess great humility in order to guide others out of suffering.

•**Carved out of stone** – Rokujizo is carved out of stone to represent its strong and enduring nature. Rokujizo will never be destroyed regardless of the pain it takes on to help people out of the six states of human suffering. The stone also represents the earth from which Jizo are supposed to be born, according to Buddhist philosophy.

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GEDATSU MEMORIAL TOWER

The Gedatsu Memorial Tower was erected so that we can pay respect to our Founder, Gedatsu Kongo, and to deceased church members. Gedatsu Kongo is enshrined in the center of the Memorial Tower. The names of deceased Gedatsu church members are also enshrined along the walls inside the Memorial Tower.

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ALL SOULS MONUMENT

At the All Souls Monument, we express appreciation to the spirits of all living things, including humans, animals and vegetation.

For example, at the All Souls Monument we express appreciation to our deceased family members, such as our parents and grandparents for their love and for the ways in which they have contributed to our lives. If we were not able to make peace with our loved ones before they passed away, we can express our love to them here.

Sometimes, children enjoy coming to the All Souls Monument so that they can say hello to their pets that have passed away. Others thank the U.S. pioneer and Native American spirits for their sacrifices in establishing this country. In times of war, many also express appreciation to all of the soldiers and civilians who have fallen.

**Thank you for touring the
Sacramento Gedatsu Church!**

If you would like to learn more about the
Gedatsu Church, please visit our website:
<http://gedatsu-usa.org>

You can also contact:
Reverend Akira Sebe
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(916) 363-6054 or akira.sebe@gedatsu-usa.org

or

Reverend Hisakazu Taki
Los Angeles Gedatsu Church
(626) 288-1212 or taki0814@hotmail.com

Everyone is welcome to attend our services at the Sacramento
Gedatsu Church on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of every month at
9:30 am.