

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

February 2, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year I wrote my first New Year's letter to you where I mentioned that our diocese would be reorganized from the current eight districts to five and that the parishes in each district would be grouped into "blocs". Some of you have shared your reactions to my message. I'm glad for your feedback.

Since the resignation of Bishop Hiraga in March 2020 and while waiting for the appointment of a new bishop, Apostolic Administrator Father Shiro Komatsu met regularly with priests representing the eight districts of the diocese to discuss matters concerning the missionary-pastoral care of the Sendai flock. After I was installed bishop, I have been meeting with said priests and together we evaluated the "district system" of the diocese and how priests are appointed. Many of them have expressed their desire that the system introduced in 2014 be improved.

On the occasion of my pastoral visits to the parishes of our diocese, I received comments from parishioners such as "Which priest in the district should I ask for parish or personal advice?" and "We don't know who among the priests sent to the district is in charge of our parish." Those comments coincide with the results of a survey for the laity that we conducted for the Synod at the beginning of last year.

I decided to respond to the call for improvements to the existing district system from priests and parishioners by introducing a new way of appointing priests. I hope that this will clarify the responsibilities of priests, eliminate confusion, and promote cooperation of priests and parishioners.

The priest I appoint to a particular bloc is the pastor of the parishes belonging to that bloc. Please consult with him about matters related to your parish. He is the pastor you can seek spiritual help from. I would like to reiterate the expectation I wrote in my New Year's letter: As the priest appointed to a bloc of parishes is the one in-charge of that bloc, with him, please meet like a family. As you pray for and trust in the guidance of God the Father, with him, please discuss your dreams, concerns, and hopes.

This year I am able to appoint one priest to each bloc. Sanpachi bloc of District 1 is the only bloc to which I appoint two "full-time" priests. I hope that the two of them will be able to carry out "jointly" their missionary-pastoral duties. I fervently hope that in the future I will be able to appoint more than one priest especially to larger blocs.

Together let us pray for God's blessing and guidance upon the priests appointed to the new districts and blocs. May we, the flock of the Diocese of Sendai, be united in heart and mind and become truly God's family.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Edgar Gacutan

Bishop of the Diocese of Sendai

Further Notes Regarding the Sending of Priests to the Five Districts (*Chiku*)

- ✧ I will appoint one of the priests of the district to serve as “Vicar forane” (*chikucho*). The *chikucho* will report to me the situation of his district, calls for a meeting of priests and parish representatives, and coordinate with his fellow priests who of them will render services to non-parish institutions (e.g., Mass or talk at Catholic school events, etc.).
- ✧ The priest appointed to a bloc (**not the *chikucho***) is the administrator (responsible) for each and every parish belonging to the bloc.
- ✧ The priest appointed to a bloc presides the Sunday (Lord’s Day) Mass of the parishes of the bloc or asks another priest to preside.
- ✧ It is desired that on Sunday, Mass should be celebrated in all parishes. In some cases, two parishes may jointly celebrate the Sunday Mass. For serious reasons (e.g., the priest is sick), one or two parishes of the bloc may hold a Prayer Assembly on Sunday. Anticipated Lord’s Day Mass may also be celebrated. I ask that priests and parishioners discuss these possibilities in light of church law and guidelines.
- ✧ Please hold Bible-reading gatherings and other faith-formation courses with proper health measures in place.
- ✧ This new district assignment will take effect on May 1, 2023. The priests concerned should move to their assigned bloc in time for the Lord’s Day Mass on May 7, the 5th Sunday of Easter.
- ✧ I hope that the till-now district councils will continue to meet as before, taking into consideration new elements caused by the reorganization.
- ✧ Each bloc may also set up a kind of a coordinating-body for the parishes of said bloc.

Edgar Gacutan
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