

Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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**We, the priest, religious and parishioners,
would like to grow together cohesively**

An Interview with Bishop Tetsuo Hiraga



Here are some excerpts from the interview with Bishop Hiraga:

I have issued the “2019 Episcopal Letter” with the title “The New Year of Grace 2019”. I have said everything I planned for the coming year in that letter. But, what I really want to focus on is the district system in the diocese.

Diminution of Catholic Population

It was announced in the “Catholic Church Information Handbook 2019” that the total number of believers in the Sendai Diocese is less than 10,000. There are 52 parishes and the total number of believers is 9,949. This is a very alarming reality.

Thinking about the present situation of Sendai Diocese and its future, we introduced five years ago the “district system”. The Sendai Diocese thought that if mutual collaboration among the priests, parishioners and religious is deepened and strengthened in mind and spirit, then the “district system” would be more fruitful.

Just like when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, in the same year, the diocese celebrated its 75th anniversary on July 3, 2011 where all resources and facilities of the different parishes, schools and convents of the diocese were put together to do the “Candlelight relay” and offered prayers. I am convinced that we still have that strong passion that we had at the time and the bond that unites us together until now. On the other hand, I heard that the numbers of participants in the Masses have decreased.

Journey continues amid challenging circumstances

How can we make the Christian fellowship more alive? What should we do to consciously say that we are all one body? I feel that we have become indifferent to each other. The parishioners would hardly visit the church if there is no priest stationed in that parish. How do we overcome this situation? Also, even within the districts, the churches are far from each other and the houses of the Christians are scattered above vast territory. How can we keep the connection in the church?

My Role as a Unifier

In such a tough situation, I remember what I shared with you when I became a bishop. I told you then that my role as a bishop is like an adhesive. I wanted to bring people together, priests and parishioners, priests and religious people, and parishioners and religious. I don't know if I have fulfilled my desires.

This year in January, I celebrated my 74th birthday. Bishop must retire at 75 years old. Therefore, this coming year, I will go around all parishes and meet the congregations to take this opportunity to thank you personally. I am looking forward to meeting all of you.

The Joy of Christmas Caroling

“Love is revealed in Words,
when words are not enough, it is revealed in Deeds,
when deeds are not enough, it is revealed in Music.
Creation is the Music of God.”
- Segundo Galilea, “Music of God”



Music has the power to unite people from different ages, social, economic, political, religious and cultural background. It has the power to move us, especially during Christmas when carols unite the singers and the listeners alike.

Last December, the “I Sing for Joy” Choir (ISJ), an international youth choir of Sendai Diocese, went Christmas caroling in Caritas no Oka, Sayurien and Ishinomaki Caritas Base in December to

share the joy and love, especially Christmas season. The ISJ Choir does not only sing during Christmas season but all through out the year in different churches and institutions by invitation.

The ISJ Choir was created in response to the challenge of Pope Francis in his Encyclical, "The Joy of the Gospel" to go forth and spread the Gospel to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear; and the message of Pope Francis to the young people for the World Youth Day on April 2017, to be like the young Mary to allow ones life to become a means for

making the world a better place. And what better way to spread the gospel and contribute to a better world than through music.

Since April 2018, the ISJ Choir meets and practices regularly, every second and fourth Wednesdays of the month, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in Mototerakoji Church. As of the now, there are about 25 members from 8 different nationalities (of course, that includes the Japanese). The ISJ Choir invites anyone who is interested to sing (even if you don't have the voice). What is important is your capacity to share with others in joy and love.

District News Tidbits

District 1

The Quebec Missionary celebrated its 70th anniversary of its mission in Japan. The celebration started a memorial mass in Tokyo and Sendai. Since Aomori prefecture is the birth place of the Quebec mission in Japan, the celebration culminated in Honcho Church last January 1, 2019 with the mass and ringing of the church bell.

District 7

For the first time, the children of the two parishes of Fukushima City (Nodamachi and Matsukicho) joined together to perform the nativity play at Christmas. 18 children from both parishes under the guidance of Sr. Yashuda and Mrs. Douko and the support of the parents communicated the joy of the birth of our savior.



District 8

- **Koriyama Church**
In November 17, 2018, Talitakum, JCarm and Koriyama Church held a seminar on the modern day human trafficking. The seminar was about the plight of the rapidly increasing number of technical interns in Japan, like unfair labor practices, inhuman conditions, sexual harassments, etc. The organizers also offer recommendations on how to address this reality, i.e, if you meet technical interns, invite them to some church activities to get to know them and their conditions so that their issues will be properly addressed.
- **Visit to Kawauchi Village**
In October 8, the association of residents of Koriyama temporary housing got together in Kawauchi Iwana Town Center. These villagers were the ones who were evacuated in Koriyama temporary housing after the Great East Japan Earthquake and the meltdown of Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. The whole day gathering was spent in sharing stories, singing, and playing bingo games. The whole day was spent

with so much laughter and fun. It was good to remember and reconnect.

- **The Closing Ceremony of Onahama Church**
The closing ceremony of Onahama Church was held in January 13, 2019. Bishop Tetsuo Hiraga officiated the mass. About 150 parishioners renewed their promised with the Lord as they move to Iwaki Church.



District 3

- **Kamaishi Church**
On December 15, 2018, a Christmas Concert was held in Kamaishi Shimin Center, TETTO, Omachi, to support the restoration of Kamaishi Church. About 250 people enjoyed the evening listening to Christmas songs and scripture readings. With the same purpose, a grand mass was presided on December 24, 2018 at 4:00 p.m. by the former Jesuit Provincial Superior Fr. Yoshio Kajiyama.
- **Shike Church in Morioka**
From October 2018, an English mass is held in Shike Church every last Sunday of the month. In Sendai Diocese, there has always been an English mass held once a month since the time of the Bethlehem missionary congregation started their mission in the diocese. However, it stopped 3 years ago because there were fewer priests.

District 4

On November 23, 2018, the parishioners from Sendai went to Ohkago Church on a pilgrimage to “protect Ohkago Church” because of its significant contribution in the Christian Church history of Japan. Fr. Paul (Sendai Church) and Fr. Takahashi (Mizusawa Church) spearheaded the pilgrimage.

District 5

On February 11, a Children’s pilgrimage was held at Hirose River Martyr’s ground. There were about 40 children and adults who joined the event. From Mototerakoji Church, they walked all the way to Hirose River. While walking, they were praying and chanting. It was a grace-filled event led by Fr. Ferdy.



News from the Disaster Area

- **Kamaishi**

From the Great East Japan Earthquake until now, the Kamaishi Church experience can be expressed in 3 words, Opening up, Fellowship and Daily life.

Opening up

Because the church became the center of Caritas Base activities, the awareness and sensitivity of the parishioners towards others has opened up and widened. Also, the understanding on both sides deepened through the exchanges among the believers and the staff of Caritas base.

Cooperation

Volunteer activities are in full swing. In the opening of the church hall, there were several church events that facilitated the warm exchanges in the community like the Christmas celebration and Easter Events. The young and old, the survivors of the disaster, the staff, everyone joined together in one table and deepened their fellowship.



Daily Life

In the salon, the users come regularly. There are less volunteers coming and the atmosphere of the city is more relaxed. And for the last couple of years, I thought that the usual “everyday” life came back. Instead of the volunteers, there are many young Vietnamese coming. They come to pray frequently and they also actively participate in reading during the mass and altar servers. Kamaishi church has a new way of living the daily life with joy.

- **Watari Church**

Watari church is a small church affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. Watari church became a center for support activities. In April 2015, the Franciscan Missionary of Mary (FMM) established a convent near the church to reach out to the people nearby. The survivors around the area has already moved to their newly build relocation area and all the temporary houses were closed. The “Olive Group” that Yagiyama church organized has moved to the church, where they have gathered 135 times in a year. The Watari church has been renovated and we strive to become a “church where people gather”. The relationship between the “Watari Catholic Nursery” and the church, which started after the disaster, has been deepened. For the past 6 years, the living environment in the disaster area has improved. New infrastructures have been restored, new residences have been erected, etc. However, the scar of the human heart is still needs to be healed. The church will continue to be the place where people seeking salvation will gather and she will continue to support the people morally.

- **Haranomachi**

March 11, 2011, Friday, I was a survivor of the earthquake. The people who attended the mass before the disaster happened were about 10 to 15 people. The church was about 8 kilometers from the sea and about 24 kilometers from the nuclear power plant. There was no fatality or damage from the church, but you cannot use the church.

When the nuclear power plant exploded, the parishioners from Futaba area evacuated quickly. Those of us who live in Minamisoma city moved to other evacuation centers, which drastically decreased the members of the community.

We gained hope when Fr. Umezu was assigned in Haramachi Church and Fr. Kariura from Nagoya Diocese followed him. Today, with the presence of Bishop Koda, our life has been stabilized, especially with the regular Mass and more volunteers are engaging in the rehabilitation and construction of the community. The relationship in the church has strengthened. I am still grateful to the many people who have helped us overcome the challenges.

Although we are back to our normal life after 8 years, I still feel the pain and suffering that we went through whenever we celebrate the March 11 tragedy. And, I think we should never forget those who passed away, especially those who lived

nearby the nuclear power plant. I am afraid that the incident has not ended and I think that it should not happen to anyone again.

- **Iwaki**

Looking back on the fishery for the passed 8 years since the great east earthquake



On the day of the earthquake and tsunami, the fishermen were about to finish fishing and were in a hurry to dock their boat and listened to the tsunami warning. The fishermen were upset with the shipment of their catch.

Fisheries in Fukushima are performing small-scale operations and are conducting trial operations aimed at securing distribution and evaluation at shipping destinations. Therefore, the amount of shipment is small. If you go to the local fish store, the sale of local fishes has disappeared. The earthquake disaster has affected fishermen and brokers as well. They tried to work together in trying to restore the fishing industry with new organizational concept and idea.

However, when life and feelings stabilized due to reparations, what was initially a huge problem has broken down into pieces. I look back on this moment, whenever I encounter various problems related to the restoration and reconstruction of fishing industry, every time I face various problems related to fishery, I will just sit down and listen to God while I am living. Perhaps it has not been understood until now that time has elapsed what had been built up so hard.

- **Ofunato**

It is a new year. Every time I welcome a new year, I have the habit of counting the good things that happened. I lived in Ichinoseki's temporary housing for 5 years. Last November 2016, I moved into the city's housing relocation area. The municipal housing apartment is the last temporary housing in Ofunato. It can be said that the commercial area was also consolidated around the same vicinity. And the living conditions has improved.

It seems that 80% of the port construction has been completed. According to the population statistics of Mori District Community, among the 14 places of Sakari including the 3 areas where survivors of tsunami reside, 51.4% are over 60 years old. Although, they are aging they are working enthusiastically.

Catholic Sendai Diocese "Act on Protecting the Rights of Children and Women" Activity Report

The day of prayers and reparations for sexual abuse victims set by Pope Francis on the 2nd Sunday of Lent (March 22, 2019). The "Committee to protect child and women's rights" was established in Sendai diocese on December 6, 2016 in an effort to prevent unfortunate events that are becoming an obstacle of the church all over the world. There are six members of the committee plus one priest and Bishop Hiraga. The members have a mandate of 2 years and meets regularly once a month. A consultation desk has been opened every Tuesday and Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at this telephone number 090-5187-4959. Last March 18, we attended a lecture by Ms. Masayo Takenoshita (Women's Counseling Kyoto) at Mototerakoji Church. The meeting was held jointly with the Central Assembly "Desk for Children and Women's Rights Protection". On July 21, a joint workshop with "desk for Sapporo diocese harassment" was held at Mototerakoji church. This year we will talk about dialogue with the LGBT community and collaborate with the Catholic Central Council's desk and other parishes to address similar issues and concerns. According to the word of Jesus "Matthew 25:40" that "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."

Foreign Language Mass Schedule

**English mass in Mototerakoji church, Sendai is every third Sunday of the month at 2:00 p.m.
If there are any changes, please check this website.**

<http://st.cat-v.ne.jp/catholic-sendai/oshirase.html>

**There is no regular schedule for other foreign language masses in Mototerakoji Church.
Please check this website.**

<http://st.cat-v.ne.jp/catholic-sendai/oshirase.html>

English mass in Shike church, Morioka is every last Sunday of the month at 11:00 a.m.

Tagalog mass in Ichinoseki Church is every third Saturday of the month at 2:00 p.m.