

DIOCESE OF SENDAI

GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE NEWS

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On Top of Unprecedented Disaster, a Nuclear Accident

Friday, March 11, 2:46 pm, 9.0 magnitude earthquake causes tsunami. Though there are 13,000 dead, 15,000 missing, 130,000 evacuees and 100,000 who have lost their homes and possessions, there is little news from the affected areas. The diocese cannot contact Catholics, churches or institutions. The Fukushima Dai-Ichi nuclear power plant sustains major damage in the tsunami, causing radioactive leaks. In many areas there is little information available from the media. The North Sendai Church immediately opens a soup kitchen that stays in operation throughout the month. At the time of the quake, meetings are taking place at the Sendai Cathedral. While snow falls the next day, Fr. Andre Lachapelle tries to return to his parish at Shiogama, but dies en route. That day the scope of the tragedy begins to become clearer.

Monday, March 14. As telephone service is gradually restored, bit by bit the extent of the damage becomes known. Even so, in the Sanriku district the damage is so complete that communication with the area is still impossible.



Motoderakoji Church in Sendai houses Sendai Diocese Support Center office.



Evacuation center in Ishinomaki. Conditions differ from place to place.



Volunteers at Shiogama Church Base.



Volunteers clean a house in Ishinomaki.



Representatives of Tokyo's Shinsei Kaikan at opening of Kamaishi Base.



Volunteers appreciate presence of Sisters.

A Chronicle of Relief Work

Wednesday, March 16. Meeting to set up Sendai Diocese Support Center. In attendance are Bishop Tetsuo Hiraga of Sendai, Bishop Isao Kikuchi, (director of Caritas Japan), Bishop Daiji Tani of Saitama, Sendai diocesan chancellor Fr. Shiro Komatsu, Fr. Daisuke Narui (executive director of Caritas Japan) and Sawako Inae (Caritas Japan staff). Bishop Hiraga is appointed director of the Support Center with Fr. Komatsu as his assistant. Fr. Narui becomes the Center coordinator. The committee decides that initially the Center will operate from March 16 to Sept. 15.

Thursday, March 17. Sendai Diocese Support Center begins operations. It is decided that there will be three "pillars" of the Center's activities: recruiting and organizing volunteers from around the country, securing temporary evacuation centers and providing food, clothing, fuel and other needs for those affected by the disaster.

Monday, March 21. Shiogama Base opens, begins relief work.

Thursday, March 24. Ishinomaki Base opens, begins relief work.

Sunday, March 27. Caritas Japan starts blog to publicize its activities.

Saturday, April 2. Kamaishi Base opens, begins relief work.

Thursday, April 7, 11:32 pm, magnitude 7.4 aftershock. Further damage results, including cutting off of newly-restored water and electricity supply.

Saturday, April 9. Sisters' Relay begins. Sisters from around Japan begin to come in relays to assist operations. Number of volunteers registered at the Support Center reaches 307, with 227 having actually served.

Sunday, April 4. Archbishop Alberto Bottari de Castello, apostolic nuncio to Japan, visits Sendai. Because of damage to the cathedral, he celebrates outdoor Mass, visits Shiogama Base.

A Month's Progress

Tuesday, April 12. Sapporo Diocese opens base in Miyako, Iwate Prefecture.

Saturday, April 16. Number of registered volunteers reaches 411, of whom 305 have actually served so far. Though there have been 40 requests for temporary housing, only one case finally accepts it. Desire to live near their old homes deters others from moving.

Monday, April 18. Number of volunteers exceeds 500.

Friday, April 22. Number of registered volunteers reaches 656, of whom 478 have served.

Sunday, April 24. Tokyo Archdiocese sets up Catholic Tokyo Volunteer Center with Bishop Kazuo Koda in charge. Osaka Archdiocese starts "Enjo Project" to support Sendai Diocese Support Center. Shiogama Base begins operations in Shichigahama. Ishinomaki Base moves volunteer quarters to new location. Kamaishi Base begins "Heart Care" service staffed by volunteer counselors. Distribution of relief supplies begins in Minami Sanriku district. Ipponsugi Church in Sendai is asked to handle storage, etc. of relief supplies.



↑ Fr. Narui explains situation to Archbishop Bottari de Castello.



↑ Salesian seminarians came as volunteers.



← Priests from Fukuoka Diocese in Kyushu came as volunteers. Volunteers have come from all over the country. Words do not suffice to express our gratitude. Thank you.