

Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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Catholic Sendai Diocese

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Rejoicing in the Nativity of our Lord



Bishop Edgar Gacutan

I extend to you the joy of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. This year marks my third Christmas season in Sendai as its bishop. The liturgical season of Christmas begins with the vigil Masses on Christmas Eve and concludes with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. During this season, we celebrate Christ's birth in our world and hearts. The joy of Christmas endures in our daily lives—it is truly a joy for all seasons.

We will welcome the year 2025 as a Holy Year. The Holy Year finds its roots in Isaiah 61:1-2, where the prophet proclaimed the "year of the Lord's favor." Jesus Christ read this passage in the synagogue at the beginning of His ministry (Luke 4:16-21). The year of the Lord's favor recalls the "year of Jubilee" described in Leviticus 25. Jubilee, observed every 50 years, was when debts were forgiven, slaves were freed, and lost lands were restored. It symbolized a new beginning for God's people—a profound expression of God's mercy, meant to renew and restore society.

Jesus came to fulfill the essence of the Jubilee. He embraced Isaiah's words as His own, proclaiming freedom from the power of sin and inviting us into a renewed

relationship with God. The salvation brought through Christ's birth gives us the grace to live freely as beloved children of God. Yet, daily, we often find ourselves burdened by jealousy (arising from comparisons with others), anxiety about the future, and a desire for wealth or power. Jesus frees us from the slavery of sin and offers us a new way of life through His life, death, and resurrection.

In response to this grace, let us deepen our thanksgiving and prayer in our daily lives. While we cannot take extended holidays simply because it is a Jubilee Year, we can still experience the Lord's love through regular participation in the Eucharist on Sundays, the day of rest. Let us also share the grace we receive from the Lord by fostering love and forgiveness in our homes and communities. By living each day with a grateful heart and fully embracing the grace of the Lord's Nativity, we can truly embody the meaning of the Holy Year.

I pray that each of us may bear witness to the glory of God through lives that manifest His love and forgiveness. May this Nativity be a time of abundant grace for all of us.

Bishop Edgar Gacutan's Letter for the Jubilee Year 2025

In a letter dated October 28, 2024, Bishop Gacutan invites the faithful of the Sendai Diocese to celebrate the 2025 Jubilee Year, declared by Pope Francis, as a time of grace and renewal. The opening Mass will be held on December 29, 2024, at Mototerakoji Cathedral. He emphasizes life as a pilgrimage, encouraging regular Sunday Mass attendance for spiritual nourishment. Seven pilgrimage

sites, including churches and martyrdom locations, have been designated for prayer, reflection, and receiving God's mercy through indulgences. Acts of charity and penance, such as helping the needy, are integral to this journey. Bishop Gacutan invites all to encounter Jesus and embrace hope in this sacred year.

Archdiocese of Gwangju and Diocese of Sendai Forge Sister Diocese Partnership



From November 11-14, 2024, the 26th Japan-Korea Bishops' Exchange Meeting was held in Gwangju, South Korea. Following this, priests from the Diocese of Sendai and the Archdiocese of Gwangju met. On November 20, a sister diocese relationship was officially established between the two dioceses, led by Bishop Ok Hyun-jin and Bishop Edgar Gacutan.

Fr. Ignacio Martinez

Honoring 75 Years of the Missionary Society of Guadalupe



The 75th anniversary of the Missionary Society of Guadalupe was celebrated in Mexico City, with around 7,000 attendees, including bishops and priests. The society, founded in 1949 by the Mexican episcopate, aimed to spread the gospel. The first missionaries were trained at a seminary that has since expanded into a large university. The anniversary included a symposium discussing 75 years of missionary work, with reflections on future formation. The society's first overseas mission was to Japan, specifically the Diocese of Sendai, in 1956. Despite challenges like the cold climate, priests from the society have faithfully served in Sendai and other dioceses, contributing to deepening faith and evangelization efforts. Currently, four priests from the society serve in the Diocese of Sendai. The event highlighted the ongoing mission and dedication of the society, which has also sent priests to dioceses in Tokyo and Kyoto.

Fr. Yoichi Onodera

One Heart, One Mind: Building a Community Beyond Borders



International Mass

On September 29, 2019, over 400 people attended the World Day of Migrants and Refugees at Sendai's Cathedral Mototerakoji Church. Bishop Gacutan presided over an International Mass with multilingual prayers, promoting unity. A vibrant cultural exchange of music and dance followed, celebrating diversity and fostering global solidarity.

2024 Annual National Training Workshop of the Japan Catholic Committee for Refugees and Migrants (J-CaRM) in Sendai



The J-CaRM National Training Workshop, held September 29–30, 2024, at Motomachi Church, focused on migrant support and integration. Bishops Shinzo Moriyama opened the event, followed by Ms. Lee Sun-hee's lecture on migrant coexistence in post-earthquake Tohoku and Ms. Motoko Yamagishi's discussion of the "Revised Immigration Control Law." Bishop Gacutan Edgar emphasized unity and Christ's love for migrants. Reports on September 30 included presentations by Sister Nguyen Thi Ba Chi Mai and Fr. Nguyen Cao Tri on the Vietnamese community, Ms. Julie Fecteau on the ISJ International Chorus, Ms. Clarita Sanchez on community rebuilding, and Fr. Ignacio Martínez and Keiko Watanabe on the multinational liturgical committee. The event ended with a panel discussion featuring Bishops Yamanochi, Moriyama, and Gacutan.

Diocesan Update

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Bishop Tetsuo Hiraga's Priesthood Ordination: Mass on September 8, 2024, 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time



On September 8, 2024, a Mass at Sendai Diocese Cathedral celebrated the 50th anniversary of Bishop Tetsuo Hiraga's priesthood. The Mass, attended by

Bishop Edgar Gacutan, Bishop Hiraga, Fr. Ignacio Martinez, and Fr. Charles Aime Bolduc, began with a greeting from Bishop Gacutan, expressing gratitude for Bishop Hiraga's 50 years of service, including 16 years as Bishop of Sendai. Fr. Ignacio's homily reflected on Bishop Hiraga's journey, highlighting his contributions to the church and his leadership. He encouraged the community to reflect on their values, emphasizing unity in Christ's love and the importance of living according to the Gospel.

Farewell Mass for Fr. Aime at Mototerakoji Church on the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 13, 2024



Fr. Charles Aime Bolduc, a missionary with the Quebec Foreign Mission Society, celebrated his farewell Mass at Mototerakoji Church on

October 13, 2024, marking the end of his 54 years of service in Japan. Joined by Fr. Kentaro Takagi, Fr. Aime reflected on his journey, emphasizing the importance of sharing wisdom, righteousness, and compassion, as highlighted in the Mass readings. He spoke of his lifelong commitment to serving others, including baptisms, weddings, and hospital visits, and expressed gratitude for the support he received. Father Eme also encouraged the community to "walk together" in faith and prayer, leaving a legacy of care and connection.

Approaching Interpersonal Relationships and Emotional Support in Missionary Pastoral Care

On March 1, 2024, the Catholic Church in Japan observed the "Day of Prayer and Atonement for Victims of Sexual Abuse." Bishop Gacutan celebrated Mass and introduced the Catholic Sendai Diocese Declaration, outlining measures like a consultation desk, annual prayer promotion, and training. In August, Yoshihiro Haraguchi led a session on healthy relationships, emotional

support, and harassment prevention, emphasizing boundaries, respectful language, and mental health care in priestly formation and leadership development.

Missionary Pastoral Council Meeting Reflections on a Year of Synodal Journey: Guided by 'Conversations in the Spirit' and the Fruits of Our Shared Experience



On September 23, 2024, the Missionary Pastoral Council held its annual meeting at Sendai Cathedral. Bishop Edgar Gacutan, along with priests, district leaders, and lay representatives, gathered for a "word liturgy" and discussed the mission and pastoral work in the diocese. Bishop Koda spoke on the Church's historical journey, emphasizing the synodal path. Fr. Yu Chongpil discussed guidelines for parish evangelization, stressing creativity and adaptability in responding to modern challenges. Sr. Akiyama led a "conversation in the Spirit" session. Bishop Koda highlighted the importance of communication and community, urging parishes to foster unity and engagement. The meeting concluded with prayers and blessings.

Diocesan Activities

Fostering Community and Belonging: My Journey in the Sendai Diocese Migrant Ministry



Since 2014, my work with migrants in the Sendai Diocese has focused on fostering inclusivity and connection. Initially supporting Filipino

earthquake survivors, I collaborated with Fr. Gacutan Edgar to transform the Migrant Support Center into a pastoral care hub. Our efforts expanded to include community-building, multilingual worship, education, and social support. Today, Filipino leaders in Fukushima are preparing to extend this mission, addressing challenges like language barriers and Japan's aging society, while fostering welcoming, compassionate communities.

Clarita Sanchez, Lay Missionary

Catholic Early Childhood Educators and Staff Training Conference in Iwate Prefecture

On July 27, 30 staff members from eight Catholic kindergartens and daycare centers in Iwate gathered for

training. Sessions emphasized the importance of religious education, faith-based teaching challenges, and general educators' role in upholding Catholic identity. Bishop Gacutan reflected on God's unconditional love and Pope Francis's call for synodality, inspiring collaboration, and a renewed commitment to Catholic education.

Masako Takahashi

Director of Morioka Shirayuri Gakuen Kindergarten

First Training Session of the Miyagi Prefecture Catholic Early Childhood Education Federation

On August 19, 2024, the first Miyagi Prefecture Catholic Early Childhood Education Federation Training Session occurred at Sendai Garden Palace, with 121 teachers from 13 Catholic kindergartens and six childcare centers. Fr. Hiroshi Katayanagi delivered a moving lecture on conveying God's love, drawing from his experience with Mother Teresa. He shared powerful stories of acceptance and love, inspiring teachers to approach children and parents compassionately. The session also emphasized the importance of prayer for children's emotional growth. The day concluded with Mass, reminding

parents compassionately. The session also emphasized the importance of prayer for children's emotional growth. The day concluded with Mass, reminding participants of their mission to reflect God's love in their work.

Kaori Sato
 Chairperson of the Miyagi Prefecture Catholic Kindergarten Association
 (Tohoku Catholic School Corporation
 Shiogama Catholic Kindergarten)

Lecture by Mari Ikeda at the 12th 'Life' Study Session



The 12th "Life" Study Session, held on November 17, featured Mari Ikeda, who shared her personal experiences of faith in pre- and post-war Japan.

She spoke about historical events at Motoderakoji Church and emphasized the importance of passing on the faith. Ikeda's story and insights, especially about daily Mass, inspired attendees.

Sr. Masako Hasegawa
 (Public Relations Committee Member, Sendai Diocese)

16th Tohoku Seminar Held: A Gathering of Insight and Reflection

The 16th Tohoku Seminar, held on September 19-20, 2024, at Mototerakouji Church, gathered 16 Catholic school teachers from five Tohoku prefectures. Established by Bishop Osamu Mizobe, the seminar nurtures teachers in Catholic schools. Lectures included one by Chikako Hagiwara, focusing on God's use of the weak and small.

Sr. Masako Hasegawa
 (Public Relations Committee Member, Sendai Diocese)

District News

District #1

Aomori/Shimokita Bloc / Hirosaki Bloc
 Reunion at Yogoshiyama Onsen: 2024 'Joint Mass and Fellowship' Celebration



On September 29, 2024, the Aomori/Shimokita and Hirosaki Blocs hosted the "Joint Mass and Fellowship" at Yogoshiyama Park, bringing together 140 participants. The event featured a Mass led by Fathers Shiro Komatsu and Seok Lee, prayers for peace, and community fellowship, followed by lunch, hot springs, and recreational activities.

Matsuda Dai (Namiuchi Church)

Aomori/Shimokita Bloc / Ominato Church
 70th Anniversary of the Dedication: A Mass of Thanksgiving



Omoto Church celebrated its 70th anniversary on October 19, 2024, marking the founding of the church in May 1954 by Frs. Armand Boaveur and Lucien

Bolliu. The anniversary Mass, co-celebrated by Bishop Gacutan, Emeritus Bishop Hiraga, Fr. Aime, and Fr. Lee, was attended by 57 participants. A booklet with congratulatory messages was shared, and the church community reflected on Matthew 18:19-20.

Masae Nagatoshi (Ominato Church)

District #5

Nakadori Kita Bloc
 A New Vision and Mission Have Been Established



On June 2, Fr. Matthias Antonio led the Nakadori Kita Bloc (District 5) in establishing a new vision and mission with representatives from Matsukicho, Nodamachi, and Nihonmatsu Churches, as well as the Congregation of Notre Dame and the Little Sisters of Jesus. The vision is to "walk together toward an open Church of salvation." The 2024 mission focuses on holding study sessions to build a strong foundation of faith, particularly through liturgy. Nodachi and Matsukicho Churches have been holding monthly study sessions, and Nodachi Church is preparing as the pilgrimage church for the upcoming Holy Year.

Yuko Watanabe (Nodamachi Church)

Nakadori Minami Bloc / Koriyama Church
 Sunday Mass and Sacred Music Concert

On Sunday, October 6, two events were held at Catholic



Koriyama Church. Bishop Gacutan celebrated the Sunday Mass, expressing joy for the ongoing church building construction and emphasizing the

community's unity. After Mass, the Koto concert "Grace of Music" featured performances by the Koto Tomo Kai, including pieces like "Rokudan no Chō" and "Hanasaki Yama." The concert, blending traditional Japanese music and biblical themes, was appreciated by the diverse parish community. The day concluded with a fellowship meeting, and the bishop praised the performers, hoping for future performances at the completed church.

Chiyoko Yoshida (Koriyama Church)