

# Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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Catholic Sendai Diocese

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## Christmas Message of Bishop Edgar Gacutan



## Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace among those whom he favors!

With those words, we sing our joy at Christmas Mass, offer praise as if we are united with the angels, and give thanks for peace. Our brothers and sisters, however, who live in towns and countries that are in conflict, such as Gaza, the regions around Gaza, including Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and Ukraine, cannot share with us the joy of Christmas. Let us join them in praying for peace on their land.

Bethlehem was not a battlefield when Jesus was born, but it seems that uprisings and violence were a daily occurrence in those days. According to the Gospel of Matthew, King Herod, after hearing a prophecy that a child would be king, had every single boy in Bethlehem and the surrounding area under the age of two killed. He feared that the infant Jesus was the one who would become king (2:1-18). It was a close call for Jesus.

God enters into our violence-filled human history, which seems to have no place for the Divine. Jesus, born in a stable, is the true glory and power of God. God answers darkness through a child born of ordinary parents in a war-torn country. God chooses this path to show His love and enters a world full of suffering.

The headlines of many newspapers on November 16 were about the military attack at Al-Shifa Hospital in the Gaza Strip, which was condemned by the Director-General of the World Health Organization. If you Google "hospitals are not battlefields," you will find dozens of articles supporting or criticizing the director-general's comments.

With so much tragic and dark news, it is hard to find a story that shines a light. After some searching, I found the voice of a woman living in Gaza. These are her words:

"We are weary of the darkness of ideology in this land where the Lord has illuminated the world with His glorious resurrection. We are tired of discrimination in this land where Christ came to unite the children of Abraham. Can we still throw off our cloaks, run to Jesus, and hear His words? We can do that when we reach out with greetings and words of hope and life. When we join with our Muslim neighbors in prayer and plead with Allah to save us from this catastrophe, our hearts weep for the victims, whatever their background. When we use our veils not to hide my fear but to wipe the ugly face of humanity."

They are beautiful words, one may say, but only a few people might share the thoughts of this woman. God does not force us into friendship through imposition. In the person of Jesus, God became weak to change us from the inside out, to heal us from sin and division, and to guide us to everlasting life. God's thoughts begin with small actions, started by a few people. Let's be grateful to a couple of people, or three, who think like Christ, speak like Christ, and act like Christ in whatever situation they are in. They are the answer to our plea that, as the glory of God is in heaven, so may peace dwell on earth. May peace begin with us.

Bishop Edgar Gacutan

## Formation Course for New Bishops 2023

From September 4 to 13, recently ordained bishops from around the world met in Rome to take part in the "Formation Course for New Bishops." The tradition started in 2000 by Saint Pope John Paul II.

I had the opportunity, along with Archbishop Nakamura of Nagasaki and Bishop Moriyama of Oita, to attend the course organized by the Dicastery for Evangelization. This was held at Saint Paul's College, a place where priests from mission countries reside while studying in Rome.

There were 110 bishops who participated, predominantly from African countries as well as from Asia-Pacific and Central and South America. It was a chance to meet bishops from other mission countries and to be introduced to the various dicasteries (departments) that make up the Roman Curia.

There was a significant amount of input during the course. Each day we listened to talks from either the head or secretary of a Secretariat or Dicastery, such as the Secretariat of State, Dicastery for Evangelization, Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Dicastery for the Clergy, Dicastery for Culture and Education, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Dicastery for Legislative Texts, or from a priest specializing in management crises or another topic.

We had a chance after each talk to ask any questions that arose from what was presented. It was particularly interesting to meet with the General Secretary of the Secretariat overseeing the Synod on Synodality and to hear of the progress made and the vision that lies behind this.



We met with Pope Francis on September 7, just three days after he came back from his apostolic visit to Mongolia. He listened to those who wished to ask any questions or make any statements. He replied to them with great enthusiasm and energy. It was inspiring to see a man so passionate for the gospel and the church.

We also had the opportunity to have a reflection day at Castel Gandolfo, the summer residence of the Holy Father.

I found the time together with the other bishops helpful to talk about what we were all experiencing. The opportunity to pray together and reflect was very fruitful. The course reminded me that the church is so much bigger than just our diocese, that we face many challenges, but also that there are wonderful opportunities for deepening our faith and learning from one another. I pray that I'll be able to put this knowledge into action.

Bishop Edgar Gacutan

## Diocese News Update

### Presbyteral Council Report

The eleven members of the Presbyteral Council meet regularly every month. The agenda items that were discussed in the recent meeting are the following:

- Reports from each pastoral district
- Pastoral issues that confront the migrants
- Collaboration of 3 dioceses (Sapporo, Niigata, and Sendai) to provide Vietnamese online preparation seminars for marriage (3 months) and for baptism (1 year)
- Preparation of the Sendai Diocese report for the visit of the Japanese bishops in Rome next year
- Preparation of the 400th anniversary of the Hirose River Martyrdom in 2024

### Pastoral Council Report

The regular annual meeting of the Sendai Diocese Pastoral Mission Council for 2023 was held on September 23rd. It was attended by the following members:

- The Bishop, the Vicar General, the Diocesan Secretary, and the Synod Team Animator
- The five priests who are in charge of each pastoral district



- Two lay representatives from each pastoral district
- The pastoral director of the migrant ministry
- Two representatives of Caritas
- The President of the Japan Catholic Women's Federation
- The representative of the Sendai Catholic Medical Association

The discussion of the meeting revolves around the synod's theme of "Communion, Participation, and Mission," particularly how to respond to and address the call and challenges presented by the synod on synodality.

### Two Archbishops from Gwangju Diocese, Korea

Since 1996, the bishops of Japan and Korea have deepened their friendship through exchange meetings held alternately in Japan and Korea. This year's Japan-Korea Bishops' Exchange Meeting was





held in Tokyo from November 13 to 16, followed by the visit of the two archbishops of the Gwangju Archdiocese to Sendai from November 16 to 19. The two bishops visited the badly hit area of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the holy place for martyrs in Tohoku Region. The visit culminated with a concelebrated mass presided over by four bishops at the cathedral.

### **"The 9th Japan-Korea Peace Pilgrimage" Optional Tour to Sendai in 2023**

The 9th Japan-Korea Nuclear Weapons Free Peace Pilgrimage, co-hosted by the Japan Catholic Conference for Justice and Peace and the Ecology and Environment Committee of the Korean Catholic Bishops' Conference, was held from October 13 to 17 in Sendai, Japan. They have visited the nuclear



power plants in Fukui Prefecture and Fukushima Prefecture.

### **Network Meeting(NWM) in Sendai, 2023**

The "Network Meeting (NWM) in Sendai" was held from November 3 to 4, and about 60 youth, priests, and religious from all over Japan gathered at Mototerakoji Church. NWM is a biannual youth gathering held in each parish on a rotating basis with the motto "exchange of information and communication."



## **News from the Districts**

### **District #1**



The steering committee of Pastoral Council District 1 met at Honcho Church in Aomori on September 9. Bishop Gacutan and all the priests and lay representatives shared about their initiatives in responding to the call of the synod, which is "Communion, Participation, and Mission."

### **Sampachi Block**

After 3 years of recess due to the pandemic, the summer camp for the children of the Sampachi Block was held on August 11 at Hachinohe during the week of prayer for peace.



A joint confirmation ceremony for 21 people from the various parishes of Sampachi Block was held at Hachinohe Shiocho Church on October 22. There were 200 people speaking different languages in the church. The Catholic Church, which is divided into liturgies of different languages, seemed to be seeing a future where it would come together as one, just like what happened at Pentecost.

### **District #2**

On October 8, there were 140 faithful from District 2 gathered at Yotsuya Church in Morioka. It was the third



such gathering since the introduction of the district system. Bishop Gacutan presided over the Mass and gave the sacrament of confirmation to five people.

### **District #4 The Cathedral Block**



On the day of prayer for migrants and refugees (September 24th), an international mass and an intercultural encounter were held at Mototerakoji Church.

On October 1st, an infant baptism ceremony was celebrated for five babies.



On October 15, the church bazaar was held for the first time in four years. The theme was "Communion, Participation, and Mission." At long last, the church seemed to have returned to a place where people of all ages, genders, and races were smiling. The bazaar was an enjoyable event that deepened communion.

There were 140 people attending an open-air mass at the Tsurugaya Catholic Cemetery on November 3.





On November 12, Fr. Tetsuro Watanabe, SJ, celebrated his first mass at Mototerakoji Church and blessed 15 children. Fr. Watanabe was baptized at Yagiyama Church. He was ordained a priest on September 23 in Tokyo.

## District #5

### Nakadori Kita Block

Two international gatherings took place at Nodamachi Church during the summer (August 10 and September 10). The thirty people



who participated were from different nationalities: Japanese, Filipino, and Vietnamese. The meeting started with a time of prayer in the church, followed by a barbeque party and a time of sharing food from each country. After the meal, funny games gave us the possibility to enjoy an intercultural atmosphere.

### Hamadori Block



On September 30, volunteers of Caritas Michinoku met at Haranomachi Church for Taize Prayer. Prayers for the victims of the great East Japan earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown were offered like they usually do every month.

## Priest Introduction

### Henri Badibanga Chipota, CICM



Birthday: September 16, 1975  
Birth Place: Democratic Republic of Congo  
Diaconate: November 15, 2008, Kurashiki Church  
Priestly Ordination: August 23, 2019, Kanaga, Congo

#### What motivated you to become a priest?

I wanted to become a priest because I admired our Parish Priest who was a Salesian priest. The place where I was born was part of the Salesian mission. Although Salesian priests and parish priests currently work together, Salesian priests are well known. The current bishop is also a Salesian. When I was a child, every week after children's mass, each child would receive a ticket to watch a movie in the church hall in the afternoon. Sometimes, when I wanted to see a movie, I would go to the Catholic Church with my two brothers and a friend. The priest I admired was a Salesian priest. However, one day when I moved to Kananga, I met a priest from CICM who was a passionate missionary, and I was drawn to his charm and decided to join CICM Congregation. When I told my parents, they were a little disappointed, but my father said, "If that is your calling, go ahead. If it's not, feel free to come home anytime." Thanks to my family and all the people I have met on the path of vocation. I have come this far because of you.

#### What do you want to do as a priest and missionary?

I wonder how it feels to work in Sendai Diocese. As a missionary, I want to be a witness to the Lord Jesus to all the people I encounter. Isn't it?

However, right now, above all else, I would like to prioritize spending time with the Lord Jesus Christ. To discover the face of the Lord Jesus Christ through the priests and sisters who work with us and the congregation, and to spend time with the Lord Jesus Christ. So, I am not too worried about the cold weather in Hachinohe City, although I have heard that it is very severe. This is because we are able to live in peace in the warmth of the hearts of the bishop, priests, sisters, and believers of the Diocese of Sendai, who are walking the path of faith together, not alone, but toward the promised land. I think it can be done.

#### Is there anything else you want to say?

I received the grace of baptism at the age of 13. Before I was baptized, my mother was a Protestant, and my sister, two brothers, and I attended a Protestant church together. At that time, my father was a Catholic and my mother was a Protestant. As children, we were not yet baptized and our parents gave us the freedom to choose Catholicism or Protestantism. So, I was baptized at the age of 13. My mother converted to Catholicism when my sister and I received Baptism and First Communion. After that, my younger brother was also baptized, and my youngest brother was baptized as an infant. My two older brothers had already been baptized in the Catholic Church, so they have been going to the Catholic Church. God the Father calls us to be His children in each hour, as stated in Matthew 20:1-16 (Parable of the Vineyard). Some people are baptized in the morning (infant baptism), some at noon (adult baptism), some in the afternoon (adult baptism), and some in the evening (at the end of life or at the end of life). To be a child of God takes time and it is different for each person.

*May your mercy, Lord, be upon us: as we put our hope in you. (Psalm 33:22)*