

# Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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Catholic Sendai Diocese

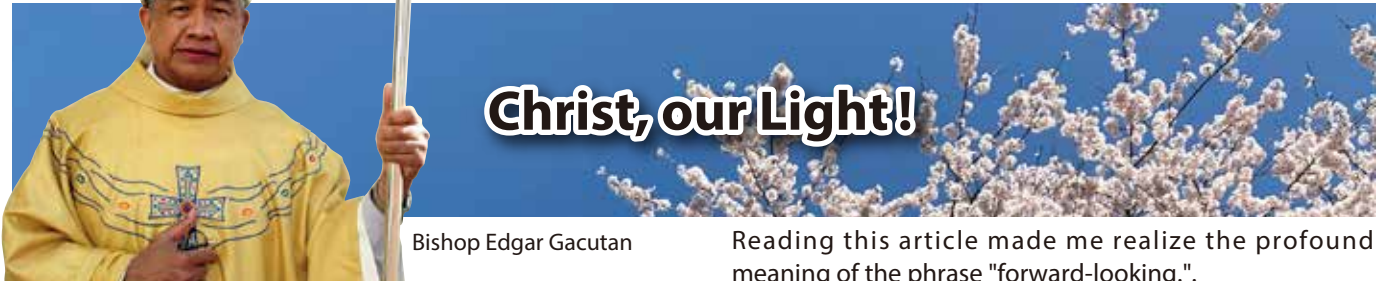
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Bishop Edgar Gacutan

## Christ, our Light!

With the start of the fiscal year, all of us have taken a new step forward, like entering school, moving up to a new grade, joining a company, taking on new duties at a company or business, retiring from work, or seeing off a relative to start a new way of life. Receiving the grace of baptism during the Easter Vigil or during the Mass of Easter Sunday is truly a new start. One is born again.

Easter is the highlight of Holy Week. What we rejoice in and celebrate through Easter is that the Lord Jesus Christ has conquered death, not only for Himself but for all of us. "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold, the place where they laid him" (Mark 16:6).

He has been raised; he is not in the tomb. Such is the message we receive in and through the Easter liturgy. The tragic death of the Lord Jesus did not end in the tomb.

The Lord Jesus rose to live with us. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus shows us the way of life. While we are in this world, we suffer its pains (such as wars), pain in our families due to separation and financial problems, or pain in our hearts caused by difficult relationships. But we are not afraid of the situation before us, which is like a dark tunnel. We walk on because we rely on the light that Jesus casts on our path.

A newspaper I subscribe to, Mainichi Shimbun, had on its March 25, 2024, issue an article entitled "Acknowledging Individuality for Happiness," which introduced a 36-year-old TV personality who has Down syndrome. He works as a contract employee for an IT company in Tokyo and does TV and radio talent shows on the side. He obtained his driver's license when he was 20 years old. He says, "I passed the practical test on the first try, but I failed the written test 54 times and finally passed it on the 55th try." Kenta says he sees his disability as "individuality" and would like to be called "a nice person with a disability." The article appeals for support for people who have Down syndrome and who have no family or relatives. "I want to tell more people that there is a man with Down syndrome who lives his life in such a forward-looking manner," said Kenta's older brother. This brother has a YouTube channel called "Down Up" to spread understanding of Down syndrome and to introduce the activities of his younger brother, Kenta.

Reading this article made me realize the profound meaning of the phrase "forward-looking."

As it does every year, the Japan Catholic Newspaper introduced catechumens who were to receive the grace of baptism at this year's Easter Vigil. I read the six series of articles and was moved by the faith testimonies of the two women and four men that the newspaper had featured. Each one spoke of how their faith in the resurrected Jesus had led them to an inner peace and made them realize how life is stronger than death, love is stronger than fear, and hope is stronger than despair. I was struck by their description of their faith journey. Through their reading of the Bible, they encountered Jesus: "I felt familiarity with the person of Jesus." "I learned that Jesus was not a fictional character but a human being born into the world like himself." Then they experienced the presence of Jesus in their lives: "Jesus changed the way I have been living." "Jesus changed me."

A 53-year-old male catechumen described God's guidance in this way: "I had been taking on everything on my own and had been trying to do everything on my own, but I came to know that there's a way of life that entrusts my being to someone beyond myself." His experience of this strength beyond oneself is what we call "grace." The grace of God makes us begin a spiritual life by believing in the resurrected Jesus. Thus, we are born anew.

God gives us faith. Of course, we are thankful for people who have guided us on the path of faith. Having companions along this path is part of God's grace. Faith gives us courage and perseverance and makes us move forward in the face of despair. A 53-year-old catechumen wondered why her husband could be so calm and had never shown any sign of distraught since he was told of his terminal disease. She found the answer in her husband's oft-repeated statement: "Don't worry, God is with me." A 52-year-old male catechumen described his faith journey thus: "I have seen the dark side of humanity and have been led to believe."

When a loved one becomes ill or unemployed, or when we experience personal loss, God gives us the strength to get through it. Relying on the Holy Spirit to lead us, let us proceed with the assurance that the Lord Jesus is constantly present, providing illumination for our path. Thanks be to God.

## Presbyteral Assembly Living Out Synodality: Learning by doing



Last year, a gathering of priests from the Sendai Diocese took place on November 27th and 28th at the Akiu Resort Hotel Crescent. Guest lecturer Momoko Nishimura led the event. She is a member of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. She was selected as one of the nine alternate chairs of the Synod's Assembly and played an active role. The theme was "Living Out Synodality: Learning by Doing." The participants learned about the difference between dialogue and conversation. The synodal experience was emphasized, with the participants practicing "conversations in the spirit." The event was organized not in a usual classroom-style setting but with five round tables and groups of five people. The participants were divided into age, experience, and nationality groups. The purpose of the synod was to practice living out synod and reflect on and share their experiences.

Fr. Ignacio Martinez (Chancellor)

## Participating in the "Synod of Japan"



The Synod of Japan was held on March 7 and 8. It was attended by 68 participants from various dioceses to discuss the church's direction and aims. The participants were divided into six groups and presented their thoughts. The most important thing was "listening in prayer" (discernment) and accepting differing opinions. The first day's theme was "Synodality: Experience and Hierarchy." The themes on the second day were: "Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation," "People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey," "The Church of Every Tribe, Language, Ethnicity, and Nation," "The Church in Mission," "Women in Church Life and Mission," and "Toward a Listening and Accompanying Church." The gathering brought hope and courage to walk together despite challenges and problems.

Sr. Ryoko Akiyama (St. Ursula's Sisters)

## Feast of the Sendai Christian Martyrs Mass and Prayer Gathering to Commemorate the 400th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Hirose River



The 400th anniversary of the Hirose River Martyrdom in Sendai City, Japan, was celebrated with a Holy Mass and a Memorial Service for Fr. Carvalho and eight other Christians who were martyred in 1624. Catholic churches in Sendai city prepared for the "Feast of Sendai Christian Martyrdom," which took place on February 23. The Mass was attended by over 300 participants, including pilgrims from Tokyo and other dioceses. A 30-minute film, "The Flame of Love and Fervor," depicted the martyrs' state and their faith. Bishop Edgar Gacutan, Bishop Emeritus Tetsuo Hiraga, Vicar General Yoichi Onodera, Chancellor Ignacio Martinez, and 10 priests concelebrated the mass. After the memorial mass, about 200 people moved to Sendai Nishi Park, where Bishop Gacutan gave a message to bear witness to Jesus Christ's teachings like martyrs did.

## Memorial Mass for the Victims and Survivors of the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake Learning Compassion from the Triple Disasters



At 2:30 p.m. on March 11, the day the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, over 80 people gathered to pray silently, and at the 46th minute, the bell of the Sendai Diocese Cathedral rang, and after a moment of silence, a mass was held in memory of the victims and survivors. Thirteen years have passed since the "triple disaster" struck Japan in 1995. After the earthquake, many people voluntarily went to the disaster area to offer their help to the victims. In his homily, Bishop Edgar Gacutan said that the gospel passage can be seen as a reflection of our everyday relationships and the importance of helping those in need.

## Day of Prayer and Reparation for Victims of Sexual Abuse Mass and Proclamation

In 2016, Pope Francis announced to the world's bishops' conferences of the need to establish a day of prayer to remind church members of their responsibility for the sexual abuse of children, and Japan has designated the second Friday of Lent as that day. On March 1, the second Friday of Lent this year, the "Day of Prayer and Reparation for Victims of Sexual Abuse" Mass was celebrated at Mototerakoji Church, Sendai at 10:00 a.m. with Bishop Edgar Gacutan as main celebrant and Vicar General Yoichi Onodera, Chancellor Ignacio Martinez, Fr. Hiroshi Sasaki and Father Masashi Takahashi as co-presiders.



At the end of the Mass, Bishop Gacutan announced the "Catholic Sendai Diocese Declaration on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Violence, and Harassment."

## District News Update

### From District #2

#### Morioka Block/Morioka Kamido Church

#### Morioka Area Ecumenical Prayer Meeting in 2024



The Ecumenical Prayer Service, held for the first time in four years since 2020, took place at Yotsuya Church on January 20th (Saturday) at 1:30 p.m. The event was attended by 53 participants from 13 churches from both

Catholic and Protestant Churches. The Ecumenical Prayer Service strengthened the bonds between the participants and the churches.

Atsumi Sato (Morioka Kamido Church)

#### Miyagi Northern Block/Furukawa Church

#### Pontifical Mass of Bishop Edgar Gacutan in multilingual



On March 3rd, Furukawa Church hosted an international mass with Bishop Edgar Gacutan, Fr. Masashi Takahashi, and Fr. Tadanori Kawasaki. The Bishop officiated the mass in Japanese, English, and Tagalog. The readings were read

in Taiwanese, English, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. Furukawa Church has been using both English and Japanese for communication since February, with Father Raphael's approval.

Jina Ogawa, Yuki Shimizu, Kiyochika Sakurai  
(Furukawa Church)

### From District #4

#### Cathedral Block/Moterakoji Church

#### Disaster Prevention Drills

Earthquakes are common, and Mototerakoji Church has prepared a disaster prevention drills. On February 25th,

everyone evacuated after Sunday Mass, assuming an earthquake had occurred. The church serves as a support system and a family, emphasizing the importance of daily disaster prevention for safe evacuations.

Tsuyoshi Seki (Moterakoji Church)

### From District #5

#### Nakadori North Block

#### Nodamachi Church, and Matsukicho Church

#### Support activities for immigrants



Two Catholic churches in Fukushima City, Nodamachi and Matsukicho, have partnered for over three years to support those affected by the pandemic and those

with disabilities. They provide food, clothing, pastoral counseling, medicine, and scholarships to over 90 people in 35 households. They also collaborate with the Fukushima City Multicultural Center and the government.

Mizuho Komada (Matsukicho Church)

#### Little Sisters of Jesus of Charles de Foucault

#### Memorial Mass for Saint Charles de Foucault



On December 1st, a memorial mass for St. Charles de Foucault's death anniversary was held at the Little Sisters of Charles de Foucault chapel. Bishop Edgar Gacutan, Fr. Osamu Sato, and Fr. Aime

Bolduc concelebrated the service, which included readings from the Book of Wisdom and John 15:9-17. The event was attended by 9 participants from Koriyama and 1 from Nihonmatsu, who were touched to witness the spirit of Charles de Foucault being lived out by the sisters.

Chiyoiko Yoshida (Koriyama Church)

## Diocesan Update

### 11th (2024) Light of Life 3.15 Fukushima “What Fukushima has carried and continues to convey”



This year, the event was held in 2 days on March 15th and 16th, focusing on the 13th anniversary of the nuclear accident. The event began with a Holy Mass at Catholic Haramachi Church in Minamisoma City, Fukushima Prefecture, which was concelebrated by Bishop Kazuo Koda, Fr. Ignacio Martinez, and Fr. Nozomi Shiota. Bishop Edgar Gacutan was the main celebrant. Then, a local fisherman, Haruo Ono, a plaintiff in a lawsuit against the release of treated water, spoke about his ideas on the need for sustainable fishing practices.

On the second day, the event moved to Cathedral Mototerakoji Church for a lecture on environmental pollution from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident. Fukushima University instructor Ms. Tsugiko Takase covered the topic, emphasizing the importance of local opinions and desires that the government must listen and consider. The event attracted 90 people, with the Diocese of Sendai being a victim of the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power plant accident. Light of Life 3/15 Fukushima Executive Committee believes that the event should be an important place for prayer, learning, and reflection on life.

Noriko Kimoto (Kitasendai Church)

### The 11th "Life" Study Group Session The Church Walking Together with Migrants: The importance of connection The current situation of the Vietnamese in Japan



The 11th "Inochi" Study Group, organized by the Sendai Council for Catholic Justice and Peace, held at Mototerakoji Church on February 4th. The theme was "The Church Walking Together with Migrants: The Importance of Connection" and "The Current Situation of the Presence of Vietnamese People." Around 100 participants attended the sharing of Sr. Maria Nguyen Tay Bach Mai, who serves the Vietnamese people in the Diocese of Sendai. She said that most of the Vietnamese are technical interns or students. She shared about the struggles, hopes and joys the Vietnamese experienced and how their faith and spirituality were nurtured in the Catholic Church. After the lecture, participants shared their experiences and suggestions for helping the Vietnamese people.

Sr. Masako Hasegawa  
(Diocesan Public Relations Committee member)

### From Father Kentaro Takagi Study Abroad Experience in the Philippines



Fr. Kentaro Takagi has been studying English at St. Louis University in Baguio City, Philippines, for more than half a year, which is a special class for foreigners, with six students.

Fr. Takagi has also begun a new challenge in C.I.C.M. community life, learning about Filipino culture, mentality, and liturgy. He stayed at Bishop Edgar Gacutan's home in Enrile, Cagayan Province and experienced the life of a Filipino family. Fr. Takagi was grateful for the opportunity to experience Filipino culture and celebrate Christmas and New Year with Bishop Gacutan's family in the Philippines.

## Introduction of Priest

### Fr. Nozomi Shiota (Little Brothers of Jesus of Charles de Foucault)



Date of birth: September 18, 1947

Birthplace: Echigo-machi  
(Saitama Prefecture)

Deaconate: Tsuruga Church  
(Fukui Prefecture)

Ordination: November 3, 1989 Ordained  
by Bishop Nobuo Soma at  
Akatsukino-mura  
(Maebashi City, Gunma  
Prefecture)

On January 15, 1973, Fr. Shiota joined as a brother in The Little Brothers of Jesus of Charles De Foucault congregation in Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture. I never had any intention of becoming a priest. But, when I returned to Japan after my theological studies in France, Fr. Andre and Brother Gui encouraged me to become a priest. After a long discernment process, I said yes and I was ordained in 1989.

I think I got my vocation as a religious from my father who was a Pastor. Last year, Bishop Edgar Gacutan of Sendai Diocese assigned me to Mizusawa Church in August.