

Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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Catholic Sendai Diocese

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Let us follow the Spirit

Bishop Edgar Gacutan

On May 19, during the Mass of the Solemnity of Pentecost at the Mototera Cathedral, Bishop Edgar Gacutan administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to 11 brothers and sisters. The First Reading was read in Vietnamese by a Vietnamese woman, the Second Reading in Japanese by a Japanese woman, and the Gospel was read by Father Ignacio in Japanese. The general intercessions were offered in different languages. After the Communion Prayer, 14 young Vietnamese men and women danced with a bouquet in their hands as they sang a prayer. Below is a summary of Bishop Gacutan's homily.

The Feast of Pentecost mentioned in the First Reading (Acts 2.1–11) is celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Jewish Passover. It is a festival celebrating wheat harvest, one of the so-called Seven Species commonly produced in Israel, which included wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. (Deuteronomy 8:8) In time, this celebration of the wheat harvest also commemorated a foundational event in the history of the Jewish people. That event was the Covenant made between God and the people at Mount Sinai after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. At Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks (seven weeks), the Jewish people commemorate and renew their covenant with God, who gave them the commandments. "Remember that you too were slaves in Egypt, so carry out these statutes carefully." (Deuteronomy 16:12)

The seven weeks that coincide with the first half of spring are pollen season. It is also hay fever season as cedar pollen fills the air. Without pollen, we would not have fruits to harvest in the summer and autumn. During spring, flowers bloom, pollination occurs, and it is as if the climate's dryness, heat, cold, and strong winds are fighting against each other. This natural occurrence is an act of God. Thanks to it, the harvest season arrives. Seen this way, the meaning of Pentecost, which is an expression of gratitude to God for the fruits of the earth, is understood by all humans.

We have seven lighted red candles put up around the Easter candle. Written respectively on each of them are "Wisdom," "Understanding," "Counsel," "Fortitude," "Knowledge," "Piety," and "Fear of God." These seven candles represent what is known as the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that the gifts of the Holy Spirit "are permanent dispositions that make us docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit." (#1830)

From the Second Reading, Saint Paul's letter to the church in Galatia (5.16–25), we heard these words: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,



generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." As a way of analogy, just as delicious cakes or sweets are made from wheat and figs, so do love or joy come from the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

As we are baptized, the meaning of the teachings of Jesus Christ will become more and more clear to us as we live our lives as believers. The Holy Spirit gives us a deeper understanding of Jesus' teachings and suggests how we should live his words.

Brothers and sisters who are to receive the sacrament of confirmation will join us gathered here today in professing the Apostles Creed. We are a community united with God, the people of the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit, so to speak, sets the sails of the church and keeps it cruising like a ship. The Spirit of God is expressed in various words, such as breath, wind, and fire. No single translation can adequately describe the abundant work of the Holy Spirit. The unseen hand of God (working like climate elements such as heat, cold, storms, rain, and sunshine) makes our lives fruitful. Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle Paul exhorts: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit." (Gal 5:25)

After the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem from several countries wondered: "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language?" Understanding God's work in one's own language reminds us of the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel. The tower that was being built was a symbol of human skill and pride. The people, moreover, wanted to create a single language. Their effort is tantamount to idolatry and folly. The forceful creation of one language is a manifestation of a relationship between ruler and subject. What happened at Pentecost is the opposite of the efforts of the people of Babel. The disciples said, in their own words, that Jesus Christ is the Savior, and the people heard them in their native language. We, too, need to listen to the language of others. For example, the Thanksgiving prayer of our

Vietnamese brothers and sisters after Communion is expressed in body language called dance. Members of our community speak different languages. Let us ask for the gift to understand them.

Our brothers and sisters who will receive the sacrament of confirmation will be anointed with Chrism (perfumed oil). We believers emit the fragrance of Christ through our love, joy, peace, etc. We are weak people. Many things will happen to us from now on. We make mistakes or fall

on our journey. As we read in today's gospel (John 15.26–27, 16.12–15), Jesus promised to send us the Advocate from the Father. The word "advocate" can also be translated as "companion," "helper," "comforter," or "cheerleader. That is to say that the Holy Spirit is always standing by us. When we are down and we want to pray, but words fail to come out of our lips, saying "Come, Holy Spirit" is prayer enough.

Diocese News

My First Ad Limina Bishop Edgar Gacutan

Canon Law mandates that every five years, a diocesan bishop must report to the Supreme Pontiff on the state of their diocese. This obligation is known as *ad limina*, or "to the thresholds of the apostles," Peter and Paul, who were martyred in Rome. The 17 bishops of Japan made their first ad limina visit from April 4 to 13, due to COVID-19 and other factors.



The Sendai Diocese report consisted of three major parts: a general introduction of the situation of the diocese from 2015 to 2022, a report of the committees and subcommittees, and prospects for the diocese. The contents of the report were presented to the priests of the Sendai Diocese in Japanese on two occasions at the monthly meetings.

During the first four days of the *ad limina*, the bishops and accompanying priests visited dicasteries and other offices of the Apostolic See, being welcomed by their respective Cardinal Prefects, their Secretaries, and staff members. The highlight of the visit was their audience with Pope Francis on Friday morning, April 12, at one of the audience halls of the Papal Palace. The Pope's attitude of listening and dialogue and his inner joy were greatly appreciated.

Coming back from my first *ad limina*, I renew my commitment to my ministry to serve the Diocese of Sendai in a synodal way, that is, by walking and helping each other as we follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Recycling of Removed Soil Report at the Pastoral Gathering of the Diocese of Sendai on May 27 Bishop Koda Kazuo

The first "Gathering of Pastoral Ministers" meeting took place on May 27, with 24 participants, including Ms. Claire Sanchez, a lay missionary. The meeting focused on the issue of recycling soil from the decontamination of the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Decontamination work was carried out in Fukushima Prefecture to reduce

radiation levels after the 2011 nuclear accident. The government is considering recycling the removed soil with relatively low radiation levels, but the Nakadori district of Iitate Village in Fukushima Prefecture has been the hardest to decontaminate.



The idea that soil contaminated by the accident could be recycled only in Fukushima Prefecture seems absurd, but there is a risk that this could happen. The

same is true for the discharge of ALPS water into the sea in Fukushima Prefecture. The problem of radioactive contamination caused by the accident should not be solely placed on the people of Fukushima, but should be considered by everyone in Japan. The nuclear accident is not a thing of the past, but an ongoing event, and the mission of the speaker is to continue to be with the people of Fukushima.

The 50th General Meeting of the Federation of Catholic Women's Organizations in Japan and the 50th Anniversary Convention in Sendai

50 Years of Building and Building by Catholic Women in Japan



From May 7th to 8th, 150 women from various Japanese churches attended a two-day general meeting and formation session at the Cathedral of the Diocese of Sendai, Mototerakoji Church. The Japan Catholic Women's Organizations Federation (JFWF) held its board meeting and 50th general meeting, where President Abe Masako expressed gratitude to Bishop Gacutan Edgar, Bishop Yamanouchi Michiaki, two former presidents, and seven participants from the Korean women's group. The meeting approved the 2023 activity report, financial statement report, accounting audit report, and 2004 activity plan, and elected new officers. Representatives from member organizations federations gave lively reports on their activities, emphasizing the importance of women's participation in the Catholic Church.

Fr. Kentaro Takagi's Experience Studying English at St. Louis University (SLU) in Baguio City, Philippines



Fr. Takagi finished his English studies on May 31 at St. Louis University (SLU). He is currently staying at Maryhill School of Theology in Manila, a theological school established by CICM. He has made significant progress

in English proficiency. At the same time, he learned about the language and culture of his classmates from China and Mongolia and also some Tagalog words. His main goal is to improve in his English proficiency, which he has achieved through his daily conversations and watching English programs on TV. He was deeply grateful for the help of SLU professors, classmates, and priests.



One of his significant religious cultural experiences was the Holy Week. He experienced the reenactment of the passion of Christ by taking turn in carrying the cross up in the mountain.

He planned to return to Sendai Diocese after one year of English study and experience in the Philippines.

Thank you. Morioka Dominican Monastery

The Dominican Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary, located in Morioka City, has ended its 88-year history. The monastery, which was officially known as the "Dominican Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary," was a significant Catholic-related facility with over 130 years of history. Despite the closure, the monastery's name, "Dominican," has become familiar to the general public through pastries and trinkets made by Belgian nuns. The people are grateful for their prayers, and they hope for her health and continued prayers.

Mayama Shigehiro (Yotsuya Church)



The Dominican Convent of Our Lady of the Rosary, a religious community in Morioka, has completed its mission and is merging with the Dominican Convent of St. Joseph in Seto City, Aichi Prefecture. The convent, established in 1936 by six Belgian nuns, has faced challenges such as urbanization and deteriorating buildings. However, they have managed to raise cows, cultivate fields, bake cookies, and live a life of prayer. After 38 years on the lakeside, the congregation reflects on their humble and helpless steps, expressing gratitude to God and the support of their community. They believe that their fellowship will continue to live on, connected deep underground. They will remain in the Word of God. Now, they will depart as new wine! Thank you very much.

All the Sisters of the Dominican Convent of Our Lady of the Rosary,

April 2024

District Update

District # 3: Northern Miyagi Block/Furukawa Church Fr. Raphael Send off to Rome, Welcome to Fr. Miguel

We welcomed the arrival of Fr. Miguel Varela to Furukawa Church in April 1 while bid goodbye to Fr. Mejia Tadeo Raphael on Easter Sunday, who will go to Rome to study. It was not exactly a goodbye but a promise to meet again.



On Easter Sunday, Suzuki Osamu was baptized and confirmed at Furukawa Church for the first time in 10 years, and Fr. Rafael officiated his last mass before leaving for Rome.

Sakurai Kiyochika(Furukawa Church)

District #4: Cathedral Block/Mototerakoji Church Vietnamese mass and Marian procession



May is the month of Mary. On Sunday, May 26th, Trinity Sunday, Bishop Gacutan Edgar, Father Ignacio Martinez, Father Nguyen Cao Tri, Vietnamese pastoral minister for the Diocese of Sendai, and more than 100 people from the Sendai Vietnamese Community gathered in front of the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes and marched to the Cathedral singing "Ame no Kisaki" with the statue of Mary surrounded by flowers. Upon entering the Cathedral, Vietnamese young people performed a dance of thanksgiving, and all the participants offered flowers to the statue of Mary.

Seki Tsuyoshi (Mototerakoji Church)

Introduction of New Priests

Father Antonio Matias (Sch.P.)



- **Date of birth:** June 13, 1966
- **Country of birth:** Manila, Philippines
- **Deaconate:** 2005
- **Ordination:** February 11, 2006 (Yokkaichi Church, Kyoto Diocese)

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, Today, I would like to introduce myself. Perhaps some of you have already met me. But for those who have not you will get to know me better.

I'm Father Antonio Matias. As of April 1, 2024, I oversaw three churches in the Nakadori Kita Block of the 5th District: Nodamachi, Matsukicho, and Nihonmatsu. I was born and reared in the Philippines. Since childhood, I have aspired to be a teacher and studied psychology at the university. After searching for my vocation, I joined the Congregation of the Escolapios. After that, I studied philosophy and theology at a Jesuit university in the Philippines, and in 2001, while still a religious, I was assigned to Japan. At first, I was confused by the Japanese culture, language, and life, but I gained more and more trust in God, and with the support of many believers' prayers, I professed my lifelong vows and was ordained a deacon in 2005. On February 11, 2006, the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes, I was ordained a priest at Yokkaichi Church in the Diocese of Kyoto. After that, I completed my Master of Theology at Nanzan University and obtained a teaching license. The spirit of our Congregation of the Escolapios is to provide an educational environment for young people.

I worked for 16 years in the Japanese education system, mostly at our congregation's Kaisei Junior and Senior High School in Mie Prefecture. For ten years, I was also Yokkaichi Church's parish priest. After many years of service in the Kyoto Diocese, where I interacted with believers in Mie Prefecture, God has called me to this new location of missionary work in the Sendai Diocese. Despite being born in a tropical nation, I was unprepared for the intense snowfall that greeted me upon arriving in Fukushima City. However, among the snow, I discovered that each and every one of you was radiant with the light of your faith. Together with Bishop Gacutan Edgar, the priests, and the entire faithful, I wish to serve for the evangelization of the gospel in this site of Sendai, where the faith of the Sendai Christians was developed. Please pray for me to be able to be a servant of the Lord for you. In addition, I ask the Holy Spirit to provide me with plenty of direction as I travel with you all.

Dominic Nguyen Cao Tri (Sch.P.)



- **Date of birth:** July 17, 1977
- **Country of birth:** Vietnam
- **Deaconate:** August 11, 2012
- **Ordination:** February 3, 2013 Holy Trinity Church, Novaliches Parish (Philippines)

Reasons for becoming a priest and career

Born into a family of five. I have a brother who is also a parish priest in Vinh Long Parish. I aspired to become a priest to share the good news of Jesus with those who were not acquainted with Him. After graduating high school in 1997, I applied to the parish seminary and met Bishop Thomas Nguyen Van Thanh, who encouraged me to attend university. After passing the admission exam, I decided to join the Escolapios, joining the first batch with three other Vietnamese people. We arrived in the Philippines in 2003, but after three months, all three others left, leaving me alone.

The Escolapios charism emphasizes education, and I earned master's degrees in English, philosophy, and religion in the Philippines.

I was ordained as a priest in 2013, I worked with Don Jose International House from 2013 to 2014. In 2014, I traveled to Japan to study Japanese and spent a half-year as an associate priest at Tobe Church in Yokohama. Then, I moved to the Escolapios Monastery in Tokyo with other members and presided mass and led meditations for Vietnamese people in some parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Tokyo.

What I value as a priest

I've served as a priest for almost ten years. The language is what I find most challenging. But the fact that there are so many Vietnamese people in Japan and that I can celebrate mass for them makes me very pleased. However, the most distressing incident I've had so far was when a parish refused to let me celebrate mass in Vietnamese.

I am now delighted to be able to work at the Sendai Diocese. I currently work with the Vietnamese and celebrate mass as part of my pastoral duties. I wish to be able to celebrate mass at more parishes. One of my dreams is to open a Vietnamese activity center.

