

# Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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## Growing and Maturing in Our Faith

### New Year's Message of Bishop Edgar Gacutan

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I wish you a Happy New Year. May God pour out His abundant grace upon you, may you live each day in peace, and may God hear your prayers.

In his letter for the Holy Year 2025, Pope Francis wrote:

*Pilgrimage is, of course, a fundamental element of every Jubilee event. Setting out on a journey is traditionally associated with our human quest for meaning in life. A pilgrimage on foot is a great aid for rediscovering the value of silence, effort, and simplicity of life.*

I have designated seven pilgrimage destinations in our diocese. These are Hirosaki Church, Yotsuya Church, Yonekawa Church, Mototerakoji Church, Nodamachi Church, Okago Martyrdom Site and Hirose River Martyrdom Monument.

The Okago Martyrdom Site and the Hirose River Martyrdom Monument commemorate about 1,000 Christians who died for their faith in Tohoku during the Edo Period (1603-1867). Remembering our faith elders is part of our journey as Christians. Historian Edward Hallett Carr said: "History is a continuing dialogue between the present and the past." Indeed, prayer is for us a dialogue with God, the origin of history. Prayer moves us forward.

When we celebrate Mass, we recall the event to which we owe our existence as redeemed people: the death of

our Lord Jesus Christ. After the consecration, we say: "We proclaim your death, O Lord, and confess your resurrection, until you come." At the end of the Mass, we are sent to go and announce the Good News of the Lord. It is the same news we heard during the mass. We are a people who go forward.

In my 2024 New Year's Message, I compared our parishes to a field and invited you to talk about how we take care of each other in our parish communities. Having heard your answers and desires, from your representatives and pastors, I ask that during this year we exert effort in understanding more deeply our liturgy or how we worship.

There is a basic teaching that our Church has always followed. The teaching says that "the law of prayer is the law of faith and the law of life." The teaching means that our prayers express our beliefs and at the same time, our prayers form our beliefs. In other words, how we worship guides us in how we live our Christian faith and fulfill our Christian mission in the world by manifesting the continuing presence of the Risen Jesus Christ.

Let us know the meaning of our liturgy and prepare well our worship and prayers. Priests and pastoral workers who speak your language will meet with you more frequently so you can talk about the contents of our Catholic prayers and forms of our worship.

In the 12th Chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, we read the following words:

*'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us<sup>2</sup> while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader, and perfecter of faith.*

When I read those words, I imagine an athletic stadium filled with cheering fans. Those who are on the upper seats seem to be standing in the clouds. The "clouds of witnesses" are generations of believers, including the Edo Martyrs, who cheer for us as we persevere through all challenges as we grow and mature in our faith.

We are free to practice our religion in Japan, but I know what trials some of you face in this country. Walk on with faith in your heart, as one song puts it.

"Hope does not disappoint." That's the theme of the Holy Year. It comes from the Letter of Paul to the Romans 5:5:

*and hope does not disappoint,  
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

I hope to walk, pray, and converse with you as I do my pilgrimage to the designated pilgrimage destinations of our diocese during the Holy Year.

Your Fellow Pilgrim,  
Bishop Gacutan Edgar

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## Opening of the ORDINARY JUBILEE OF THE YEAR 2025: "Hope Does Not Disappoint"



On May 9, 2024, the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, Pope Francis issued the papal bull *Spes Non Confundit* ("Hope Does Not Disappoint"), officially proclaiming the 2025 Jubilee Year. In the Sendai Diocese, the Holy Year began with a solemn Mass on December 29, 2024, the Feast of the Holy Family, celebrated by Bishop Edgar Gacutan.

The Rite of the Opening of the Jubilee Year was held at the square in front of the Cathedral and started with the singing of the Jubilee Hymn. The bishop's invitation included these words: "This rite is for us the prelude to a rich experience of grace and mercy; we are ready always to respond to whoever asks the reason for the hope that is in us." After the reading of a gospel passage and an excerpt from "Hope Does Not Disappoint", the pilgrimage procession to the cathedral followed.

### **Bishop Gacutan's Homily (Gospel: Luke 2:41-52 The Loss and Finding of Jesus in the Temple)**

In his homily, Bishop Gacutan reflected on the Gospel passage where 12-year-old Jesus remains in the temple, causing worry for His parents. He highlighted two key themes: the significance of beginnings and the faith journey.

Bishop Gacutan reiterated the meaning of a word used during the opening rite before the mass: prelude. The word means not only "beginning", but also "foreknowledge". The first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke are a prelude to the whole gospel story. In those chapters, Mary received a foreknowledge or premonition of the mission of her son Jesus. The exchange between Mary and Jesus in the Gospel -where Mary anxiously asks why he remained behind- shows her limited understanding at the time. However, the phrase "I must be" in Jesus' response told her that her Son had to be

obedient to God's plan, a theme that reappears in Luke 9;22, when Jesus foretells his mission.

Although Mary did not fully grasp the meaning of these events immediately, she "treasured all these things in her heart," a reminder that understanding often comes with time and experience. Bishop Gacutan emphasized that we too have enough experience that foretells us (assures us) that God is faithful to us. He also emphasized that the life of Jesus with his parents before his ministry prepared him for his mission. His life with his parents and townspeople taught him their hopes and dreams.

### **Life as a Pilgrimage: A Journey of Faith**

Bishop Gacutan likened life to a pilgrimage, echoing Pope Francis' message that Mary is the greatest witness of hope. She endured suffering—most notably at the cross—but never lost trust in God. Simeon's prophecy at Jesus' presentation in the temple (Luke 2:34-35) foretold both the impact of Christ's mission and the deep sorrow Mary would endure.

The homily also highlighted the Holy Family's annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover, a journey that required time and sacrifice. In today's fast-paced world, time is often viewed through an economic lens, but Pope Francis reminds us that pilgrimage helps us slow down, reflect, and rediscover what truly matters.

The Pope's *Spes Non Confundit* emphasizes that life itself is a pilgrimage, requiring moments of rest and renewal. He calls on Christians to participate in Sunday Mass, where the Eucharist nourishes the body and soul. Bishop Gacutan encouraged the faithful to embrace this Jubilee Year as an opportunity to deepen their faith, recognizing the importance of hope, rest, and spiritual renewal.

As the Church embarks on this Holy Year, believers are invited to walk as "Pilgrims of Hope," embracing the grace, mercy, and meaning in their faith journey.

Father Ignacio Martínez  
Sendai Diocese Chancellor



## Jubilee Door of Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral (Mototerakoji)

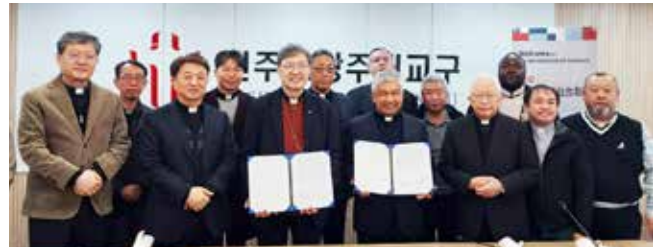
• Decorated with a photograph of the Holy Door of Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, the two middle panels of the six-panel entrance of the cathedral serve as “Pilgrims of Hope Door” during the Jubilee Year.

• Before entering the Door, one passes through an arch decorated with Eucharistic symbols. The framed “Letter for the Jubilee Year” of Bishop Edgar Gacutan in Japanese, Vietnamese and English are hung on the left side of the arch.

Father Ignacio Martínez  
Sendai Diocese Chancellor

## The Archdiocese of Gwangju and the Diocese of Sendai Form a Sister Diocese Relationship

The Diocese of Sendai and the Archdiocese of Gwangju in South Korea have become sister dioceses, a bond rooted in the friendship of Bishop Emeritus Tetsuo Hiraga and Archbishop Emeritus Hyginus Kim Hee-jung. This relationship deepened through exchange meetings of Gwangju and Sendai priests and the sending of Fr. Lee Seok to Sendai. In November 2023, Archbishop Emeritus Andreas Choi Chang-mou and Archbishop Simon Ok Hyun-jin visited Sendai, leading to further collaboration. In November 2024, the bishops of Japan and Korea held their annual exchange meeting in Gwangju. After the bishops meeting, a number of priests of Gwangju and Sendai and their current and emeriti bishops held an exchange meeting in Gwangju, which culminated in the signing of the sister diocese agreement. Both dioceses share a commitment to promoting exchanges between priests and laity, mutual prayers, and solidarity. Following



a tragic accident at Muan International Airport, Bishop Gacutan sent condolences to Archbishop Simon Ok Hyun-jin, emphasizing unity in prayer. According to its latest report, Archdiocese of Gwangju has a population of 366,882 Catholics. Its first parish was erected in Mokpo by the Missionaries of the Paris Foreign Missions Society in 1897.

Father Ignacio Martínez  
Sendai Diocese Chancellor

## “To Protect All Life”

— We, Who Could Become Perpetrators of Violence (Harassment, Sexual Violence, etc.) —

On October 28, 2024, the “**Gathering of Pastoral Workers of the Sendai Diocese**” focused on the theme “**To Protect All Life**”. Ms. Fumiko Kiyonaga led a session covering the Church’s response to violence, types of violence, the potential for secondary victimization, and protecting vulnerable individuals. Participants were reminded that violence affects everyone, and reflecting

on their role as potential perpetrators was essential. They learned the importance of listening and providing support for victims. The event included group discussions and reflections, emphasizing that **violence is a collective issue** and that **true listening is key to offering support**.

Father Ignacio Martínez  
Sendai Diocese Chancellor

## News from the District

### From the First District

Aomori - Shimokita Bloc /

Honmachi Church, Namiuchi Church

#### Advent Meditation

We will receive talks from each priest (gifts from God) and share them with gratitude.

① Fr. Patrick

December 1, 2024 (Sunday) at Namiuchi Church

Theme: “Rediscovery of Faith.”

“Go, your faith has saved you” (Mark 10:48).

Faith is the certainty of what we hope for and the assurance of what we do not see. Like the children in the



First Communion study group or the faith declaration from the Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki shop owner, we experience, accept, and live out faith.

Bartimaeus is a powerful example of this faith. We continue to nurture the fire of faith through personal and communal prayers and Masses (Leviticus 6:5). Jesus reignites this fire of faith and hope through His coming—His birth, which represents infinite love (Luke 12:49).

② Fr. Komatsu

December 8, 2024 (Sunday) at Honmachi Church

Theme: “Peace.”

The Savior’s peace is not just the absence of war but the acceptance of diversity. The gospel does not impose patience or uphold hierarchy but encourages giving—leveling mountains and filling valleys. Use and enhance your talents to help others. Heaven does not create people above or below one another (Fukuzawa Yukichi).



Matsuda Dai (Namiuchi Church)

## From the Second District

Iwate Chūbu Bloc / Hanamaki Church

### Celebration of the Completion of the Renovation of Hanamaki Church

On December 22, 2024, the parish of Hanamaki celebrated the completion of the renovation of its church with a Mass presided by Bishop Edgar Gacutan and concelebrated by Fr. Marco de la Rosa and Fr. Tadanori Kawasaki. 50 parishioners, including representatives from seven parishes of the Second District, participated. Young Vietnamese parishioners decorated the church and hall for the celebration. After the Mass, everyone gathered at the hall for a thanksgiving ceremony and lunch. Hanamaki parish, erected in 1955, will celebrate its 70th anniversary in 2025. Parishioners hope that the number of their community will grow.



Masashi Odashiro,

President of Hanamaki Church Parish Pastoral Council

## From the Third District

Miyagi Hokubu Bloc / Furukawa Church

### Advent Retreat



On December 1, 2024, the first joint retreat between Ishinomaki Church and Furukawa Church took place at Furukawa Church. The retreat began with Mass at 10:30 AM, led by Father Miguel Varela, followed by Eucharistic Adoration and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Participants reflected silently on Bible passages. After lunch, Father Miguel gave a talk, and the retreat concluded. Thirty-eight participants deepened their understanding of repentance and Advent, concluding with a warm and joyful atmosphere.

Yuki Shimizu (Furukawa Church)

## From the Fourth District

Cathedral Bloc / Mototerakouji Church

### Advent Prayer Gathering & Illumination Lighting Ceremony

On November 30th, 200 people gathered at Mototerakouji Church for the Advent Prayer Gathering and Illumination Lighting Ceremony. The event included lighting the church's illumination and unveiling a Holy Mother and Child tarpaulin. The ceremony began with the hymn "Let Heaven Drop Dew," followed by a liturgy led by Bishop Gacutan Edgar and priests Ignacio Martinez and Kentaro Takagi.

This year's event was enhanced by performances from local school choirs, creating a joyful gathering of prayer to celebrate the Lord's birth.

Tsuyoshi Seki

(Mototerakouji Church)



## From the Fifth District

Nakadori Kita Bloc / Nodamachi Church

### Jubilee Mass of District 5



The District 5 Jubilee Mass was celebrated on January 4 at Nodamachi Church, presided over by Bishop Edgar Gacutan, with several priests concelebrating. As the Sendai Diocese pilgrimage church, Nodamachi Church welcomed pilgrims with Holy Year decorations and commemorative bookmarks. An exhibition, "The Life of Jesus Christ," featuring 16 paintings by Norihiro Suzuki, was displayed for meditation. From May, a special prayer space with Marian statues and images will be prepared.

Yuko Watanabe (Nodamachi Church)

## 2024 Sendai-Shiogama Area Women's League Retreat: Reflecting on the Synod 2021-2024



On November 19, 2024, around 90 members of the Sendai-Sendai Area Women's Union gathered at the Grand Cathedral of Motodera Shrine Church for a retreat focused on reflecting on the Synod 2021-2024. The event began with prayer and rosary beads, followed by greetings and a talk led by Bishop Kazuo Koda. The Synod, which spanned from 2021 to 2024, focused on the theme "Walking Together: Communion, Participation, Mission" and sought input from Catholics worldwide, despite disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Synod's final document identified five key areas: conversion through the Holy Spirit, urging the Church to

embrace transformation and unity; transformation of relationships, emphasizing inclusivity and healing trust within the Church; transformation of processes, encouraging discernment, accountability, and decision-making rooted in prayer; transformation of bonds, addressing the changing dynamics of relationships, especially with younger generations more connected via social media; and formation of the people, stressing the need to involve youth, children, and vocations in the Church's mission.

The Synod marked a fresh starting point for the Church, emphasizing ongoing participation, inclusivity, and collaboration. As the Church faces challenges like aging populations and social divisions, the Synod calls for continuous transformation, urging all members to walk together in mission.