

Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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Catholic Sendai Diocese

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On the Occasion of the Election of Pope Leo XIV

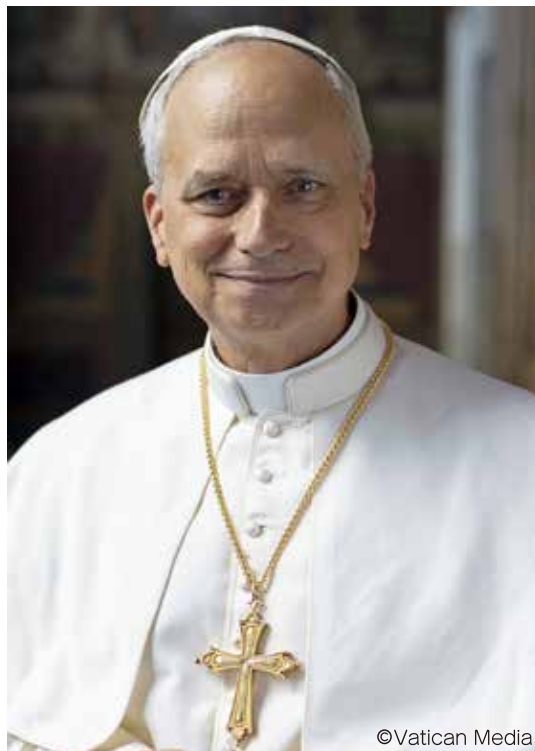
On the evening of May 8, we, the College of 133 Cardinals, gathered in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, elected our brother, Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, as the 267th Pope of the Catholic Church in the fourth ballot of the conclave that began the evening of May 7.

In front of the College of Cardinals, he accepted the result of the election in response to the question posed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vice Dean of the College of Cardinals. He declared that he would take the name "Leo." Thus, Pope Leo XIV was born.

Pope Leo XIV is a member of the Order of St. Augustine and has become the first Pope from the United States. With his experience as Prior General of the Augustinian Order, his rich missionary experience in Peru, and his service as a diocesan bishop there, he is a Pope deeply familiar with the realities of evangelization. Most recently, he served as Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops in the Vatican and is also well-versed in the role of bishops. In this sense, the Church has seen the birth of a strong shepherd, with deep knowledge and experience in both pastoral care and ecclesial governance.

In the days leading up to the conclave, following the passing of Pope Francis, general congregations of the College of Cardinals were held every day (except Sundays and May 1). Nearly 180 cardinals attended each session, including me and Cardinal Maeda from Japan. Almost every participant was allowed to speak.

Throughout these meetings, words of gratitude were repeatedly expressed for Pope Francis's extraordinary spirituality, decisiveness, and capacity for action. At the same time, there was a strong emphasis on the need to continue along the path he laid. However, the College of



Leo P.P. XIV

Cardinals held deeply in their hearts the understanding that they were not searching for a successor to Pope Francis, but rather seeking the successor to the Apostle Peter.

What the Cardinals prayerfully sought was not a second Pope Francis, but the successor of Peter—one who the Lord has entrusted to guide His Church faithfully. Many cardinals emphasized the importance of unity within the Church—unity that respects diversity while maintaining a clear faith.

What path Pope Leo XIV will take in his pastoral leadership is yet unknown. He may choose a different path from Pope Francis, or he may carry on many of his initiatives. Within this complex

reality of the Church, let us daily pray that the successor of Peter be richly blessed, protected, and guided by the Holy Spirit.

In his first words from St. Peter's Square, Pope Leo XIV spoke of the importance of establishing the peace of Christ. He emphasized the value of dialogue and encounter, and the importance of walking together. It was Pope Leo XIII who, in 1891, issued the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which laid the foundation for modern Catholic social teaching. The choice of the name "Leo" suggests that the new Pope holds a deep commitment to the Church's engagement with society.

Let us walk together, listening closely to the voice of the Holy Father. I also humbly ask for your prayers for the College of Cardinals, as we support and walk alongside the new Pope.

May 9, 2025

Cardinal Isao Kikuchi

President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan

Archbishop, Archdiocese of Tokyo

Brief Biography of Pope Leo XIV (267th Pope)



- **September 14, 1955** – Born in Chicago, Illinois, USA
- **1977** – Entered the novitiate of the Order of St. Augustine, Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel, in St. Louis
- **June 19, 1982** – Ordained a priest
- **1984** – Sent to Piura, Peru, for missionary work in Chulucanas after obtaining a teaching qualification

• **1988** – Assigned to missionary work in Trujillo as head of a joint formation project for Augustinian candidates in Chulucanas, Iquitos, and the Apostolic Vicariate of Apurímac

◦ (1988–1992) – Local superior of the community

◦ (1988–1998) – Director of formation

◦ (1992–1998) – Teacher for those preparing to take vows

◦ (1989–1998) – Judicial vicar in the Archdiocese of Trujillo

◦ Taught Canon Law, Patristics, and Ethics at “San Carlos y San Marcelo” Major Seminary

- **1999** – Appointed Prior Provincial of the Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel in Chicago
- **2001** – Elected Prior General of the Augustinian Order at its General Chapter
- **2007** – Re-elected as Prior General
- **2013** – Returned to the Chicago province as a teacher and vicar for religious in formation
- **November 3, 2014** – Appointed Apostolic Administrator of Chiclayo (Peru) by Pope Francis
- **December 12, 2014** – Consecrated as bishop
- **September 26, 2015** – Appointed Bishop of Chiclayo
- **March 2018** – Elected Second Vice President of the Peruvian Bishops' Conference
- **2019** – Appointed to the Congregation for the Clergy
- **2020** – Appointed to the Congregation for Bishops
- **April 5, 2020** – Appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Callao
- **January 30, 2023** – Appointed Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America
- **September 30, 2023** – Created Cardinal by Pope Francis
- **May 8, 2025** – Elected as the new pope

Pope Leo XIV's Coat of Arms



The **coat of arms** features a **silver lily on a blue background** (symbolizing the Virgin Mary) and a **flaming heart pierced by an arrow on white** (the emblem of the Augustinian Order). These are placed on a red shield atop a closed book, symbolizing the transformative power of God's Word.

Above the shield is a **silver bishop's mitre**, decorated with gold bands and a red lining with golden crosses and tassels. In front are the **crossed keys of St. Peter**, one gold and one silver, tied with a red cord.

The **motto**, **"IN ILLO UNO UNUM"** (We are one in Him [Christ]), emphasizes unity in Christ.

The symbols reflect themes of **holiness, purity, transformation, and unity**, drawing especially from Marian and Augustinian traditions.

Memorial Mass for Pope Francis



A memorial Mass for Pope Francis, who passed away on April 21, was held on April 28 by the Sendai Diocese.

Over 250 attendees gathered at the Cathedral Church, with Bishop Edgar Gacutan presiding and numerous clergy present. Pope Francis' peaceful passing

shortly after Easter shocked many, especially after reports of improved health. His final words included gratitude to a nurse,



and his will requested a simple burial. The homily emphasized his lifelong message of mercy, empathy, and peace. Through Scripture and reflection, Bishop Gacutan highlighted the Pope's enduring faith and his call to imagine and embrace the suffering of others.

Brief Biography of Pope Francis (266th Pope)

Jorge Mario Bergoglio, born on **December 17, 1936**, in **Buenos Aires, Argentina**, was the **first Pope from the Americas and South America**, and the **first Jesuit Pope**. Known for his **humility, simple lifestyle**, and **empathy for the poor**, he famously said, *"My people are poor, and I am one of them."*

- **March 13, 2013** – Elected Pope at age 76 while serving as Archbishop of Buenos Aires
- **May 24, 2015** – Released encyclical *Laudato Si'* on environmental care
- **2019 Japan Visit** – Held Mass in **Nagasaki**, attended a **peace gathering in Hiroshima**, and met **2011 disaster survivors in Tokyo**
- **2023–2024** – Led 16th Synod of Bishops
- **December 24, 2024** – Opened the Ordinary Jubilee Year
- **April 21, 2025** – Passed away peacefully



He entered the Jesuits in **1958**, was ordained a priest in **1969**, became a bishop in **1992**, and a cardinal in **2001**. Pope Francis will be remembered for his compassionate leadership and call for mercy, simplicity, and global solidarity.

Apostolic Nuncio to Japan and Priests' Pilgrimage to Sites of Christian Martyrdom



From May 7 to 9, Archbishop Francisco Escalante Molina, Apostolic Nuncio to Japan, joined missionary priests from the Tokyo Archdiocese on a pilgrimage to historic sites of Christian martyrdom. On the first day, the group met

Bishop Edgar Gacutan of Sendai Diocese at Ichinoseki Station and visited Okago Church, as well as the Okago Christian Martyrs' Memorial Park. At the Okago Christian History Museum, they learned about the faith and perseverance of early Japanese Christians during periods of persecution. On the second day, they visited Mototerakoji Church and entered the cathedral's Holy Door. A special Mass was held at 6:00 p.m., featuring prayers for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the election of a new pope. Bishop Gacutan, the main celebrant, emphasized in his homily that the Holy Spirit, not media speculation, chooses the pope. He lightheartedly noted that if a new pope had already been elected, the Mass would have been held in his honor.

Caritas Ofunato Base Thanksgiving Mass and Closing Ceremonies

As of the end of March 2025, Caritas Ofunato Base officially concluded its activities. Over the years, the base became a vital hub for 2,099 volunteers from across Japan and the world, many of whom returned to support the recovery of Ofunato City and Rikuzentakata City following the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic from December 2019, volunteer activities were suspended. However, staff continued outreach efforts, offering services like shopping transportation, community salons (e.g., handicrafts, smartphone and English classes, exercise), and home visits. These initiatives were deeply appreciated and became a core part of community life. As the region steadily recovered, the need for volunteer-based work decreased, and salon participation



declined. Though home visits remained valuable, as staff we felt our limitations. Recognizing the base had fulfilled its role, the decision to close was made. Residents responded with heartfelt gratitude and even tears.

March 11 – A Time to Remember

On March 11, shortly before the closure, about 50 residents who took part in salon activities gathered for a farewell event. They enjoyed a warm and nostalgic time, watching a slideshow of shared memories.

May 18 – Thanksgiving Mass and Closing Ceremony



On Sunday, May 18, around 100 people, including parishioners, former staff members and volunteers of Ofunato Base attended the Thanksgiving Mass held at Ofunato Church. The Mass was presided by Bishop Otsuka of Kyoto and concelebrated by Bishop Sakai (Osaka-Takamatsu), Bishop Emeritus Suwa (Takamatsu), Bishop Edgar Gacutan, Fr. Takii (Hiroshima diocese) and Fr. Insen (Ofunato). Bishop Matsuura of Nagoya delivered the homily.

Caritas Ofunato Base was put up and funded by the dioceses of Takamatsu, Hiroshima, Osaka, Kyoto and Nagoya that comprised what was then the Osaka Ecclesiastical Province. (In 2023 Osaka and Takamatsu became one archdiocese and with the three other dioceses form what is now called Osaka-Takamatsu Ecclesiastical Province.)

Afternoon Closing Ceremony at the Base



At 1:00 p.m., participants moved to the base for the official closing. Bishop Gacutan expressed thanks, a slideshow was presented, and staff were honored with certificates and gifts.

Keiichi Sugawara,
Former Base Director, Caritas Ofunato Base

NEWS FROM THE DISTRICTS

From District 1

Sanpachi Bloc / Hachinohe Shiocho Church & Samemachi Church

Joint Lenten Retreat of Hachinohe Shiocho Church and Samemachi Church



From March 15 to 16, a joint Lenten retreat was held at Hachinohe Shiocho Church, led by Fr. Tomohiro Mori from

Kichijoji Church, originally from Hachinohe Shiocho Church. The retreat began on Saturday afternoon with talks, reflection time, and the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. On Sunday, Fr. Mori gave a talk before Mass, a homily during the liturgy, and a concluding reflection afterward. He guided participants through Luke 9:28 b–36, introducing three approaches to Scripture: reading it as “text,” “window,” and “mirror.” His meditation method involved three readings of the Gospel, each deepening reflection. During his homily, Fr. Mori shared insights from the Gospel and stories from his time as a seminarian in the Philippines, which he expanded on later in the day. The retreat concluded with a tea gathering, fostering fellowship and gratitude. Participants appreciated Fr. Mori’s thoughtful guidance and spiritual leadership.

Tomohiro Makiyama (Hachinohe Shiocho Church)

From District 4

Sendai East Bloc / Shiogama Church

Farewell and Best Wishes to Fr. Morita

Fr. Naoki Morita, priest of the Sendai East Bloc of District 4, was transferring to Sekiguchi Church at Tokyo Cathedral after six years at Shiogama Church. A farewell celebration was held following Easter, filled with warm smiles and heartfelt gratitude. Fr. Morita shared fond memories of life in Shiogama, noting the cold weather but enjoyable shopping and walks. Sunday Masses were held at Shiogama and Higashi-Sendai Churches, and many parishioners lined up to bid him farewell. A young mother recounted his meaningful marriage preparation class, where she and her partner reflected on the meaning of parenthood. She also remembered



his touching reference to The Little Prince during their wedding. Known for his clear and hopeful homilies, Fr. Morita left a lasting impact on the community. Parishioners pray for his continued health and success as he begins his new role. The next chapter begins with a warm welcome: “Hello, Fr. Henri!”

Noriko Sato (Shiogama Church)