

# Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

No.7 Issue(243)

April 4, 2021

Catholic Sendai Diocese

〒980-0014

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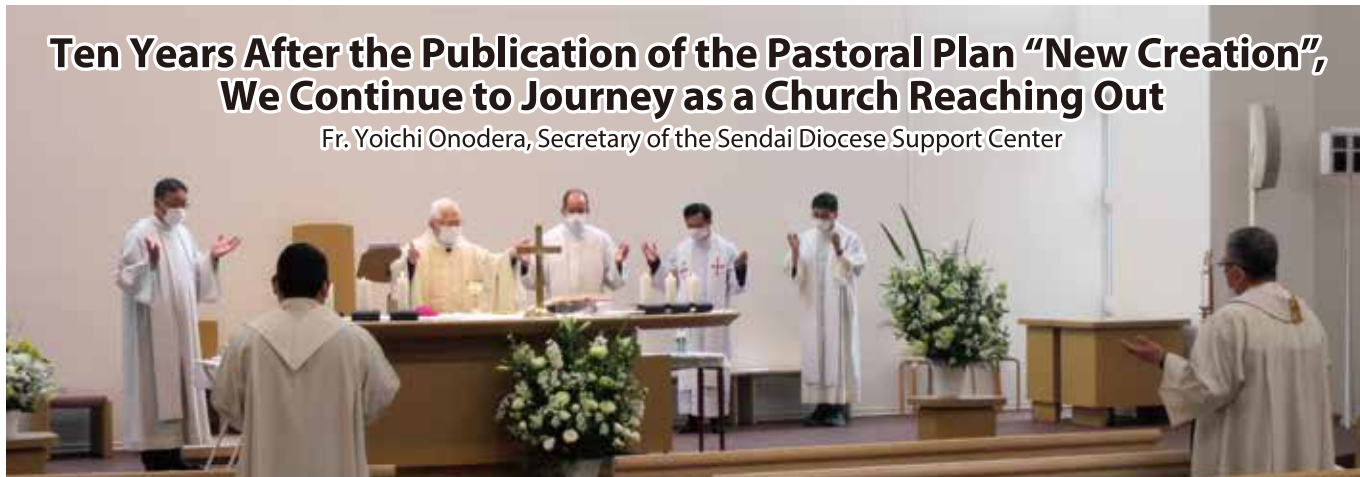
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## Ten Years After the Publication of the Pastoral Plan “New Creation”, We Continue to Journey as a Church Reaching Out

Fr. Yoichi Onodera, Secretary of the Sendai Diocese Support Center



One month after March 11th, 2011, Bishop Hiraga issued the basic pastoral plan “New Creation. This plan laid the foundation for a new vision in the Japanese Catholic Church. Based on this pastoral plan, for the past 10 years, the church has not been presented as an institution existing solely for its members, but as one at the service of all residents of the region. When people living in the devastated areas met Christians from various parishes, they began to consider them as friends, greeting them as “Caritas-San”. This expression constitutes an example of the “New Creation.”

Many volunteers who had no Christian background came and shared meals with Catholics from various parishes, as well as staff and directors of Caritas bases. The volunteers had positive experiences that they returned to their hometowns smiling and always said they want to go back to “Caritas-san”. These volunteers were deeply moved by their experiences that when they returned to their hometowns, some of them started to go to church and became baptized

Christians. After becoming Christians, some of them joined religious congregations or entered the seminary to be a priest.

We often hear that it takes about 10 years to recover from the earthquake and tsunami. However, we cannot gauge the time to recover from the devastation caused by the nuclear accident in Fukushima. When it comes to reconstruction, the future is not clear. Even if Japan has experienced the effects of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we still cannot really measure the impact of the radioactivity caused by the Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdown.

As people who have experienced such a disaster, what we can do is draw closer to the other victims and journey together. Isn't that the message that God is sending us through this earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident? May the Risen Lord descend upon us and make His Presence strongly felt in this vast territory of Tohoku (Northeastern Japan)

## Youth Christmas Celebration in the Midst of Pandemic Can Still Be Merry

Monica Ono, Sendai Church Youth Leader



2020 has been a rough year for all of us. However, in the midst of all these challenges and seemingly never-ending pandemic, the Sendai Youth Group sends a Christmas message of hope and cheers through prayers and music.

Taking into consideration all the three Cs (close spaces, crowded places, and close contact) to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus, the youth group managed to celebrate Christmas in a meaningful way.

On the 26th of December, the Sendai Youth Group held a Christmas Gathering. Young people from various countries, including the Japanese, were able to gather, exchange, and celebrate a joyful Christmas. There was a short 30-minute Christmas concert before the holy mass started. The youth from different nationalities performed their traditional Christmas carols. Indeed, it was a heartwarming and enjoyable atmosphere.

When I was elected the leader of the Sendai Youth ministry, I didn't know what to do and I was confused. However, each member of the group has helped me materialize all the planned activities during my post. This Christmas Youth Celebration was a collaborative event. The youth community of Sendai may not be a very big community. But I feel that the warm atmosphere in the group is like a family. I'm very grateful to be part of such a warm and loving community.

## Testimony from a foreign youth member of Sendai Youth Ministry

100% Scientist and 100% Catholic Christian  
Dr. Indra Kusuma, PhD



My name is Indra “Bernard” Kusuma from Indonesia, 31 years old infant baptized Catholic. After I finished my master’s and doctoral degree in Chemistry at the Tohoku University in March 2018, I was hired as a senior research engineer at the DIC Corporation where there are only 2% foreign employees and I am the only Indonesian. My current residence is in Sakura City in Chiba Prefecture, where our company’s “Central Research Laboratories” is located. I have spent one-third of my life in Japan. Being an anime and tokusatsu fan, Japan was my childhood dream country which means, I am living my dream right now.

Before I came to Japan, I graduated in the top university in Indonesia with the highest honors both in academics and non-academic achievements. I enrolled in an English-based Master’s and PhD degree program in Tohoku University with no knowledge of the Japanese language and culture. I can only manage to say “Arigatou” and “Sumimasen”. Aside from my deficiency in language, I met a lot of difficulties in adjusting in my daily life for several months. But God has been good to me because I received many supports from Japanese and foreign friends from the university and most especially from the Sendai Catholic Church community. The third day I arrived in Japan, particularly in Sendai, I searched for Mototerakoji Church alone with no map and no Japanese language. It was my first Sunday mass and my first contact with a Japanese Catholic Church. Being raised Catholic and a scientist, I thought that paying respect to our Lord on Sundays was the first thing and the right thing to do when you arrive in a new place.

My relationship with Sendai Church Community in Mototerakoji, Kita Sendai, Ipponsugi and Tatamiyacho Church has been strengthened and deepened because of my regular attendance in the different eucharistic celebration (masses) and my active participation in the youth gatherings, volunteer activities, retreats and recollections. However, I struggled a great deal to balance my church activities and completing my Master’s and PhD studies. I didn’t want to give up one from the other. I didn’t want to sacrifice my being Catholic from my being a scientist. I always wanted to keep these two sides of my identity: “pure scientist” and “pure Catholic”.

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I know, as a child, I have been greatly influenced by “science” and “scientific way of thinking”. But I never had difficulty to integrate science and religion. What I believe is, science and religion are not two separate entity. In fact, they complement each other. I remember in one of my research experiments, I was able to successfully synthesized (“create”) a new material through great effort and hard work. When I observed in details the characteristics of this material, I was awed in silence with the beauty and splendor of its structure. At that moment, my thought was not: “Wow, I am so great that I could create this material!”. Instead, I felt humbled by God’s greatness and thought: “Dear God! How great are you to create this beautiful world, and through my hands as a scientist, I am so happy to be able to discover your greatness.” This is just one of the many experiences I had in my scientific world where I could say that science and religion are complementary.

In those years of my study, the role of Sendai Church through its masses and religious activities has helped me kept my balance and my identity as “100% scientist and 100% Catholic”. I have always carried this mindset even now in my work as a researcher. I share the same thoughts and words from these two most influential scientists, Isaac Newton, “Gravity explains the motions of the planets, but it cannot explain who sets the planets in motion,” and Albert Einstein, “The more I study science, the more I believe in God.”

I am in truly grateful for the support I received from Sendai Church community, particularly Fr. Nicolas Kondi, SVD and Sendai Catholic youth group. Because of their constant encouragement and consolation, I managed to pass through hard times like the sudden death of my brother, learning Japanese language by myself, and finishing my PhD. I really feel that the church people are my family in Japan and Sendai is my home away from home.

I still hold on to the same spirit in keeping the balance of being a scientist and Catholic in my workplace and community. I think I have started to make an impact in my new location because the company magazine has featured my story entitled, “A Bridge to the World” 「架け橋の人」. Also, in my present residence, I have built good relationship with the Catholic church people in Chiba Prefecture. They have welcomed and helped me to quickly get used to live in a new environment. I can say that wherever I am, as long as there is a Catholic church, I am sure that I can easily adjust to the new environment because God has prepared it for me.

My mission to spread the love of God as 100% scientist and 100% Catholic continues.

## Fr. Moria Sato



I was born in Sendai on October 29, 1936. I was ordained a priest on September 15, 1971. My father died when I was in 4th grade elementary. It was during this time when a lady from our neighborhood invited me to attend Sunday Mass at Tatamiyacho Church. The priest was celebrating mass facing the wall and was praying and singing in Latin. I was amazed by the beautifully embroidered liturgical vestment worn by the priest. As a child, I thought the priest was like God. Many a time, I could not stop thinking about where my father had gone after he died. When my father's body was laid in the casket, my mother cried. Then, I realized that my father died. But I didn't completely accept his death. It was because of this experience that I started to think about God and to consider priesthood as the incarnation of God.

As a student, I visited the church almost every day on my way home. Even if I did not pray, I was looking for something. It maybe strange, but I was checking if the priest was present in his office. At that time, I thought a priest is a full-time staff and I still do today. I mostly met the priest in his office. There was no sign of ordinary life like, no tea, no radio, or nothing at all. He only uttered few words giving me an impression that he was a dignified man and distant.

There were 3 significant saints that influenced my priesthood. As a child, I fell in love with St. Bernadette of Lourdes. Even today, her picture hangs on the wall of my room. When I went to Lourdes, I asked for her intercession.

Another person who had a great influence in my life is St. John Vianney. Because of the French Revolution, he could not attend school. At the age of 20, Vianney met a priest and expressed his desire to be a priest. However, he was drafted in the army of Napoleon. After his military service, he expressed again his desire to be a priest. Due to lack of education, he was sent to farming. A few years later, the Archbishop of Lyon ordained him with conditions that the parish priest will oversee his basic education and he cannot hear confession. Two years later, the priest died and he became the parish priest in the small village of 250 people. He lived in this village for 41 years. Gradually, the number of people were going for confession has increased to 100,000 people. Vianney would spend 17 hours hearing confessions. He lived simple life i.e., sleeping for 2 – 3 hours and eating little food. A few years ago, I went to visit the little village in Ars, France. I felt he was wearing a cassock, a surplice, a violet stole waiting to hear my confession.

In the church of Ichinoseki, there is a statue of St. Elizabeth of Hungary. At the age of 4, she was forced marry and became a widow at 19, raising three children. She died at 23. Her eldest son became king in the city where Martin Luther translated the bible in German 300 years ago.

Thanks to Bernadette, Vianey, and Elizabeth, I continue to preach the Gospel. Although, I am a diocesan priest, I still live a simple faith like the faith I received during my baptism. I strongly believe that God is guiding the history of the Church.

## God's Resume and My Personal Resume

### Fr. Setsuro Horie, S.J.



I have been working in pastoral district #3 of Sendai Diocese since April 2019. When I expressed my desire to do pastoral work in the area affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, Bishop Hiraga assigned me in Kamaishi, which happened to be my birthplace. Even if it is my hometown, after living for 47 years out of Japan, it looked like a completely new world for me.

However, each time I walk on the seashore, I remember my priestly vocation through my encounter with the Bethlehem missionaries. Seeing those priests who gave their lives to Christ, I saw the image of Christ Himself in them.

I became very close to Christ after my confirmation. When I was 15, Fr. Joseph told me that there was a "Hidden Missionary" in Kamaishi. His name was Fr. Rispal, who was a young missionary from the Paris Foreign Missions. Towards the end of the 19th century, there was big tsunami that hit the area and Fr. Rispal was washed away and was never found. With great reverence, I was deeply moved by this story. I asked myself, "Did Fr. Rispal sacrificed his life to save people?" Then, it dawned on me that I can also walk the same path as Fr. Rispal. Going back on this experience, I have realized that all my relationship with my family, teachers, friends, were leading me towards God.

God is concretely calling us through our encounter with various persons. A priestly vocation is born from the love of God and the love of people.

Impressed by this image of a missionary, I joined the Jesuits. I was ordained a priest in 1970 and I was sent to Brazil, a country who has the reputation of being a place of immigrants. People from all around the world are living there; Asian people, European settlers, and slaves from Africa. All are put together in this new world. In each city, poverty is rampant and social inequalities are massive.



I felt more like a student in this great school of life than a missionary. I was struck by the positive atmosphere of joy and love they bring to the church during gatherings. They are not defeated by the poverty they experienced. I realized how important it was to work always with them. People living in the slum area were always joyful. Rather than saying that I was working with them, I must say that I was working with Christ.

Time has passed. I am aging progressively. Coming back to Japan after all those years abroad, I discovered a new world again. In my native land, with my gray hair, I am happy to continue working with Christ. The thing that I cherish the most as a priest is working hand in hand with the lay people. Because priests and laity, by the grace of baptism are sent off, without exception, as disciples of Christ.

## News Update from the Districts

### District 1

Paul Shogo Sasazaki, the person-in-charge of the DARK group in Aomori was baptized in Honcho Church recently.

### District 3

On December 3, 2020, Fr. Setsuro Horie, S.J. blessed a memorial plaque commemorating the church community members who passed away, the Bethlehem priests who served the church, and Fr. Funayama and others. Among the 13 churches in Iwate Prefecture, Kamaishi is the only church that installed a memorial plaque.

### District 5

Despite the constraint because of the pandemic, some of the church activities continued like the blessing of children, first communion, and Christmas masses in the parishes of district 5. Also, we were able to celebrate a thanksgiving mass for the 95th birthday of Fr. Kawai in Furukawa Church.

### District 6

The Christmas masses in each parish of District 6 were celebrated while respecting the precautionary measure set to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Illumination was displayed in front of the church of Ipponsugi and Tatamiyacho. In Mototerakoji Church, to observe the 3 C's (social distancing) protocol, TV monitors were set up at the first-floor hall and the second-floor chapel so that other people can view the mass from these areas. In Watari Church, some members of Watari and Yagiyama organized the meeting "Olive-no-kai" the once a month. This is a gathering and sharing of survivors of the Great East Japan and tsunami.

### District 7

The preparation for Christmas was completely done. Unfortunately, on December 20, 2020, the city of Fukushima issued an order of lockdown due to the spate of the COVID-19 virus. Masses in Fukushima City have to be suspended from December 24, 2020, until February 27, 2021.

## Analysis of the Priest Assignment for Pastoral Year 2021

Fr. Charles Aime Bolduc

Recently, the list of priest assignments was sent to all the parishes from the diocesan office. The first thing we look into is the priest assigned in our parish, or who is moving in or out with great interest. To be able to see a bigger picture, we need to analyze this assignment with the following 10 points:

1. Before the end of the 2020 pastoral year, there are 28 priests in Sendai Diocese.
2. In the coming 2021 pastoral year, there are 5 priests moving out of the diocese and only 1 new priest coming in. As a result, there will be a total of 24 priests in the Sendai Diocese.
3. Starting April 2021, these 24 priests will work together to cover the 52 parishes in 4 prefectures, Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima.
4. Of these 24 priests, 5 priests are over 80 years old, 7 priests are over 75 years old and the other half is below 75 years old.
5. Just in case a priest gets sick or on sabbatical leave, the priest from a nearby parish will preside the mass or rely on communion service (para-liturgy).
6. The composition of the priests of the Sendai Diocese are as follows 10 priests from the Sendai Diocese, 11 priests from the missionary or religious congregation, 1 priest from the following places; Archdiocese of Tokyo, Diocese of Kyoto, and Archdiocese of Gwangju, Korea.
7. Sendai Diocese is becoming more international and taking on an image of a Universal church where the priests come from different nationalities, 13 priests are Japanese, and 11 foreign priests.
8. The 11 foreign priests come from 6 different countries. There are 4 Mexicans, 2 Koreans, 2 Filipinos, 1 Indonesian, and 1 Canadian. We are grateful to have foreign priests serving in our diocese. But we have to pray for local vocations and create an atmosphere that supports priestly vocation.
9. Looking at the assignment of the priest, 10 priests are transferred and 14 priests remained in place.
10. The three pastoral districts (No. 1, No. 2, No.8), all the priests are moving. This will likely bring about various challenges.

◇ You can check the list of priest assignments of the Sendai Diocese posted at the entrance of the church.

