

# Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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Catholic Sendai Diocese

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## Ordination of Bishop Gacutan Edgar



On March 19, the ordination of Bishop-elect Edgar Gacutan, who was appointed last December 8 (the feast day of the Immaculate Conception), took place at Mototerakoji Cathedral. Although the number of attendees were limited due to the pandemic and the intensity 6 earthquake which happened two days before the ordination, about 150 people attended the ceremony, including the Apostolic Nuncio to Japan, the bishops from various dioceses, priests, and lay representatives from Sendai Diocese.

The ordination ceremony, presided over by Archbishop Isao Kikuchi, began solemnly and proceeded in a warm atmosphere, with not only the Japanese faithful but also people from the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, Peru, Nigeria, Fiji, and other countries gathering to celebrate together.

After the ordination ceremony, volunteers from Ofunato Parish, where Bishop Gacutan served as Parish Priest in the past, recited the poem "Song of Gacutan" (written by Harutsugu Yamaura), and the ceremony ended in a friendly atmosphere.

### The Making of the "Song of Gacutan"

Harutsugu Yamaura, M.D.

Everyone at Ofunato Church is ecstatic to hear that Fr. Gacutan will become the Bishop of Sendai Diocese. As the head of Caritas Japan, Ofunato Base and as the Parish Priest of Ofunato Church after the tsunami, Fr. Edgar has loved, encouraged, and guided us from the bottom of his heart. When Fr. Edgar was transferred, we had a farewell party for him. During the party, Hiroshi, who was a first grader, a son of a Filipino mother, and an altar server of Ofunato Church, hugged Fr. Edgar tightly and cried so hard. Fr. Edgar and the rest of us were moved and cried as well.

This incident has inspired me to write the poem "Song of Gacutan". This poem was recited by the congregation during the send-off of Fr. Edgar. In the poem, "Mt. Kohidoro" is the name of the hill on which Ofunato Church stands, and "Ama Namin" is Tagalog for "Our Father". In Ofunato Church, there were about 100 Filipino married women who always sang the "Lord's Prayer" in Tagalog at the Holy Mass.

## Interview with Bishop Gacutan Edgar

# First, I want to meet and talk with the congregation!

The Diocesan Newsletter Team quickly interviewed Bishop Edgar Gacutan on the day he arrived to Sendai from Tokyo on January 31 and right after the monthly priests' meeting. Despite the long day, he was gracious enough to accommodate the PR committee members.

### **How did you feel when you were appointed bishop?**

When I received the news from the Nuncio at the nunciature on December 1, tears just naturally fell from my eyes. I had mixed feelings when I received the news. I felt honored and at the same time, I was scared. The Nuncio led me to the chapel where I prayed for a while. When I realized that I have to take on this service for the sake of the church, I said, "Yes".

### **By the way, what made you decide to become a priest?**

I think my "call to the priesthood" was a two-step process. I was born into a Catholic family and was baptized at the age of 3 months. My family prayed together at night before bedtime and went to church together on Sundays. I think it was through these experiences that my faith gradually grew.

I was a sixth grader when I first served as an altar boy on February 2 (the feast of the Presentation of the Lord). From then on, I started to think about "vocation for priesthood" because I believed that the Lord gave me a grace to do so. In my service at the church, I have met many parish priests and missionaries who confirmed my vocation. But my next question was what congregation? When I was in high school, I became interested in a congregation that goes out into the world to preach the gospel. It was during this second process that I decided to follow the invitation to join the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM).

### **Can you tell us about the steps you have taken since joining CICM?**

First, I studied philosophy at St. Louis University in Baguio, Philippines, and then took my first vows in 1986 after completing my formation. After that, I studied theology at a seminary established by the CICM in Manila, and came to Japan in 1990 as a CICM seminarian which was part of internship program of CICM. I studied Japanese and experienced missionary pastoral work in Osaka. In 1991, I made my perpetual vows and on March 20, 1992, I was ordained as a deacon at the Osaka Cathedral. I returned to the Philippines in March 1993 to finish my theological studies, and was ordained a priest in my country on April 23, 1994. In May of the same year, I was sent back to Japan to work in the Diocese of Osaka,



where I was involved in pastoral work in parishes, working with the Japan Organization of Catholic Youth Workers (JOC), and serving as the Provincial Superior of the Japan Province of the CICM.

### **In 2014, you came to Ofunato Church in the Diocese of Sendai.**

Yes, the CICM and the Diocese of Sendai did not originally have a relationship. But when Sendai Diocese was hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Catholic Bishop Conference of Japan (CBCJ) formed the "all-Japan" structure to support the diocese and we were one of those who responded the call. During that time, I was in the middle of my term as the Provincial Superior of CICM of Japan.

Immediately after the earthquake, Fr. Nozomi Shiota of the Little Brothers of Jesus went around to the evacuation centers in the Ofunato area, where there were many Filipino mothers, and he introduced Ofunato church to them. Fr. Hiroshi Kanda of the Osaka Diocese who found out that there was a strong need for foreign priests to be sent to Ofunato. So, first, we sent Fr. Harnokoh and Fr. Garry of CICM. In 2014, Fr. Harnokoh left his post to become a formator of the CICM congregation. This was the time I came to Ofunato.

When I first arrived in Sendai, I did not feel the traces of the earthquake. But as I got closer to the disaster area, it became more and more terrifying. As I arrived in Ofunato, I was shocked beyond words at the extent of the damage.

First, I was asked to serve as the head of the "Caritas Japan Ofunato Base," which was under the umbrella of Osaka Archdiocese. Second, I was assigned as a Parish Priest of Ofunato Church. Third, I became in charge of the Sendai Diocese Support Center for Foreigners (SDSCF).

I belonged to the 4th district of the Sendai Diocese. It was fun. I drove around from Aomori to Iwaki in Fukushima, offering Masses, listening to the people's

stories, and doing counseling. At the supermarket, I happened to meet some seamen who arrived at the port on that day. I invited them to the church. They were very happy to attend Holy Mass and this was a source of comfort and strength on their journey. I enjoyed so much my three years and four months in Ofunato. But in 2017, I had to leave the Diocese of Sendai and was sent to Tokyo to work for our congregation.

**What has been important to you so far in your priestly life, Bishop?**

I have three main goals: to follow Jesus, to cherish the Mass, and to share in a Bible study group. Both at Mass and in the study group, the participants share with each other how they are enlightened by God in their daily lives, how the words of the Bible enriched their daily lives, and the Word of God has been deepened.

**Have you told your family about your appointment as a bishop?**

Yes, I told them over the phone. My parents have already passed away, but I have an older brother, an older sister, and two younger sisters. I called each one of them. They said, 'What an honor to our family! Your responsibility is great, so please do your best.'

**If there is anything you would like to say to the faithful of the Diocese of Sendai, please say so!**

First, after the ordination ceremony, I would like to visit each parish and meet with the faithful and listen to their stories. Now, in connection with the Synod, I would like to meet with various people, listen to their opinions, and sit down to think about the situation.

Pope Francis has announced the October 2023 Synod on Synodality in Rome. Since last October, he has been calling on all the faithful in the world to begin preparing for it together. This is a call for the laity, priests, and bishops to become a "Church that walks together," just as the early Church did. Therefore, I would like to walk with you all with a greater awareness of "walking together".

I want us to work together in building the Kingdom of God. I would like to talk with various people and ask them what kind of hope they have and what kind of church community we should build in this time. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

**What are your hobbies, Bishop?**

I don't have any specific hobbies, but I like walking and going to hot spring (onsen).

Well then, Bishop, please take care of your health and we look forward to working with you in the future.



**Explanation of Coat of Arms**

**“One Heart and One Mind”** (Acts of the Apostles 4 : 32)

Becoming one is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and a gift we earnestly desire. The upper half of the symbol shows the merging of the work of the Holy Spirit (dove) and our human longing(♡). The lower half consists of the cross and the ideogram for "heart" 心. This depicts the drawing near of the Merciful God and of diverse peoples seeking for the Truth, and the meeting of their thoughts and feelings. Following our Lord Jesus Christ, and one with people, the Church groans, calls out "You are not alone," grieves, prays, hopes, helps, laughs, and gives thanks.

**Introducing the Priests of Sendai Diocese**

**Fr.Takashi Aizu**

**Date of birth :** May 6, 1950  
**Place of birth :** Chuo-ku, Tokyo  
**Date of ordination :** April 29, 1989,  
 Mototerakoji



became a priest. This is my year because I was born in the year of the tiger. I thought I am still a young man. But I've noticed that the number of senior priests has been decreasing and I myself have reached an age where I could be called an old man.

**What made me want to become a priest?**

Looking back, it seems that the twists and turns of my life lead me to my vocation to priesthood. Born and raised in Tokyo, I came to Sendai to study at the university. I entered the Faculty of Engineering. But after graduation, I joined the Faculty of Education for graduate studies. I was

**“a light in the dark”**

I am just wondering the meaning of writing a selfintroduction. It has been over 30 years since I

baptized while I was enrolled in graduate school. After working as a teacher at a junior college and university in Morioka, I entered the seminary. How did the desire to become a priest arise? I want to live like those priests. But I don't have special gifts like other priests. At one time, the church in Senmaya, Iwate Prefecture had no priest. At that time, I thought the church needs to be lighted even just in the evening. If only I could become that priest for that purpose I would do it. Then, I was ordained as a priest and my desire was fulfilled. My subsequent steps took me to Hirosaki, Namiuchi, Sendai, Aizuwakamatsu, Tsukidate, Kesenuma, Ishinomaki, and other places. I have worked in churches and kindergartens from one place to another. I also experienced the earthquake disaster while I was in Kesenuma and Ofunato. I believe that I was led by God in all these endeavors. Even now, "everything God does is timely and beautiful" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

### **What I cherish?**

It might be a cliché, but it is those words of Jesus, "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34). I could not find better words than those. I want to respect people's way of life, even if we have differences of opinion. Nothing in this world is perfect, whether it is an individual or a community. Therefore, we should respect the individual and the community, even if they are imperfect. This is what we have learned from forefathers and saints. We should cherish people whether or not we share the same faith. In Iwaki, I hope to live this with all the members of the congregation.

### **Fr. Shiro Komatsu**

**Date of birth :** May 13, 1965

**Place of birth :** Tagajo City,  
Miyagi

**Date of ordination :** April 29, 1996  
Mototerakoji



### **Wakage no Itari 若気の至り**

I guess "Wakage no Itari" means to let one's youth get the best of one's mind, to make decisions in the heat of the moment.

When I think about my vocation, the first thing that comes to my mind is "Wakage no Itari". During my ordination, I asked the congregation to pray for me that I may be able to fulfill my priestly vocation because I sensed the lack of confidence in persevering until the end. Twenty-five years have passed, I still feel a certain doubt. Probably because I thought my decision was coming from "Wakage no itari". The irony of it, it's this "wakage no itari" that kept me committed to my vocation through the years. I sincerely hope that those who read this article will pray for me. It is undeniably true that thanks to your prayers that I have reached 25 years as a priest.

I have no clear thought where my priestly vocation comes from. What I remember is that at a young age, I graduated in a public high school and was against the idea of pursuing higher education or finding a job. I was living a hedonistic lifestyle without a firm purpose for the future. When I ran out of money, I would take on some odd jobs. When I have enough money, I would spend it by playing pachinko or mahjongg with local Tagajo bums. On the other hand, I was active in the church. I joined youth activities and Sunday schools. Which makes me think I was probably a good boy when I was inside the church. Oftentimes I wonder what moves me to go to the church. Most likely, there was a place in the church for a person like me who is helpless, someone who could hardly move a grain of sand and let alone a faith that could move mountains. It was Fr. Itagaki of Mototerakoji Church who guided me and told me to promise and write, "I will never play pachinko again!".

In 1979, Mother Teresa came to visit Sendai Diocese after she won the Nobel Peace Prize. Many people came to listen to Mother Teresa's talk. I was a young man attending the parking lot and I hardly remember what was the content of Mother Teresa's talk. But that incident opened my mind to see the bigger world. Growing up from the countryside of Tagajo, I realized that the Catholic Church was connected to the rest of the world. I said to myself, "Okay, I'm going to go out into the world".

For the next two years, I had a regular job. The purpose was to save enough money to go out into the world. But it was difficult to save because after work, I go out drinking, playing pachinko, and drove around in my car with no direction. However, the faint thought that one day I will go out to see the world has not disappeared. By this time, my local Tagajo friends have taken up jobs and gradually disintegrated. I decided to leave the comfort of the church and the lukewarmness of my family. I went to Aichi Prefecture to work in Toyota Motors factory in order to save money to go abroad. I decided not to return to Tagajo until I have saved one million yen.

When I had saved enough money, I went wandering around India for almost a year. Why India? Because Mother Teresa was there. There is so much to talk about India. But my space in this article is limited. Maybe in some other venue, I can write something about my experience in India.

When I came back from India, the late Fr. Naoya Sasaki advised me to enter the seminary. He did not recommend me to become a priest, but rather said, "Seminary is a fun place, so you should try it once, and if you don't enjoy it, you can come back! I remember that. Thirty years have passed since then. I still struggle in my life, far from being called a priest.