

Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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For a Church that Journeys Together: Communion, Participation, and Mission



1. What is a Synod?

For the renewal of the Church proposed by the Second Vatican Council held in Rome from 1962 to 1965, Pope Paul VI established the "World Conference of Representative Bishops" on September 15, 1965. The assembly of bishops that meets at this fixed time is known as the "Synod". Synod is originally a Greek word meaning "to walk together".

The World Synod of Bishops has three types of assemblies: ordinary sessions, extraordinary sessions, and special sessions that deal with issues directly related to a particular region. Synod has no decision-making authority, rather it summarizes what the participants have discussed and submits their recommendations to the Pope. Based on these recommendations, the Pope issues post-Synod apostolic recommendations.

The first Synod was held in 1967 and has been held approximately every two to four years. The 15th Ordinary General Synod took place in October 2018, and its theme was "Young People, Faith, and Discernment of Vocations." The 16th Ordinary General Assembly will be held in Rome in October 2023. The theme is "For the Church to Journey Together: Communion, Participation, and Mission". The theme of this year's Synod is "Synodality," that is, the Church's attitude and way of walking together. The Synod will prepare the way for this General Conference with the whole People of God, including the laity, religious, priests, bishops, and the Pope, and will proceed along the following:

- On September 7, 2021, the Secretariat of the Synod will publish the Preparatory Document and the Manual.
- From October 2021, the opening ceremony of the Synod period will be held in each parish.

- On June 4, 2022, each Japanese diocese submits a written report to the Catholic Bishop Conference of Japan (CBCJ) (Diocesan Phase)
- On August 15, 2022, the summary is sent to the Preparatory Committee for the Pontifical Synod.
- In March 2023, the summary in Asia (Continental Phase)
- In October 2023, the General Assembly will meet at the Vatican (Universal Church Phase).

2. Sendai Diocese Initiative

On October 10, 2021, while the joyful atmosphere of Pope Francis' visit to Japan in November 2019 still lingers, the start of the Synod was proclaimed and the Diocese of Sendai received its call for the "Synod" with gratitude and joy". However, due to the pandemic, the diocese was forced to refrain from Mass and suspend all church activities, limiting the efforts of the diocese. In addition, the diocesan episcopate was vacant, which caused the delay in conducting the synod.

It was in this context that the appointment and arrival of Bishop Gacutan surprised and delighted the Diocese. His appointment was in December 2021 and he was ordained in March 2022. Although the pace was slow in the first three months after his appointment, partly due to the pandemic, church activities resumed in some of the parishes in April. The Sunday Masses and Synod discussion gatherings began to take place at a rapid pace, thanks to the new bishop's proactive call.

The new bishop reminded us that the "Synod" is not a one-time initiative. But it is the direction in which the Church will walk together in the future even if this initiative is inadequate. Because "Synod" is the "Journeying Church" itself. The Diocesan Synod was roughly divided into two groups: the Japanese faithful and the foreign faithful.

At the end of last year, the efforts of the Synod were explained at the monthly priest's meeting, but due to the pandemic, it was not possible to fully discuss. Only one of the eight districts received a synod parish report, and only two of the 53 parishes discussed and compiled the results of the Synod. The other parishes distributed a questionnaire and only 11 parishes responded to it. The number of congregations that responded to the questionnaire was 205, or 2% of the parishioners.

The participation of the foreigners in the synod process was carried out by the staff of the Sendai Diocese Support Center for Foreigners (SDSCF) through survey questionnaires online. The 10-question survey was translated into five languages (English, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean, and Spanish). The total number of respondents to the survey was 151, covering all of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectures. The opinions were collected according to the ten questions in the prepared document by the Secretariat of the Synod.

Question 1: Journeying companions

Question 2: Listening

Question 3: Speaking out

Question 4: Celebration

Question 5. Sharing responsibility for our common mission

Question 6. Dialogue in church and society

Question 7. Ecumenism

Question 8. Authority and participation

Question 9. Discernment and decision-making

Question 10. Forming ourselves in synodality

3. Submission of the Summary Report to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan

As mentioned above, the synod process of the Sendai Diocese started after the ordination of Bishop Gacutan. We have to submit our summary report to CBCJ in two months. The final report was presented to the priest's monthly meeting in May and was approved by the bishop, deputy bishop, and administrative vicar, and submitted to CBCJ.

The contents of the report are as follows.

a. Participation in the diocesan – is divided into two groups, the Japanese faithful and the foreign faithful. Although it is ideal for Japanese and foreign parishioners to work together without a difference, this may be an indication that the majority of Japanese believers and priests in the diocese are not aware of foreign parishioners as companions in the "Synod" = "Journeying with the People of God".

b. Results of Diocesan Initiatives/Summary of Questionnaire Results

- The question on who is their "travel companions" is; many respondents answered the lay people, priests, and religious they meet in church. The question who are the people who cannot connect with, they mentioned homeless people, immigrants, refugees, the poor, and people with disabilities.



- In terms of "listening" and "speaking out," the majority of respondents said they were in dialogue with church leaders. Many also felt that it is difficult to say that there is a place within the church for them to speak freely.
- As for "celebration" when asked what is the most important thing in their lives, the overwhelming majority said Holy Mass. We can sense how the cancelation of Holy Masses due to the pandemic had affected many members of the congregation.

The Conclusion – is a very insightful reflection on the 10-year support initiatives following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, which was considered a great journey (Synod) as stated by the people affected by the disaster. Although we are just at the beginning of the journey to the Synod, Bishop Gacutan encouraged us that "the Synod is not just for this one-time initiative, but is part of the process of journeying together as a "traveling Church".

The steps taken by the Diocese of Sendai through its support activities for the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 can be said to be the steps of the Synod itself.

4. From now on...

A distinctive feature of this year's Synod was that the traveling Church was required to reflect on how it has traveled through the "renewal" advocated by the Second Vatican Council.

I would like to think and live about how the Catholic Church in Japan, which is now placed in a concrete situation, will walk in Japanese society. In this context, how the evangelical mission will be carried out while watching with interest the trends of the Church in Asia and the world. I would like to continue to take steps to be a Church open to various people and to continue challenging what the Synod requires in order to "Journey together".

Commemoration of March 11, 2011

Each year on March 11, we pray for the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the tsunami, and the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear meltdown. On this memorial day, masses were celebrated in various locations:

Mototerakoji Church (Miyagi Prefecture)

Bishop Emeritus, Martin Hiraga Tetsuo presided over the mass and was assisted by Fr. Yoichi Onodera.

During his homily, Fr. Onodera reminded us that it is important to pray for the victims and their families and to support them. He also expressed his gratitude to all the volunteers who continue to accompany the people in need. Some participants also mentioned that through the experience of the past eleven years, the church of Japan has become a real Catholic Church by reaching out to the victims. There were 35 people who attended the mass.

Watari Church (Miyagi Prefecture)

Fr. Miguel Varela presided over the mass assisted by Seminarian Kentaro Takagi. Members of the Olive no Kai were present. There were 20 people who attended the mass.



Haranomachi Church (Fukushima Prefecture)

Bishop Jacob Kazuo Koda presided over the mass on March 11 at 11:00 a.m. There were 15 people who attended the mass.



Ofunato Church (Iwate Prefecture)

Bishop Edgar Gacutan presided over the mass at 1:00 p.m. There were 20 people who attended the holy mass.

Mr. Shinshu Hida's Reflection



On March 15, the day of the Light and Life, Mr. Shinshu Hida described the actual situation in Fukushima using the documentary "The Truth of Fukushima". In Fukushima, the decontamination operation has been partially carried out. However, many areas still remain contaminated and from next year tritium contaminated water is going to be discharged into the sea. Meanwhile, all levels of government are pressing people to return to their hometowns without giving them correct information about the radiation situation. This is a very serious matter to deal with.

The problems that will arise in the future include the issue of exposure to radiation for local workers and for the people who have to return to their homes. Mr. Hida raised a serious question: "Are we going to leave them alone to take care of this grave issue?"

Blessing of the Holy Oils and Ordination of Deacon Takagi

Mass with Holy Oil and Ordination of Deacon Takagi

On Wednesday, April 13, Bishop Gacutan Edgar celebrated the Chrism Mass and ordained Kentaro Takagi, a seminary student, as a deacon at the Cathedral



(Mototerakoji Church). Although the Mass was held in private to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus, the priests of the Sendai Diocese gathered in one place to offer a solemn service.

In his homily, Bishop Gacutan Edgar asked us to "fulfill all our duties with God's help and show that we are true disciples of Christ, who came not only to be served but also to serve" and "keep the mystery of the faith with a

pure heart and show by our deeds what God says with our mouth.

The newly ordained deacon, Kentaro Takagi, then performed his duties as a deacon with dignity during the Paschal Triduum and returned to the seminary. We hope and pray for the birth of a new priest in the Diocese of Sendai. (Tsuyoshi Seki, Public Relations Committee)

Message From Deacon Takagi

Thank you for your continued prayers and support. On April 13, 2022, I was ordained a deacon by Bishop Gacutan Edgar during the Chrism Mass. I received the sacrament of ordination with the support of your prayers. It was a joyous occasion. But at the same time, I was thinking, "Now the Deacon Ministry awaits me. I wondered if I would be able to do it. I wondered if I could do it." But I said to God, "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit" (Luke 23.46). I started to serve Bishop Gacutan, who presided mass at Mototerakoji Church immediately after my ordination during the Paschal Triduum. Currently, I am back at the seminary, enrolled in the deaconess course as a fourth-year theology student, and doing a pastoral internship at Kanagawa Church in the Diocese of Yokohama on weekends. While fulfilling my duties as a deacon, I am also carefully preparing myself for the time to come. I look forward to working with you in the future.

NEWS FROM THE DISTRICTS

From District 5 Holy Week Celebration at Nishi Sendai Church



Due to the pandemic, we could not have the joint celebration during Holy Week at the cathedral. The discussion has been going on between Fr. Lee Seok and the parishioners of Nishi Sendai Parish to organize the liturgy for the Holy Week at Nishi Sendai Church. Eventually, we were able to celebrate the liturgy of the Holy Week after a moratorium of 20 years.

I would like to express our deep gratitude to Fr. Lee Seok for leading us to this point.

Takashi Ueno (Nishi-Sendai Parish)

From District 6 First Joint Confirmation Ceremony in Three Years

On June 5, 2022, the Lord's Day of Pentecost, twenty-five persons from the parishes of District 6 gathered at the Cathedral of the Diocese of Sendai for the first joint Confirmation in three years.



After reciting the Apostles' Creed and declaring their commitment, the confirmands received the sacrament of Confirmation through the laying on of hands and anointing with oil by Bishop Gacutan.

Although attendance at the Mass was limited due to the pandemic, the cathedral was filled with smiling faces of those who received the Sacrament of Confirmation from Bishop Gacutan.

From District 7 Joint Confirmation Ceremony in Fukushima

On Sunday, May 1, a joint Confirmation Ceremony was held at Nodamachi Church in Fukushima City with Nodamachi Parish and Matsukicho Parish. This was the first Confirmation Ceremony after Bishop Gacutan's ordination, so we were more prepared than usual to welcome him. The Mass was held at 11:00 a.m., but the congregation gathered two hours before, and the first

hour was for "interaction between the congregation and the bishop" to ask him questions. The next hour was "Time with the Bishop and the children receiving Confirmation," during which he spoke about "what the Bishop would like to say to the 16 children receiving Confirmation," and we had a very precious time before Mass. Especially, the time with the children who were to receive Confirmation seemed to ease their tension and increase their familiarity with the Bishop. I could feel the Bishop's desire to understand the church and the congregation well.



Despite the pandemic, many people gathered in the church and celebrated Mass and Confirmation in a solemn atmosphere, offering praises to God.

Yuko Watanabe (Nodamachi Parish)

From District 8 Celebration of the canonization of Charles de Foucault <Congregation of Little Sisters of Jesus>

The Sisters of the Little Sisters of Jesus congregation live near the Motomiya Municipal "House of Rest and Recreation for the Elderly, Abukuma-so". They are Mitsue Rosalia, Haruko Veronica, and Kumiko Sabinas. Following the way of life of St. Charles de Foucault, the sisters moved their convent to Fukushima Prefecture after the Great East Japan Earthquake and began living with the people of the affected area in Shirakawa City and then Motomiya City. On Wednesday, June 8, the Little Sisters Society celebrated Foucault's canonization at the monastery "House of Friendship". The Thanksgiving Mass for Foucault's canonization was celebrated by Father Nozomi Shiota, a priest from the "Little Brothers of Jesus" in Wakayama City, together with Father Osamu Sato. Sixteen members from Koriyama Parish and two from Nihonmatsu Parish attended the Mass. After the Mass, we also had a small celebration in joy.

Hiroko Kominato (Koriyama Parish)

