

Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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Catholic Sendai Diocese

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Toward a New Creation

Bishop Edgar Gacutan



I am now on my official visit to each parish in the Diocese of Sendai. I have already met some of the parishioners, but I believe there are many more whom I have not yet met. I look forward to meeting all of you in the future. At that time, I would like to have a long talk with all of you.

When I visited one church, I was asked the following question: "What is this 'new creation' that you mentioned at your ordination ceremony? Could you explain it a bit more?"

This "new creation" is a phrase that my predecessor, Bishop Tetsuo Hiraga, came up with in May 2011 as part of his "Basic Plan for the Great East Japan Earthquake". In the midst of this catastrophe, we, the Church, as a new creation united with Christ, should walk strongly, one day at a time, toward the "New Creation" of the layers, with the same feelings that Christ had. The Diocese of Sendai is committed to this basic plan.

The Diocese of Sendai has been following this basic plan for the past 10 years. I am aware that when I received the mandate of service entrusted to me, I received these words from Bishop Hiraga like a sash, like a marathoner running with a sash and handing it to the next marathoner.

Looking back, I believe that what the survivors lost in what has been called "an unexpected and unprecedented earthquake" was too much to describe in words. I believe that the people of the Diocese of Sendai while assisting in the recovery efforts and sharing in the suffering of the victims of the disaster, must have realized and gained something from God's creative work in the midst of their suffering.

I believe that there are people in each parish who have experienced the same kind of new creation, both individually and as a community. I would be happy to share these experiences with you.

The "New Creation" of Sendai Diocese

Kazuo Koda

Emeritus Auxiliary Bishop of Tokyo Archdiocese

Director of Caritas Minamisoma

The phrase "new creation" comes from the Bible: "See, I am creating new heavens and a new earth; The former things shall not be remembered nor come to mind. Instead, shout for joy and be glad forever in what I am creating. Indeed, I am creating Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight." (Isaiah 65.17-18)



Creation is the most fundamental work of God. The message of the "New Creation" is that a new and decisive work of God will be performed which is equivalent to the most basic plan of God. The Diocese of Sendai suffered tremendous damage from the earthquake, but Bishop Hiraga's words were filled with the hope that something far more wonderful than mere "restoration and reconstruction" will happen in the future. Through this process, the church itself will be renewed, and the relationship between the church and society will be reexamined. I felt that this was what Bishop Hiraga had in mind.

In other words, it is to be a church that "rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep" (Romans 12.15). Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, parishes and Caritas volunteer centers in the affected areas have continued this process.

In the area around Minamisoma City in Fukushima Prefecture, where Haramachi Church is located, many people were affected by the tsunami, were subject to various evacuation orders due to the nuclear power plant accident, and experienced a decrease in population. The number of believers has also decreased. However, the believers met with volunteers who came from all over the country and started activities in the community. Caritas Haramachi Base was born, which has now developed into Caritas Minamisoma. Although the pandemic has restricted our activities for more than two years, our staff and sisters continue to work steadily.

Our wish is that the church will "live with the people, weeping and laughing together". We believe that this is where God's work of "New Creation" will take place. After

the earthquake, Filipino believers who had not been connected to the church began to gather at the Ofunato church, and a new vitality was born. Bishop Gacutan, who worked at the church and base in Ofunato, must have felt the same way: "So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Corinthians 5.17) "For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a New Creation." (Galatians 6.15)

The "new creation" is, after all, also the renewal of ourselves in our relationship with God. It is "spiritual renewal" that is important. May we all be more deeply united with Jesus and more deeply united with those who suffer. That is where God works.

Sendai Diocese Update

Report on the Pastoral Council for Mission

The Pastoral Council for Mission Meeting was held on October 10th for the first time in three years at the Diocesan Center (Mototera Koji Church). This was the first Pastoral Council for Mission meeting since Bishop Gacutan took office, and it was attended by the bishop, council members from each district, priests in charge, and others concerned.



Bishop Gacutan explained the role of the Pastoral Council for Mission, referring to the decisions of the Second Vatican Council. The first item on the agenda was the reports from the different ministries of the Sendai Diocese during the pandemic. The second item on agenda was the preparation of the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly which had been postponed for 3 years due to Covid-19. As recommended by Fr. Shiro Komatsu, the preparation for the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly should take into account the results of the Synod on Synodality.

Finally, Bishop Gacutan summed up the discussion like this: "We have heard people say that it is exhausting to prepare for the assembly. What is important is the movement of parishes, districts, etc. A parishioner told me that there is an increasing number of foreigners in the church. Others mentioned the issue with communication between the priests and the laypeople and among the members of the community. I would like to see this matter to be addressed in the parishes and districts before we proceed with the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly. When the results of the Synod from all over the world would come out, we will assimilate them and start the diocesan assembly from there.

Novena of Prayer for Peace and Send Off Mass

The "Novena of Prayer for Peace and send off Mass" was held on Wednesday, August 17, from 2:00 p.m. at Mototerakoji Church in Sendai. It was organized by the Sendai Committee for Justice and Peace and supported by the Sendai Diocese.



The theme of this year's event was "Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees: Together for Peace." Bishop Mario Michiaki Yamanouchi of Saitama Diocese was the guest speaker. His talk was based on his rich experiences which were illustrated by video clips. After the talk, a send-off Mass was held.

Closure of St. Paul's Bookstore in Sendai

On December 25, 2022, St. Paul's Bookstore, which has been located at the entrance to the Cathedral grounds in Sendai for 64 years will be closed. This has been part of day-to-day life not only for Catholic Christian believers of Sendai Diocese but even for non-Christians.

We carried on our missionary activities through the convent as long as we could, but unfortunately, due to our inability to do so, we had to close the convent in Sendai. We would like to thank everyone for their cooperation and support. We hope to continue to



respond to your needs through our mail order and online store. Thank you very much for your support.

The New Mass Order

The New Mass Order has been in effect since November 27, 2011. I am sure that you are still preparing your prayer books at hand and beginning to familiarize yourself with them. It is our hope that this change in the formula is not merely a change in wording, but an opportunity to further deepen our understanding of the words of the Mass prayer and to respond carefully to each word.

In response to the call, "The Lord be with you all." we respond, "Also with you." The "priest" has been changed to "you," and what is important here is that it is not merely a change of words, but a greeting that confirms the presence of the Risen Christ with us.



It is a greeting that reminds us of the presence of Christ Himself in the midst of the congregation gathered there and in the service of the celebrant, even though we cannot see it. Let us celebrate **Mass together**, cherishing this greeting that is repeated throughout the Mass.

District News

Bishop Edgar Gacutan visited the following parishes of Districts 1, 2, and 5:

District #1

- Honcho and Namiuchi on September 25th, Sunday
- Hirosaki on October 23rd, Sunday

District #2

- Kuji on August 13th, Saturday
- Misawa on August 14th, Sunday at 9:00 a.m.
- Ominato on August 14th, Sunday at 2:00 p.m.



- Towada on August 20th, Saturday at 2:00 p.m.
- Hachinohe on August 21st, Sunday at 10:30 a.m.
- Samemachi on August 21st, Sunday at 2:00 p.m.

District #5

- Kita Sendai on June 26th, Sunday

Furukawa Parish

On June 26th, Sunday, a mass was held to commemorate the 59th anniversary of the church's foundation. It was a modest celebration held in private because of the pandemic.



District #7

Summer Gathering for Children for the First Time in Three Years

On July 18 (Monday), marine day, we held the children's gathering for the first time in three years. About 30 people attended the said event which includes children from kindergarten through elementary and junior high school. Their parents and other volunteers came and helped them.



It was a whole day activity that started with Fr. Aime's storytelling about the "Prodigal Son" by showing Rembrandt's painting and a Holy Mass. After having their curry and rice lunch, the children had a ping-pong tournament and other games.

Before the day ended, the children shared their impressions: (1) In Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son," they could understand the meaning of the father's hand holding his son in his arms. (2) The curry and rice for lunch were very tasty. (3) The watermelon smashing and ping pong tournament was a lot of fun. (4) I am glad I came here today. (5) I am glad that we were able to get together despite the Covid-19 pandemic. (6) It was a fun and memorable day, and I hope you will plan another one next year.

Vietnamese Mass was celebrated

The Vietnamese Youth Group was established on August 23, 2020, in Sendai City. St. Augustine of Hippo was chosen as the patron saint. On August 28, 2022, 180 Vietnamese youth gathered at Fukushima Nodamachi Church to commemorate the Second Anniversary of the establishment of the Vietnamese group. Fr. Nguyen Tan Hy presided over the Holy Mass at 11:00 a.m.



Introduction of Priest

Fr. Paul Too

Date of birth : August 11, 1978

Birthplace : Kenya

Deaconate : October 4, 2008
Guadalupe Church,
Nairobi

Ordination : May 23, 2009
Bomet Church,
Diocese of Kericho,
Kenya



Father, do you come from a Catholic family?

Yes, I was born into a Catholic family. I have 9 brothers and sisters, 5 brothers and 4 sisters. Five boys were born in succession, and I was the third of them. Therefore, I have two younger brothers and four younger sisters.

What made you want to become a priest?

The parish I belonged to was called Bomet Church, which had 42 chapels under it. I was an acolyte at the church. I also went around those 42 chapels with the parish priest. In those parishes, we had Mass only once or twice a month. I could understand how much everyone cherished the Mass. And even if someone wanted to confess, the priest doesn't have the time because they have to move to the next church immediately after the mass. I could not forget the sad faces of some parishioners at that time. This experience made me realize the importance of the Eucharist and the sacrament of forgiveness.

When did you join the Quebec Foreign Mission Society?

I joined in May 2003. In 2000, the Quebec Foreign Mission came to Kenya. In 2001, the seminary formation was opened. I was the first Kenyan to join. At first, I was confused by the cultural differences between Canada and Kenya, but God guided me. In 2004, I went to Montreal, Canada first to study French. Then, I did my novitiate formation for a year.

How was your priestly life in Kenya?

It was a very busy life because I had to celebrate three masses a day. But it was more fulfilling and meaningful than exhausting.

When did you first visit Japan?

I came to Tokyo on December 18, 2009. First, I attended a Japanese language school in Tokyo for two and a half years. However, I could hardly speak Japanese. I often had trouble communicating when I tried to talk to people on the street. I thought Japanese was difficult. I tried to speak to people in English, but still, they could not understand me. After graduation, I came to Sendai. I lived in Mototerakoji Church for 6 months and attended Japanese language school. Afterward, I went to Hirosaki Parish in Aomori Prefecture. Having experienced the cold and snow in Canada, I was not surprised by the Japanese winters.

The parish priest of Hirosaki Church has always been a Canadian. When the people of Hirosaki saw me, a Kenyan, going in and out of the church, they thought I was a tourist. They must have been suspicious of me. So, one of them called the police. Around that time, the Hirosaki City Tourist Association took a picture of me explaining the stained-glass windows of Hirosaki Church to tourists. They made a large poster and put it up at Hirosaki Station and various other locations. When they saw it, they finally recognized me as a priest of Hirosaki Church. After this experience, I became close to the people and the town of Hirosaki. I still love Hirosaki, a town I have lots of fond memories.

I returned to Kenya from Hirosaki because I received an assignment from the Quebec Foreign Mission Society. For six years, I served at the seminary taking care of applicants and seminary students. At the end of my term, I came back to Japan. I will be attending a Japanese language school until Christmas, after which I will be transferred to Fukushima. In Japan, life is convenient, the security is good, and the transportation is very convenient, so I am looking forward to missionary pastoral life in the future.