

Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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Catholic Sendai Diocese

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Holy Week in the Midst of Covid-19 and The Altar Minister Appointment Ceremony

The Chrism Mass was held privately on March 31st due to the declaration of the state of emergency in Miyagi Prefecture because of the spate of Covid-19. Bishop Tetsuo Hiraga presided, accompanied by some priests. All masses in churches of Miyagi Prefecture were canceled, including Holy Week like last year.

Usually, the Chrism Mass is celebrated to bless the oil to be used for the sick, catechumens, and for those who receive confirmation, etc. It was also a significant occasion because the priests of Sendai Diocese renewed their promise of faithfulness to the bishop.

On the same occasion, a ceremony was held to ordain Kentaro Takagi, a seminarian, as an Altar Minister. (This is the last step before becoming a deacon.) Many of you



may know him as he has been visiting several parishes in Sendai Diocese. He is currently continuing his studies and formation to become a priest at Tokyo Major Seminary. Please pray for Seminarian Takagi.

Message from Seminarian Kentaro Takagi



Thank you very much for your prayers and support. On March 31, 2021, I was ordained as an Altar Minister (Acolyte) by Bishop Emeritus Hiraga Tetsuo.

The duties of an Altar Ministers are: (1) to help priest during mass. to carry the liturgical books, etc. (2) to distribute the holy communion as a temporary minister.

You may be wondering what is the difference between being ordained by the Bishop as an acolyte and those traditional acolytes and Eucharistic Ministers. There is a big difference in understanding. In our seminary formation, before we are ordained as priest, we go through different stages from reading minister, altar minister, deacon, and priest.

With your support and prayers, I am now in this stage of my formation: Altar Minister. I will try my best to be a priest who can convey the joy of the gospel without forgetting my deep gratitude to all of you.

NEWS FROM THE DIOCESE

Introducing the New Youth Minister of Sendai Diocese Fr. Rafael Tadeo, Guadalupe Mission

Fr. Rafa, as he is fondly called, is a 35 years old Mexican priest who is a member of the Guadalupe Mission. He has served Sendai Diocese, as a parish priest in Aomori City for two years right after his priestly ordination. He has recently been assigned as the youth minister of the Sendai Diocese which started last April 2021. He underwent his seminary formation in Fukuoka and Tokyo,



Youth Mass in Mototerakoji in June 26th

which made him adept to the Japanese language. He is also well-versed in English language. At present, he resides in Ishinomaki Church and a parish priest of District 5.



As a newly assigned youth minister with full of zeal and optimism, he hopes to develop a more comprehensive pastoral plan that would serve as a direction for the whole Sendai Diocesan Youth Ministry for at least the next 5 years. Instead of only organizing yearly activities that respond to the immediate needs, without having the



occasion to step back and carefully set priorities and identify needs to be addressed, Fr. Rafa wants to conduct a strategic planning that provides an opportunity for a

broader discussion of vision, mission, goals, and programs for the youth. He intends to do this together with the youth leaders and the Youth Ministry Team composed of Julie Fecteau of Quebec Foreign Mission Society and Clarita Sanchez of Sendai Diocese Support Center for Foreigners.

Having this scheme at the back of his mind and knowing that masses were still restricted in the church due to the pandemic, Fr. Rafa has kicked off the youth activity with an online mass using the Instagram account of the Sendai Youth Group (Instagram account ID is sendaiyouthgroup) every Saturday at 2:00 p.m. starting from May 29, 2021 until June 19, 2021. The Sendai Diocese Youth Ministry has social media accounts on Instagram, Facebook, Line and Youtube.

When the holy mass resumed in all the churches in Sendai, the regular 4th Saturday of the month youth mass also continued in June 26th at 2:00 p.m. in Mototerakoji



Church where it was streamed online on youth group's social media accounts. But sad to say, there were few attendees which prompted the youth community to do a more intensive and comprehensive promotion/campaign to reach out to the young people.



Since the vision of Fr. Rafa is still in the conceptual stage and for the time being while the pandemic is still around, the youth community decided during the June 26th meeting the following activities:

- The youth will join the international mass every 1st Sunday of the month at 6:00 p.m. in Mototerakoji Church. Right after the mass, the youth will gather for education/formation session.

- Every second Saturday of the month, Fr. Rafa will make himself available from 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. in Mototerakoji Church youth office. The youth can join him for coffee, consultation, chatting, confession, etc.



- Every third Saturday of the month at 5:00 p.m. will be the youth mass in Mototerakoji Church.

- Every fourth Saturday of the month from 12:00 – 5:00 p.m. will be a free day spend in Ishinomaki Church where Fr. Rafa resides. This day will be set for the young people to think of any activities to do on this day.

- The youth plans to have a summer camp in August 20 – 22 depending on the situation of the pandemic.

- The activities mentioned above will be done following all the protocols in preventing the spread of the virus.

And, for all these to be materialized, a new set of officers were chosen to assist in the implementation, Mako Senzaki is the coordinator and Carlos Baptista will be her assistant. These will be evaluated after 6 months to see how to improve the plan.

With high hopes, Fr. Rafa believes that everything will happen according to God's will, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the cooperation of everyone working towards Kingdom of God.

Clarita Sanchez (SDSCF)

News Update from the Pastoral Districts

District 3

Caritas Ofunato Base

We started the "Circle of Picture Letters"! Due to pandemic, the number of people who are visited by Caritas Ofunato Base has decreased, and the number of people who feel lonely and depressed has increased. We stopped accepting volunteers for over a year and many volunteers expressed their desire to visit Ofunato. Because of this, we created a project called "Circle of Picture Letter" where you can send a postcard that contains a picture and few words. It is a way to get in touch with each other even if we are far from each other. Hope springs from this new way of interaction. Thus, we are looking for 1) people who draw picture letters, 2) people who receive picture letters, and 3) those people who know someone who receive picture letters. For inquiries, please call Caritas Ofunato Base (0192-47-4737).



Ai Ohkochi (Caritas Ofunato Base)

District 4

Yonekawa Church

Yonekawa is a city blessed with sunny weather. Every year we look forward to attending mass to Yonekawa church. Sadly, last year, masses had been canceled due to corona virus. However, this year thanks to the dedication of many people, mass was celebrated by Fr. Takahashi and Fr. Lopez on June 12. After mass, we all walked to the Sankyozuka sites of the martyrs to offer prayers. The Yonekawa area has seen painful memories for 400 years ago. There were 120 hidden Christians working in mines who were arrested and persecuted on the order of the



Sendai Daimyo. After being crucified or beheaded they were buried in 3 groups of 40 peoples in 3 locations; Kainashizawa, Honosawa and Oinosawa. Hearing about this persecution is heart breaking for us living in modern Japan. We invite visitors all over Japan to come to Yonekawa church and Okago Museum.

Junji Suehiro (Senmaya Church)

**District 5
Higashisendai Church**

When masses resumed in June, Mr. Yasuo Yamamoto of Higashi Sendai Church was baptized on June 13. He underwent catechism class with Sr. Hasegawa. His baptismal name is Michael. We were happy to welcome him as a member of our community, and he was greeted by everyone with loud applause. These are the words of Fr. Lee, the presiding priest, "Baptism is not the end, but a new beginning. It is a new start. I hope you will walk forward with a new heart."



Yumi Wano (Higashi Sendai Church)

**District 6
Mototerakoji Church**

Since last year, masses were canceled due to Covid-19. Normally, baptism is celebrated during the Paschal Vigil. But, this year, it was impossible in this time of pandemic. Happily, on May 30th 2:00 p.m., on the Feast of the Holy Trinity, a Baptismal Ceremony was presided by Fr. Yoichi Onodera. This was the much-awaited baptism. The 8 catechumens, who were filled with hope, attended the ceremony together with their godparents. In order to respect the security measures, the number of attendees were limited to 20 persons. The limited number of attendees may seem to be a gloomy occasion. But this small group gathering created a warm and intimate atmosphere. Everyone was very happy to receive the grace of baptism. The person who could not attend the ceremony on that day were baptized by Fr. Shiro Komatsu on the Feast of Pentecost on May 23rd.

Sr. Masako Hasegawa

Mototerakoji Church



On June 6, the Feast of the Eucharist, four children who have been studying with Sister Hasegawa since October 2020, received the sacrament of First Communion at the 9:00 a.m. Mass at Mototerakoji Church. The First Communion Ceremony was interrupted several times due to the pandemic, but they continued to attend the

catechism class. We look forward to working with these international children who will be the future leaders of the church.

"I am glad that I could enjoy learning about Jesus. I'm glad I could learn so much about Jesus and have fun."

(Vincent Takahashi)

"The taste of the bread we received at the First Communion filled me with happiness and joy. I learned a lot of things in Sunday School. When I received my First Communion, I received many gifts and I was very happy."

(Gamutan Johan)

Yagiyama Church

The long-awaited baptismal service was held on June 6, the feast day of the Eucharist, in Yagiyama Church. Ms. Tsuneko Maria Kobayashi was baptized by Fr. Yoichi Onodera. Ms. Kobayashi's baptismal name is Mary. She got her basic catechism class when she was a student at Shirayuri Gakuen. It was the sisters from Shirayuri formed her to be a Catholic Christian and assisted her baptism. Ms. Tsuneko Kobayashi is a hard worker who continues to attend Bible reading groups and study even after her baptism. Welcome to Yagiyama Church!



Kazuo Noda (Yagiyama Church)

Tatamiyacho Church



We interviewed Yamaura-kun, who celebrated his First Communion, through his mother. He said that he has been watching his parents receiving communion for a long time and was wondering how the host tasted. I am very happy to have tasted it. The taste was not as bad as I thought it would be.

Shun Yamaura

**District 7
Nodamachi Church, Matsukicho Church**

On March 14, Nodamachi Church and Matsukicho Church held a joint Lenten recollection at Nodamachi Church. The lecturer was Mr. Michio Chiba, Director of Minamisanriku Caritas Base. He talked about the origin of volunteer activities from people all over the world through his experiences at World Youth Day and Taize in France, and about his activities in Minamisanriku for 10 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake. The power point presentation and video clips gave us a good opportunity to think about how we can be close to people and communities, and what it means to live like Christ.

Mizuho Komada
(Matsukicho Church)



Introducing the Sendai Diocese Priests

Fr. Gerardus Rekdak, CICM

Nickname: Gerry

Religious Congregation:

Congregatio Immaculati Cordis
Mariae (CICM)

Nationality/Birthplace: Indonesia

Diaconate Ordination: March 20,2002
Hiroshima Cathedral

Priestly Ordination: August 13,2002.Christ the King Parish,
Pejompongan, Jakarta Indonesia



Vocation Story

I was born and raised in a Catholic family and environment. During my childhood, I used to serve as an altar boy in our parish which was ministered by CICM missionary from Belgium. I was attracted by their missionary lifestyle where they left their homeland and went to serve in foreign countries like here in Japan. This attraction led me to enter the seminary and joined the CICM congregation and become one of the CICM members.

Contribution to Sendai Diocese

In our present situation, especially with the ambiguous circumstance we are experiencing because of the pandemic, I want to be a witness of God's love in doing my pastoral and missionary activities.

Vision for parishioners

Despite all the difficulties that the parishioners are going through in their lives, I hope that in the midst of all these hardships, they will truly discover and experience God's love and faithfulness in the Eucharist as they regularly come together to pray. By doing this, they will faithfully find their church community as a place of communion where they experience the spirit of God that guides them in their daily lives.

Hope for the Parishioners

I believe that the mission entrusted to us as followers of Christ has always been one and the same with that of Christ Jesus in the gospel as He proclaimed, "Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15). Let this be an invitation for all of us to respond to this call in our own way of life. And, remember that God is with us always.

Francisco Xavier Fr. Masashi Takahashi

Date of Birth: October 16,1936

Birthplace: Ichinoseki City,
Iwate Prefecture

Priestly Ordination: March 20,1965
Ichinoseki Church



Vocation Story

I went to Ichinoseki Church shortly after the war. Father Veillette (in short, Fr. Ve) loved children and had about 400 attending. There were three catechists. I learned about the existence of God, the purpose of life, and prayer. Fr. Ve was a priest who was strict with himself and kind to others. The writer Hisashi Inoue

was at the LaSalle Home for a while, and he had an exchange with Fr. Ve. In his book "Travels in Bologna," Mr. Inoue describes in detail in the section "St. Dominic, My Benefactor".

My story jumps to around 1949 when my mother went to Ichinoseki Church to ask for help from the parish priest, Fr. Ve. He suggested that she send her son to a boarding house (La Salle Home) in Sendai. I entered the La Salle Home, and a year later I was baptized by Fr. Ve. He was also the one who contacted Sophia University who gave me an exemption from entrance and tuition fee, and at the same time I got a scholarship fund from the Sendai Diocese. One time I asked Fr. Ve, "What do you do for the faithful? And I asked again, "You are doing something for the faithful, but don't you have any desires of your own?" Then he said, "Yes, there is. But I couldn't fulfill that wish. When the war broke out, the Canadians were declared physically fit foreigners and were forced to work in a factory in Gunma Prefecture." When I asked him if there was a way for him to return to Canada on the hostage exchange ship, he said, "We take the harder road, choose the more painful one, and pray and work hard, because this is the way of life of a Dominican. But I lost the opportunity to go to Bologna because of the war. It is the birthplace of the founder of the Order of St. Dominic." His eyes, looking from afar, as if he was longing for something. The priest's wish was not fulfilled and he passed away in 1974 while working at a church in Shirakawa City, Fukushima Prefecture, at the age of 66.

Fr. Ve is my role model. He showed me how I should live my life as a priest.

Vision for Parishioners

I would like to invite everyone on a pilgrimage to Mizusawa Church!

- In Mizusawa, there was a Christian Lord, Goto Jouan. He built a church, dug a weir, took care of priests and believers, and did not abandon his faith when persecuted. He is an example of a believer.
- There are three Blessed Fathers. (1) Blessed Father Calvaro, who was captured in the mines of Mizusawa and martyred with ten other believers in cold water at the Hirose River in Sendai in February. (2) Blessed Friar Peter Sawaguchi Kyubei from Maezawa, Oshu. He was baptized by an Augustinian priest and martyred in 1630 in Omura, Nagasaki, while working as an interpreter. He was 29 years old. (3) Blessed Father Peter Kibe, ordained in Rome 400 years ago, returned to Japan where he was persecuted, went north from Nagasaki, preached in the Tohoku region, mainly in Mizusawa, and was captured, hung upside down in Edo (present-day Tokyo), and martyred. There is a memorial park in Oita Prefecture, where he was born, and a statue of him made by Yasutake Funakoshi has been erected.
- Including the above, there are about 150 martyrs related to Mizusawa. Let's honor the martyrs.

Hope for the Parishioners

On the card commemorating my ordination as a priest, I quoted 1John 4: 20-21: "If anyone says, 'I love God', but hates his brother, he is a liar: for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." We live in a selfish world, but I will continue to pray that we will develop a heart that cares for others.