

Catholic Sendai Diocese Newsletter

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Catholic Sendai Diocese

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Hospitality of Abraham, mosaic, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome

Experiencing God's Hospitality

Bishop Edgar Gacutan

The story of Abraham welcoming three guests into his tent (Genesis 18:1-10a) is the first reading for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C), which this year fell on July 20, a very hot summer day. Some years ago while listening to this reading during Mass, I desperately wanted a drink to satisfy my thirst. In the scorching desert, hospitality — like the one Abraham offered to guests he did not know — revives weary travelers. Hebrews 13:2 tells us: "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels." Our Lord Jesus tells us in the parable of the last judgment: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

The episode of Jesus staying in the home of Martha and Mary on His way to Jerusalem (Luke 10:38-42) is the Gospel reading for the same Sunday. I spent ten days of early summer in 2013 walking about 240 kilometers to a pilgrimage shrine. After a day's walk, resting under a roof was such a delight. I think I know what Jesus meant when he said: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken from her." In life, we need to enjoy regular moments of rest where we share life's challenges and joys and encourage each other to keep on journeying.

The image of our Church walking together is captured by the word "synod". The late Pope Francis (who reigned from March 2013 to April 2025) — like his predecessors Saint Paul VI (1963–1978), Saint John Paul II (1978–2005) and Benedict XVI (2005–2013) — urged us that our Church continue along the path of synodality.

Pope Francis left us these words: "The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission... What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word "synod". Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into

put into practice" (October 17, 2015 Address on at the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops).

Many of us know the difficulty of journeying together. Church meetings can stall, opinions diverge, and unity seems elusive. In such moments, we need to remember the Apostle Paul's exhortations: "Bear with each other and forgive one another" (Colossians 3:13) and "Encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, known as the Synod on Synodality, was held from 2021 through October 2024. Its "Final Document" will serve as guideposts on our path as we journey on as a diocese.

I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit guides our journey and makes us one. The explanation of my episcopal motto and coat of arms expresses that same faith: "'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 human longing (♡). The lower half consists of the

cross and the ideogram for "heart" 心. This depicts that the Merciful God and diverse people seeking for the Truth draw near each other and that their thoughts and feelings resonate with each other. Following our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church groans with people, calls out to them 'You are not alone,' and with them grieves, prays, hopes, helps, laughs, and gives thanks."

Our Lord Jesus experienced the hospitality of people. He invites us to allow God to be our host: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).



Updates from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ)

The July 2025 Bulletin of the General Secretariat of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ) reported on the bishops' Assembly held from June 16 to 20, where chairpersons and responsible bishops for various committees were appointed. Bishop Edgar Gacutan of Sendai Diocese was appointed chair of the Priests and Permanent Deacons Ongoing Formation Committee and in charge of the Council for Justice and Peace under the Episcopal Commission for Social Issues.

The CBCJ continues to emphasize its commitment to peace, especially during Japan's annual "Ten Days for Peace" (August 6–15), which commemorates the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings and the end of World War II. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the war's end, prompting deeper reflection and new initiatives from the Church and society.

In 2025, the CBCJ released two significant messages:

1. **"A Journey of Peace: Bearing Hope"**
A Message from the Bishops 80 Years
After the War



2. **"Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons 2025"**



In their Declaration, the bishops said: "As followers of the gospel of Christ, we strongly urge the complete abolition of nuclear weapons in order to achieve peace through dialogue and to protect the life and dignity of all people." The bishops also stated that they support the principles of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and urged the Japan government to ratify it as soon as possible.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki dioceses hosted peace events, including symposiums, educational activities, peace-themed essay contests and youth programs. Bishop Edgar Gacutan read the bishops' "Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons" during a symposium held in Hiroshima on August 5. In the evening of August 9, a mass was held at Nagasaki's Urakami Cathedral, which was followed by a torchlight procession. These initiatives aim to preserve historical memory and pass on the value of peace to future generations.

Sr. Masako Hasegawa

(Public Relations Committee Member, Sendai Diocese)

42nd Japan Catholic National Convention for Justice and Peace 2025 Sendai Conference "Hope Does Not Disappoint"

The 42nd National Gathering of the Japan Catholic Council for Justice and Peace will be held in Sendai from October 11–13, 2025, under the theme "Hope Does Not Disappoint," marking 14 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake. Bishop Gacutan, recently appointed bishop-in-charge of the Council for Justice and Peace, emphasizes gratitude for the nationwide church support after the disaster. The event takes place over three days: Day 1 features visits to affected areas; Day 2 includes reflection sessions with a keynote on lessons from the earthquake and nuclear accident and a symposium; Day 3

offers workshops on various social justice topics, including peace advocacy inspired by Pope Francis, nuclear risks, disaster recovery, global conflicts like Gaza, discrimination issues, and support for foreign trainees and the homeless. The convention highlights the interconnectedness of justice and peace issues, including local recovery, nuclear safety, human rights, and global peace efforts, aiming to inspire active commitment to a safer, more just world.

Sr. Masako Hasegawa

(Public Relations Committee Member, Sendai Diocese)

Parish Activities

A Mini-Pilgrimage with Lay Missionary Julie Fecteau A Wonderful Experience at Ipponsugi Church

In celebration of the Jubilee Year, the Diocese of Sendai has designated one pilgrimage church per region to allow the faithful to visit and pray, receiving the spiritual grace of the Holy Year. Julie Fecteau, a lay missionary from the Société des Missions-Étrangères du Québec (SME), serves in District 4 and initiated a mini-pilgrimage program that anyone could participate in, regardless of age or physical ability.

After hearing comments like "I can't walk long distances" or "Do I have to go to Rome or Jerusalem?", Julie created a 45-minute PowerPoint presentation to explain that pilgrimage is, above all, an act of prayer and a symbolic journey toward God. Her message was well received by parishioners.

The first mini-pilgrimage was held with three volunteers from Tatamiya-chō Church. The second, on June 22, gathered 13 parishioners from Ipponsugi Church. After



Mass, they began their 7.5 km journey in 33°C heat, passing through Tatamiya-chō Church and the Hirose River Martyrs' Monument, and finishing at Mototerakoji Church. They prayed, sang, and carried prayer intentions from those who could not join. Along the way, they strengthened community bonds and deepened their faith. At Mototerakoji Church, they were welcomed by Vietnamese youth, with both groups singing the pilgrimage song in their native languages. After reading the Gospel and sharing prayers, the group returned to Ipponsugi Church with a profound sense of fulfillment.

Julie's initiative shows that pilgrimage is not limited to faraway places—it can be local, accessible, and deeply spiritual. Other churches in District 4 are also planning or have completed similar pilgrimages. The Diocese encourages all to take this opportunity to become "Pilgrims of Hope," walking together in faith during this Holy Year.

Sr. Masako Hasegawa

(Public Relations Committee Member, Sendai Diocese)



A Home Port for Seafarers: The Birth of Stella Maris in Onahama and Our First Celebration of Seafarers' Day

I never imagined I would become involved with the Stella Maris Ministry. My connection began unexpectedly when my brother, a marine engineer, fell seriously ill at sea and was hospitalized in Canada. By grace, my mother and I were in New York then, and thanks to a call from Stella Maris, we could visit him. Back then, I saw Stella Maris as just another organization, unaware of its deep compassion and importance.



Years later, at Onahama Port, everything changed. I met a group of Filipino seafarers gathered in a small store during

the cold Christmas season. Seeing them, I thought of my brother and the lonely holidays he must have spent at sea. I realized Stella Maris was more than a name—it was a calling. These seafarers are silent heroes enduring long isolation and hardship for their families and the world's economy. They didn't just want charity; they needed a home port—a place to feel welcomed and valued.

Encouraged by Bishop Kazuo Koda, Fr. Antonio Matias, and I connected with the Filipino community at the Tambayan Onahama Store, a refuge for seafarers. Their stories of faith and longing inspired us to create Stella Maris Ministry in Onahama Port—not just as a service but as a spiritual home for seafarers, foreign workers, and parishioners.

Since January 2025, we've held monthly multilingual Masses there, small but full of heart. This July, we celebrated Seafarers' Day with 24 attendees, including female seafarers joining for the first time. We gave out rosaries as symbols of our prayers and solidarity.

Though just beginning, Stella Maris in Onahama is already a sacred home port—welcoming, healing, and full of hope for those who sacrifice so much yet ask for so little.

Clarita (Claire) Sanchez/Lay Missionary, Sendai Diocese

Districts Updates

The word Bloc refers to a number of parishes whose pastoral care is entrusted to one parish priest, who may have an assistant.

From District 1

**Aomori–Shimokita Bloc / Honcho Church/
Hirosaki Bloc / Hirosaki Church**

**The Church: Leaven for the Reconciliation of the
World, A Sign of Unity and Communion**



On May 24, representatives of District 1 held a meeting at Honcho Church with Bishop Edgar Gacutan. The next day, Bishop Gacutan presided the Sunday Mass at Hirosaki Church, a designated Jubilee pilgrimage site. In his homily, Bishop Gacutan expressed his hope that District 1 become a "leaven for the reconciliation of the world" and a "sign of unity and communion," echoing Pope Leo XIV. Quoting Acts 4:32, he stressed that unity is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. He encouraged the Church to walk with the people in prayer, hope, and gratitude, building communion across the Sendai Diocese.

Dai Matsuda (Namiuchi Church)

Sanpachi Bloc / Hachinohe Shiocho Church

Joint Confirmation Ceremony & International Day

On June 22, 2025, Hachinohe Shiocho Church was the venue of the Sunday celebration for the seven churches belonging to the Sanpachi Bloc.



During the Mass, Bishop Edgar Gacutan conferred the Sacrament of Confirmation on ten parishioners. Father Patrick Castroverde and Father Justin Lukusa concelebrated. The Mass featured hymns, readings, and prayers in various languages. Over 220 people from eight countries participated. After the Mass, certificates and gifts were presented to the newly confirmed, followed by a group photo and a joyful Bon Odori dance. A vibrant fellowship gathering was held at the Imelda Kindergarten yard, with

multilingual emceeing, community introductions, games, and performances. Participants enjoyed international dishes, including Japanese soba, Vietnamese sticky rice with side dishes, and Filipino lumpia, lugaw, and macaroni salad. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the event fostered unity, cultural exchange, and celebration among local and international faithful. The participants expressed their gratitude for the meaningful encounter.

Tomohiro Makiyama (Hachinohe Shiocho Church)

From District 2

Iwate Coast Bloc / Miyako Church

Cardinal Isao Kikuchi in his hometown of Miyako
Cardinal Isao Kikuchi, who considers Miyako Church his



spiritual hometown, celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving there following his appointment as Cardinal. The event gathered parishioners from Miyako and neighboring churches,

including Kamaishi, Tono, Mizusawa, and others, as well as families from the Niigata Diocese. In his homily, the Cardinal reflected on the strong presence of the Holy Spirit. After Mass, a commemorative photo was taken, followed by a joyful luncheon at Sayuri Kindergarten Hall featuring local chirashi sushi and homemade pound cake.

Childhood friends Ms. Toshiko Kato and Sr. Kuniko Nakajima contributed warmly, with the latter presenting a portrait she painted of the Cardinal. The Cardinal also encountered Miyako's new mayor during a stroll in Jodogahama. In his address, he acknowledged the challenges of maintaining churches with declining believers but encouraged trust in God's providence. His letter of thanks expressed renewed dedication to serving the Church.

Junko Ito (Miyako Church Chairperson)

From District 4

Sendai Eastern Bloc / Shiogama Church & Higashi Sendai Church



Hello, Father Henri

In 2025, Fr. Henri Badibanga was appointed to succeed Fr. Naoki Morita as pastor of the Sendai Eastern Bloc (Shiogama and Higashi Sendai Churches). Parishioners prepared the long-vacant priest's

residence with repairs, cleaning, and furniture to warmly welcome him. His kind smile comforted many. Fr. Henri celebrated his first Mass in the block on April 27, Divine Mercy Sunday, at both churches. A portrait of the late Pope Francis, who passed on April 21, was displayed on the altar. Parishioners were moved by Fr. Henri's words. They now look to him for guidance as they journey in faith with hope.

Masako Abe (Higashi Sendai Church)

Cathedral Bloc/Sendai Eastern Bloc

"Summer Day Camp in Kita Sendai"

On August 2, the eight parishes located in Sendai City and Shiogama City held a "Summer Day Camp" at Kita Sendai Church with 22 children and 15 church-school leaders. Fr. Ignacio introduced the theme "Pilgrims of Hope," highlighting Tsunenaga Hasekura's faith journey. The



children toured the sanctuary, played games, and enjoyed curry lunch. Guest speaker Hirota Nanmoku, who plays Hasekura in "Date

Bushoutai", shared how portraying Hasekura led to his baptism. The group visited Hasekura's grave and Fr. Luis Sotelo's monument at Komyozenji Temple, then concluded with a Mass. The event connected Japanese Christian history with faith formation for the young.

Sr. Masako Hasegawa

[In the years 1613 through 1620, Hasekura headed the Keichō Embassy, a diplomatic mission to Pope Paul V. He visited New Spain and various other ports-of-call in Europe on the way. On the return trip, Hasekura and his companions retraced their route across New Spain in 1619, sailing from Acapulco for Manila, and then sailing north to Japan in 1620.(Wikipedia)]

Knowing our Priests

Fr. Justin Lukusa Mende

CICM (Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary)



- **Date of Birth:** March 28, 1981
- **Country of Origin:** Democratic Republic of the Congo
- **Priestly Ordination:** October 1, 2013
Cathedral of Mbuji-Mayi Diocese

Fr. Justin Lukusa Mende, CICM, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was ordained a priest on October 1, 2013, at the Cathedral of Mbuji-Mayi. He is the fifth of seven siblings and began his religious journey at age 18. In 1999, he joined the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) and later studied philosophy, completed his novitiate, and made his first profession. In 2004, he went to the Philippines to study English and theology. He arrived in Japan in 2009, studied Japanese and culture in Osaka, and trained in pastoral ministry at Matsubara Church in Tokyo.

After ordination, Fr. Justin was assigned to Mongolia in 2014, where he served the Catholic Church and the CICM community for ten years. For the last five and a half years, he ministered at Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral.

In June 2024, he returned to Japan and was sent to the Sendai Diocese for pastoral training. He now lives in Hachinohe and has been there for over a year, appreciating the peaceful natural environment. In April 2025, he was appointed assistant priest of the Sanpachi Bloc.

Fr. Justin is committed to deepening his Japanese language skills and learning Tohoku culture. Despite the vastness of the diocese and shortage of priests—especially in District 1—he sees these challenges as opportunities. With hope, dedication, and trust in God's guidance, he aims to serve and build fellowship within the church communities, and he asks for continued support and prayers.

Fr. Ignatius Christianus Basa

SVD (Society of the Divine Word)



- **Date of Birth:** October 8, 1979
- **Country/Place of Origin:** Lembata Island, Indonesia
- **Ordination to the Priesthood:** October 18, 2009
Lederero Major Seminary, Society of the Divine Word

Fr. Ignatius Christianus Basa, known as "Insen," is a Divine Word Missionary priest from Lembata Island, Indonesia, born on October 8, 1979. Inspired by two seminarians who led liturgies in his village during his childhood, he entered the minor seminary in 1995. His vocation progressed steadily: he professed perpetual vows in 2008, was ordained a deacon in May 2009, and became a priest in October 2009 at the Society of the Divine Word's major seminary on Flores Island.

In 2010, Fr. Insen was sent to Japan, where he studied Japanese at Nanzan University. After completing his language studies in 2012, he served at the Ludovico Minor Seminary in Nagasaki and obtained a Japanese driver's license. In 2013, he was assigned to the Sendai Diocese, serving several churches in Iwate Prefecture while based in Yotsuya Church. In 2017, he transferred to Hirabari Church in the Nagoya Diocese, where he ministered for six years.

In 2023, he moved to Tsuchizaki and Honjo Churches in the Niigata Diocese. Following the Noto Peninsula Earthquake on January 1, 2024, he volunteered in Ishikawa Prefecture until May. As of April 2025, he has returned to the Sendai Diocese and now serves the Sanriku Bloc while living at Ofunato Church.

His priestly journey has been marked by both joy and hardship, but his enduring hope—nurtured through prayer, the Eucharist, and the support of parishioners—continues to guide him in trusting God and seeking His plan.