

April 2009 - Diocesan Newsletter

While Celebrating the Joy of the Lord's Resurrection Together

Saitama Diocese

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Restore to Labor its Original Meaning

From the financial crisis triggered in America, a growing sense of economic and personal insecurity has spread around the world. With the layoff of many temporary workers etc., Japanese and many migrant workers have been forced into a very difficult situation. This has exposed the dangers of a market fundamentalism whose weakness lies in only prioritizing profits. This has also revealed that Japanese laws and governmental policies have not been directed toward treating migrants as human beings or as our brothers and sisters. I think that a lot of people have now become aware of this reality.

At the end of the last year and the beginning of this year, both I and the Bishops' Commission for Societal Issues have issued messages. In these messages we asked that the parishes, as a matter of concern for human rights and human life, discuss these issues and move toward concrete action to help, not only those whose jobs have been taken away from them, but also to help those among the newly unemployed who have also lost their place to live. Consequently, there are now many parishes where the Parish Councils have taken up these issues and are involved in various concrete activities to cooperate and to offer assistance to those in need. Before now not many Parish Councils had taken up these kinds of life issues that are of direct concern to the members of their parishes. I am very happy to hear about these developments. I am very grateful that in this difficult period for so many people, we have received this grace from God to concretely deal with these problems together.

In Moses' Ten Commandments there is the admonition to, "Keep Holy the Sabbath" (Exodus 20:8). Under the Pharaohs (Kings) in Egypt, there was forced labor under harsh conditions (1:11-14), violations against freedom of religion (5:17), and the exploitation of labor. The Sabbath is not for an improvement in the efficiency of labor. If labor also is not for an increase in profits then it is not for exploitation either. In the model of God's creation, there is labor and there is rest. Through labor, human beings participate in God's creation, and through the Sabbath, they offer praise and thanksgiving to God. Through the admonition, "Keep Holy the Sabbath," God liberated

labor and rest from the debasement they had undergone amidst the structures of exploitation and oppression.

In this age of economic and personal insecurity, we can read the signs of the times. In the midst of a society with economic priorities, let us restore human dignity to people who are made in the image of God (Imago Dei), and once again restore to labor and to rest their original meaning. I urge that we apply God's teaching and his message to our understanding of labor and to the Japanese laws and governmental policies that affect migrant laborers.

Establishment of the Japan Catholic Seminary

This year in Saitama Diocese, Deacon Fujita Megumi will be ordained a priest and seminarian Nelson Seno Cabasisi will be ordained a deacon. In addition, during the coming year, Deacon Nelson and seven other seminarians will be receiving formation at the seminary. Also three aspirants are preparing for the priesthood. I am thankful that God has given this great grace to the People of God.

Up until now there have been two seminaries, one in Tokyo and one in Fukuoka. From this year the two seminaries will be joined together, and be known as the "Japan Catholic Seminary". For this year there will be 48 seminarians in formation. It is good that the seminarians who will support the Church of the future are all formed in one place.

However, through this joining together, the financial contribution that the Diocese must bear will increase by about 2,000,000 yen. Since the total cost of formation for the Diocese in 2008 was 18,000,000 yen, it will be necessary to spend 20,000,000 yen for formation in 2009. These costs are covered by the contributions of the members of the "One Grain of Wheat" Support Association, the contributions of the parishes toward the "Seminary Fund" and by the interest on the moveable assets of the Diocese etc. In 2008, through your cooperation, the "One Grain of Wheat" Support Association contributed 6,000,000 yen and the "Seminary Fund" 4,000,000 yen. I hope that in the near future it will become possible to support the seminarian's formation just through the "One Grain of Wheat" Support Association and the "Seminary Fund".

I hope that membership in the "One Grain of Wheat" Support Association will increase one person at a time, so as to include many more people. I ask those who are already members to raise their voices at various gatherings to encourage more people to join the association. In addition, I ask that you urge cooperation in the parishes for contributions to the "Seminary Fund". Together with these endeavors, I ask you to pray for the seminarians and the aspirants.

Various Events to be held in the Diocese

In February, in the West Block of Ibaraki Prefecture, Joso Church was constructed. In March, in the South Block of Tochigi Prefecture, a new church for Kaminokawa Parish was consecrated. I am thankful for the cooperation of the various blocks and for the prayers and support of all the parishes of Saitama Diocese.

At the upcoming 70th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Diocese Commemorative Event, the “Block versus Block Mini-Soccer Meet” (May 4th), money prizes will be offered thanks to a contribution from the Capuchin Friars. The Utsunomiya Star of the Sea Girls School has generously provided their grounds for this event. Each block, even in these difficult financial times, is preparing for this Mini-Soccer Meet. Money prizes will also be given to groups who come to cheer on their teams, so please come out and attend this event. It should be a good time for everyone. ,

The Justice and Peace Commission Saitama National Convention (Oct. 10-12)

This year there was no other Diocese that was able to host this National Convention, so through the cooperation of Omiya Church and the people of many other parishes, Saitama Diocese became the host. The Coordinating Committee for the Convention is continuing to do their preparation work with this in mind: “use easy to understand language, and prepare for a convention that everyone is able to attend.” They had the slogan, “Peace and Justice for Aunts and Uncles” but decided to withdraw it as some thought that this would make it difficult for young people to attend. But with the nuance of this slogan still in mind, the preparations continue. By all means, I hope that many young people will attend the Convention. There will be small group meetings on various topics at a number of parishes. If these meetings could be used as an occasion to gather together at the same table to eat and study together, I will be very happy.

The “Diocesan Convention” (Nov. 23rd) is being hosted by two blocks, the North and East Blocks of Saitama Prefecture, and will be held in Fukaya. As a preparation step for the Diocesan Convention, I have heard that a “Journey with the Scriptures” is also being planned. Since 1992, once every two years, these Diocesan Conventions are held as a meeting that symbolizes the unity, cooperation and interaction of the People of God. Please let us overcome the language barrier and invite as many people as possible.

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While in the midst of economic and personal insecurity, this is precisely the time for us as brothers and sisters to turn our attention to God’s voice, to gather together around the same table, and while sharing in each others joys and sorrows, to be hopeful as we continue our journey together.