

To all the faithful in Saitama Diocese

Beginning the Year of Evangelization for the Diocese of Saitama

— Every single Catholic is a missionary —

Mission of the Church

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news. Spread my teachings to the people of all nations. Make them my disciples."

This is the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus.

In 1987, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan held the National Incentive Convention for Evangelization (NICE), in which we promoted "Building an Open Church" as a priority issue and held up a motto of "listen, absorb, encourage." We aimed to identify the Church as a community that responds to people's concerns and needs and offers rest, comfort and encouragement especially to the vulnerable, the people with mental or emotional problems, and those who are suffering from anxiety and loneliness.

We want to be the church that warmly welcomes any visitors. And we want not only priests but all the laity to be able to share how they became Christian and what they believe in what way with anyone who wants to know about Christianity. Therefore, it is our sincere desire to encourage and foster the church community to prepare its members for communicating their faith in words of their own.

Evangelization by the Laity

All the laity are called to evangelize.

However, they should evangelize in accordance with their own status and vocation.

The laity have a role to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God through their earthly duty to be accomplished. Meanwhile, it is very important for them to receive training necessary to be in charge of Bible study groups for beginners and Catholics or to usher at their parishes.

In this regard, it is also necessary for them to ensure good communication with their clergy, pastors and other collaborators.

I understand many of you want to learn more about the Catechism, the Bible and the liturgy, etc. and encourage you to hold study sessions on them at each parish. The fact is, however, that it depends on the size of parishes and that priests are busy. It would be preferable that these study sessions be held on the diocesan or prefectural level.

Difficulty of Christianity

I have some questions to consider with you.

What kind of religion is Christianity accepted as in the Japanese society? There are many people outside the Church that criticize us because they don't quite understand what we say and do as well as our teachings. Can you see which aspects are difficult to accept, which are stumbling blocks, and which are incomprehensible?

Other questions are really simple: What happens to us when we die? Why is there so much evil in the world God created? We would like to treasure the challenge to answer those questions.

The Great East Japan Earthquake presented a big challenge to the various religions in a way.

Pope Benedict XVI gave a sincere answer to a Catholic girl named Elena from Japan who had experienced the earthquake and asked him to ask God why children in Japan had to go through the tremendous sadness.

"Witness" is also important. People are sensitive to not so much what we believe and say as how we live out what we say.

How are we living our daily life? If our life betrays the nice words we say, that could be a stumbling to other people.

New Evangelization Committee

So we have a challenge in how we should face the lack of understanding or misunderstanding about the teachings of Christianity and make an effort to clear them up. To address the challenge, I have set up "New Evangelization Committee." I ask for your understanding and cooperation, and would like you to join the committee.

January 30, 2017

Archbishop Peter Takeo OKADA
Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Saitama