

Guidelines for the New Way

Abide in My love (John 15:9)

UNUM CORPUS IN CHRISTO

May we be one body and one mind in Christ

The Right Reverend Mario Michiaki Yamanouchi
Bishop of Saitama

February 17, 2023

Brothers and sisters of Diocese of Saitama,

Three full years have passed since we had to suspend the public celebration of Sunday Masses with the first wave of the spread of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020. Although the public Masses have been resumed, we are still in the midst of the eighth wave of the outbreak. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you all for your earnest responses to the 23 precautionary measures I have requested as Bishop of Saitama over this long period of time.

I also would like to share with you some “special realizations”, or “unexpected graces”, that I, as your bishop, have received from the Lord God during these three years. The most important reason for this is that I believe that in these realizations I have found a “guidepost for the sea route” that we as a people in Diocese of Saitama should follow in the future.

Toward “the Church going beyond differences in nationality, language and culture” to live the Gospel together

The churches in Diocese of Saitama are “the Church of God placed in the land of Japan”. And it was more than 30 years ago when the people of this faith community started welcoming anew and walking together with our numerous brothers and sisters first from Vietnam, followed by the Philippines, Brazil, Peru and other countries.

Looking back to the past, fortunately, in some relatively small parishes (the majority of churches in our diocese fall into this category), not only do they celebrate Sunday Masses with the entire community, regardless of whether the language of the Mass is Japanese or foreign, but they even have the entire community celebrate festivals that were important to foreign nationals in their home countries.

Unfortunately, however, at some parishes where both Japanese and non-Japanese

congregations are in large numbers (although they are few in number), Sunday Masses are almost always celebrated separately for each language. In other words, the parish still remains a hodgepodge of different communities by their own language. I strongly feel that Diocese of Saitama, instead of being content with this reality, is now at a stage where it has taken a step forward and is aiming to become a "church going beyond differences in nationality, language, and cultural background to live the Gospel in communion with one another. We must not forget that foreign-language Masses have been an important place of fellowship for people who share the same native language, but we should not be afraid that this fellowship will be lost if they become a part of a congregation of people of various native languages. Let us not be afraid to take the first step toward a new challenge together.

The Apostle Paul's well-known words come vividly to mind: "For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26-28).

First of all, I call on all our priests and deacons

I consider this opportunity as a "time of grace" that God has given us, and I'm determined to take steps forward after COVID-19 to make it a great opportunity for us to become a "multinational church in communion with one another breaking away from a hotchpotch of groups and retaining a rich diversity". Specifically, I'm eager to move forward together with you by centering on the Mass of the community (the Eucharist of the Lord and the Word of God), giving and receiving the Sacraments of the Church, and always living out our attitude of prayer. First of all, I ask all our priests and deacons to take the lead in this effort, believing that they will surely respond to my request, then I would like to call on all the faithful in the diocese.

For our foreign brothers and sisters, I believe that it is still important for them to attend Mass in their native language, listen to homilies in their native language, and gather with other brothers and sisters of their native language at times, even though they have already been in Japan for a long period of time. Therefore, we will have a "trial period" from around Easter Sunday for Masses, Sacraments, Catechesis, prayer meetings, etc. to proceed in accordance with the 24th Precautionary Measures announced simultaneously with these guidelines. Then we will complete the "new policy" by making necessary modifications as needed.

Sharing Saitama Diocesan Prayer with all our brothers and sisters

In the Diocese of Saitama, we have always recited Saitama Diocesan Prayer together at

diocesan conferences, pastoral conferences, and other important meetings and gatherings, to walk ahead with renewed hearts. Now, in this 84th year since our establishment, Diocese of Saitama is beginning to move forward with renewed determination as a diocese blessed with "rich diversity". I encourage you to pray with us Saitama Diocesan Prayer, attached at the end of this message, at parish gatherings and many other occasions.

Now is the time for us to be one body and one mind in Christ!

In addition to COVID-19 pandemic, the staggering event of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the nightmare of the believers in Jesus invading a country of their brothers and sisters who also believe in Him, has been distressing people all over the world. However, we should never despair and continue to pray for a day of peace for all our brothers and sisters to come as soon as possible. Let us bear in mind that times of trial are always times of grace and pray to God our Father, asking the Blessed Virgin Mary to intercede for us.

Appendix 1: Saitama Diocesan Prayer

All loving Father,

Like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground, the seed of the Gospel was sown together with the blood of the Christian martyrs, by the walking missionaries who opened up Saitama Diocese.

We thank you from our hearts because due to the spiritual and material support that we have received from many people up until now, eighty-three years have passed since the establishment of the diocese (John 12:34).

We who have been called to be bearers of the Gospel among modern day people, who in the midst of plenty feel a hunger in their hearts, once again resolve to first renew ourselves, so as to discard the "old person" and live through the strength of the Gospels as "disciples of Christ" (Ephesians 4:23).

Father, please make us people who tear down the walls of division, and make us a sign of contradiction toward injustice (Ephesians 2:14, Luke 2:35).

Please help us, who partake of the One Bread, to become poor so as to enrich many people and to own nothing so as to possess many things (I Corinthians 10:17, II Corinthians 6:10).

And, so that we may be part of the heavenly kingdom, please always give us the grace of

being people who are poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3).

We ask all this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*This prayer was created on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Diocese of Urawa. The number of the years since the establishment indicated in the second paragraph is to be increased each year: 83 years in Year 2022; 84 years in Year 2023; 85 years in Year 2024; 86 years in Year 2025, etc.

Appendix 2: Prayer Circle at Monastery of St. Clare in Kiryu

The Poor Clare Sisters have been praying for all the churches in Diocese of Saitama through Prayer Journey called *Kizuna* (絆, or Bonds). Let us join them on their Prayer Journey.