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Bishop's Message for the New Year 2013

**NO ONE POURS NEW WINE INTO OLD WINESKINS.  
(Mk. 2:22)**

To my Brothers and Sisters of Saitama Diocese,

**Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all!**

Since October of last year, we began celebrating the Year of Faith. It is by baptism, that we each pass through the “door of faith” and begin our faith journey. At the beginning of the New Year, I would like to reflect with you about this “door of faith” by referencing the Acts of the Apostles, the Second Vatican Council and recent developments on the faith journey of Saitama Diocese.

**The Acts of the Apostles**

Paul and Barnabas left for a missionary journey where they had to overcome various hardships and sufferings, while leading many Gentiles to the faith. With great joy they returned to Antioch and, “On arriving there, they gathered the Church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” (Acts14:27)

At that time, circumcision became a difficult issue for missionary work with the Gentiles. Circumcision was a religious practice that followed Mosaic custom and was the traditional sign of faith for the people of Israel. The people of Israel believed that there was no salvation for those who were uncircumcised. However, for Gentiles who wanted to pass through the “door of faith”, circumcision became a great obstacle.

Accordingly, the Apostles and the elders gathered in Jerusalem and held a Council of the Apostles, (this Jerusalem Council was the first public council of the Church!). At this Council, they decided not to lay the burden of circumcision on the Gentiles. Because of this decision, it became possible for everyone who believed in the Gospel to be baptized and become a member of the Church community. Paul and Barnabas' journey, through which they encountered many people, became the occasion for opening the “door of faith” for all the peoples of the world.

**The Second Vatican Council (the Vatican II)**

The Councils that especially opened the “door of faith” wider were the abovementioned Council of Jerusalem and 1,900 years later, the Second Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council sought to renew the

Church, reconciliation with separated brothers and sisters of Christ, solidarity with people, especially those who were suffering, and aimed for a Church which ministers to these people. Through the Second Vatican Council the “door of faith” was opened a bit wider. Through the Jerusalem Council, the “door of faith” was widened by taking away the obstacle of circumcision; whereas the distinctive feature of the Second Vatican Council was that the “door of faith” was widened through the renewal of the Church itself. Through renewal of the Church, God invited the Church to participate even more fervently in God’s work of salvation.

Jesus taught: “And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins,” (Mk. 2:22). I think these words express the special character of the Second Vatican Council.

Of course the Church is the People of God. Each and every one of us and also all of us together as a community, are renewed by the Word of God, and share the Word of God in our encounters with other people. In this way, the “door of faith” is opened to many more people.

### **The Faith Journey of Saitama Diocese**

You have worked enthusiastically participating in the relief activities for victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant accident. Through reconstruction activities, many victims and volunteers were able to interact; and we got a firsthand experience of the importance and joy of being and living together. Through these encounters we also saw our faith in a new light and thus renewed ourselves. Moreover, in many different and varied circumstances, we got to encounter many people, especially people who had been marginalized. These encounters also enabled us to renew ourselves and to reflect on our own faith. In this way, our faith itself became renewed through our interactions in these social events.

There are many opportunities to meet a lot of new people who are living around us. On the other hand, there are issues such as the American Bases in Okinawa, which seems distant from our daily lives. There are people who suffer because of our indifference. Perhaps, encountering these people as well may open the “door of faith” even wider.

I hope that we can be like Paul and Barnabas and go on mission journeys so that with great joy we too can “report all God had done through us and how he opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” I give you my blessing for the grace of many person-to-person encounters throughout the coming year.

† May the Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless you all.

January 1, 2013  
Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Bishop Marcellino TANI Daiji  
Catholic Diocese of Saitama