

**“The child grew and became strong, and filled with wisdom;  
and the favor of the Lord was with him.” (Luke 2:40)**

Dear brothers and sisters of Diocese of Saitama,

In the name of the Lord, I wish you joy in the New Year. I look forward to walking together with you throughout the coming year.

Today, on New Year's Day, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. It is a day when we pray to God with all our hearts for peace in the world and humankind through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let us pray for the coming of a peaceful world without hatred, sorrow, war, division, exploitation, or starvation by saying, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace” (St. Francis of Assisi).

My wish is that the young people will be at the center of our steps toward the realization of this prayer and desire. As we head toward the Jubilee Year of 2025, Pope Francis is calling on us to join forces to help young people in particular to expand their hearts with living hope. I, too, am eager to respond this call of his. Now that the threat of COVID-19 is subsiding, we are happy to report that the budding of small gatherings of young people is clearly visible. I am very much looking forward to seeing these groups of young people grow into a diocesan-level community across nationalities, languages and cultures. As soon as something concrete is decided, I will let you all know about it and encourage you to make it a part of our diocese’s overall efforts. Please look forward to it.

As we have inherited our faith from previous generations, it is the young people living with us today who will carry on the faith into the future. If you are asked for advice by young people who want to gather together at your church or at a nearby training center to discuss their hopes as Christian faithfuls, please do help them realize their hopes.

The next World Youth Day will be held in Seoul, the capital of Korea, three years later in 2027. Let us keep our eyes on the event and pray that as many young people as possible from our diocese will participate in it with enthusiasm.

In order that these dreams may come true, on the first day of the year 2024, I give you the blessing written down in the Book of Numbers:

The Lord bless you and keep you!

The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!

(Numbers 6:24-25)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

January 1, 2024

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

Mario Yamanouchi Michiaki

Bishop of Diocese of Saitama