

At the Dawn of the Year 2021

The Lord bless you and keep you (Numbers 6:24)

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Dear brothers and sisters of the Diocese of Saitama,

May the Lord fill you with joy and hope throughout the New Year!

On the New Year's Day today, the Church is celebrating the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, the Mother of God. May God, who became incarnate through Mary, be with us and watch over us in the new year 2021.

We are also celebrating the 54th World Day of Peace, established by Pope Paul VI in 1968. As the title of this year's message Pope Francis chose "a Culture of Care as a Path to Peace", for all our experiences in midst of COVID19 pandemic have taught us how important it is to care for one another and for creation in our efforts to build a more fraternal society. By "a culture of care" the Pope means a way to combat the culture of indifference, waste and confrontation so prevalent in our time. He shows how God the Creator is the source of our human vocation to care and a model of care, and exhorts us to learn deeply about the heart of care in the ministry of Jesus and in the life of his followers. Pope Francis goes on to encourage us to learn the principles of the Church's social doctrine as the basis for a culture of care, that is, care as promotion of the dignity and rights of each person, care for the common good, care through solidarity, and care and protection of creation. These principles are a compass pointing to a common path, and he concludes: "There can be no peace without a culture of care."

Looking back on last year, I sent you 14 letters on response to the pandemic of new coronavirus infections, an encouragement message and a letter titled "In Time of Trial", and I would like to thank every one of you for having embraced all my messages and having walked with me. I am convinced that the culture of care has already sprouted at the root of

the unity that you have achieved. Now, with no end in sight to the new coronavirus pandemic, let us renew our minds and work together throughout the New Year to nurture and protect the culture of care as a path to peace, to realize solidarity with others, and to be prophets and witnesses as tools for peace.

With the blessing of St. Francis of Assisi, I extend my fraternal blessing to each and every one of you on this occasion of the New Year.

May the Lord bless and keep you.

May He make His face shine upon you and be merciful to you.

May He turn His countenance toward you and give you His peace.

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