

Paschal Pastoral Letter
The Coming Three Years in the Diocese of Takamatsu

On January 30, 2010 a meeting of representatives from each parish of the diocese was held. From the standpoint of the future of our diocese, it was a very important meeting. The groundwork for the meeting was the information sent to the Diocesan Office in response to the questionnaire "Reflecting on our Church". The objective of the meeting was to clarify what constitutes our thinking about Church.

In order to enable the process to go smoothly, a method derived from the 1987 National Incentive Convention for Evangelization (NICE) was adopted. To reflect on the meaning of Church, NICE began by examining closely three faces of Church: Faith, Community, and Involvement in Society. The conclusion arrived at during NICE was that if one or other of the three aspects were to be neglected one could not really call the assembly Church. At the meeting of January 30 we considered what would happen in a parish if one or other of the three aspects was lacking

I. Three Aspects Forming a Triangular Church

FAITH

The three aspects are all interrelated and if even one of them falls apart the whole structure becomes unstable. If faith is not deepened, no matter how intense the involvement in social action is that involvement cannot be called an activity of the Church. It is only by deepening one's faith that we become Church. Even among Christians, if only people of like mind assemble, it would be difficult to call such a group Church. We need to find ways to deepen our faith. The study of Scripture is important as is having opportunities to share with others about prayer. It is also important to make the liturgy of the Lord's Day as vibrant as possible. This brings me to my first question: "What means are available in your parish to enable you to deepen your faith? Are enough resources available?"

COMMUNITY

Even if a person has faith, if the people assembled in the church are cold and distant, the desire to go to that church will not arise in that person. A church is an assembly of people who have faith and are caring. Faith that is for one's own comfort and that does not lead to communion with others cannot in any way be called true faith. If there is no courtesy shown or if there is an atmosphere where there is no exchange of greetings, how can we expect new people to come to our church? Worse than that is the fear that even those people who are already there will leave. In such cases, with no hope for further development, what can be done if we are left with churches that are deserted? Furthermore, if because of emphasis on personal preferences or principles, division in the congregation occurs then evangelization will become only a remote possibility. This brings me to my second question: In your parish is communion among the faithful given preference over everything else? In what way are new people welcomed in your church? What initiatives are being taken in these areas?

Involvement in Society

As a result of Vatican II the Church has continuously emphasized the importance of openness to the problems of modern society. To live in faith means to be conscious of the pain of the lives of our brothers and sisters in modern society and to extend a helping hand to them. A parish that is not open to people is a closed society with very little possibility of growth. Archbishop Okada says, "The Catholic Church must be an oasis in the modern world." Becoming an oasis has many meanings but at least we must be conscious of the many people who are being tossed around violently in modern society. This brings me to my third question: What relationship does your parish have with the people who live in the neighborhood? Is there a deep awareness of the problems facing modern society?

II. What Kind of Church Do You Desire?

In order to answer this question, I recommend that together you begin in your parish by answering the questions suggested above. When you

determine what is lacking, then begin by finding ways to remedy the situation. The important point is to become conscious of what is lacking and begin to change from where you can. In one of the poems written by Mitsuo Aida we read, “You don’ t have to stand firm. All you have to do is start doing something concrete.” I do believe that what he says is true.

As you know, at the present time in our diocese parishes are working together in mutual aid and cooperation in a system of Collaborative Ministry for mission. I ask you to share what you have discussed in your parish in the area meeting. By continuing this process the image of the church you desire will become clearer to you. The conclusions you have come to will then be sent to the Diocesan Office, the central organ of the diocese. This information will become the basis for discussion about the future direction of the diocese.

Last year we began a three-year process. In 2009 the objective was to become aware of the true situation in the diocese. In 2010, in order to bring about revitalization in the diocese, we are concentrating on the formation of the clergy and faithful. Then in the autumn of 2011 we are planning a Mission Congress for the whole diocese. The meeting of the representatives of the parishes in January was held to put into operation the process leading up to the Mission Congress. As a result, it is our sincere wish that the persons who took part in that meeting do everything in their power to build Church in our midst. This process will be a long one, but as we all move forward together that in itself will be an experience of Church. As the poet Aida says, if we “start doing something concrete” , the true face of Church will be born. Let us say that this process of going back and forth is like a game of ping-pong. I have given you the “ping” . Please send the “pong” back to me,

III. In Deep Prayer

Some people may have the mistaken idea that the objective of this process is to consolidate the Church organization. Rather than a process of organizational consolidation, we wish it to be one of personal change. There is a Greek word “metanoia” . John the

Baptist used this word in urging the people of his time to prepare for the coming of Christ. He urged them to prepare to welcome Jesus into their midst by changing their way of looking at things. In other words, he called them to a change of heart. In order for us to realize our goals we, too, need “metanoia” of the heart. There is only one way to bring about “metanoia” . It is a deepening of our prayer. Prayer comes before deliberation and prayer comes before action. We repeat this process again and again. Without prayer any discussion of Church is meaningless. Recently I hear the criticism that there is no church or chapel where one can pray quietly. In order for our churches to become oases for the people of the modern world it is important for us to make available to them spaces where they can experience silence and peace of mind.

Finally, I wish to remind you that the two issues I spoke to you about in my pastoral letter last year—Collaborative Ministry and Youth Ministry— remain the priority concerns of the diocese. The process we have just begun may be a difficult one, but let us set out in hope. Let us not give up before we begin, but start from where we can. By setting out and doing something concrete we will surely become new.

March 28, 2010 (Passion Sunday)

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