

Mission and Pastoral Policy of the Catholic Diocese of Niigata

Communion, Mission and Participation

Mission and Pastoral Policy

1. A community that values communion together

We aim to be a community where all the faithful and followers of Christ are respected as members of the community which Christ has gathered.

2. A community that goes forth together for mission

We share the gospel of Jesus with people and walk together for the realization of a society which God desires.

3. A community that is linked and participates together

We aim to be a community where everyone lives the gospel in their own place and in their own way, and participates flexibly in the life of the church.

Foreword

Dear brothers and sisters of the Catholic Diocese of Niigata

† The peace of the Lord be with you.

I am very happy to announce the publication of the Mission and Pastoral Policy of the Diocese of Niigata. We are called by God to form one large community, the Diocese of Niigata. It is my hope that this Mission and Pastoral Policy, borne out of sharing at our communities, will be a good tool for parishes, institutes of consecrated life, and various Catholic institutions engaged in various missions to walk together as members of the Diocese of Niigata in their respective places.

Let us walk "together, always for the Gospel" so that we can grow as a church community where all the faithful and people who join Church activities, regardless of how long or short they have been a member of the diocese, of all generations, nationalities, positions, and roles, can say with joy and pride, "I am walking this journey of faith in this church community."

December 8, 2023, Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Bishop Paul Daisuke Narui, SVD

Catholic Diocese of Niigata

Current Situation of the Diocese of Niigata

From the end of the 16th century to the beginning of the 17th century, Christians migrated to Niigata, Yamagata, and Akita. Groups of believers called "Kumi," who testified to God's love by risking their lives gathering in prayer and serving the poor and the sick, moved people's hearts and minds in such a way that many joined the church. It has been 400 years since a church community was established here. What kind of church community are we living now?

The results of the 2012 Review of Diocesan Priorities and the current status of the Diocese of Niigata in 2022 (available on the Niigata Diocese website) show an aging society, one of internationalization, and a decrease in the number of children and youth. There is also a decrease in the overall number of believers, priests and religious. Difficulties in living the faith at home, restriction of activities due to the Covid-19 pandemic, etc. are listed as challenges.

At the same time, there are positive activities going on. A mature witnessing of the faith among the elderly, interaction across nationalities and regions, utilization of the Internet, cooperation with neighboring churches at the district level, etc., are being promoted to meet the needs of the situation.

Throughout history, the Church has changed flexibly in response to changes in society and communities. The Acts of the Apostles describe how the Hebrew-speaking disciples changed the rules of the Church as they encountered Greek-speaking Jews and then Gentiles. As the environment surrounding society and the Church is rapidly changing, we hope that we too can change flexibly as we walk together.

About the Mission and Pastoral Policy

What is the Mission and Pastoral Policy?

The Mission and Pastoral Policy is to reaffirm the deepest nature of the Church and to show how the Diocese of Niigata as a whole understands and takes direction in

order to live out the deepest nature of the Church (for the deepest nature of the Church, see "Aims of the Mission and Pastoral Policy" on page 3).

Background of the Mission and Pastoral Policy

In 2012, the Diocese of Niigata celebrated its 100th anniversary by issuing a Diocesan Mission Statement, which identified three priorities. This is a deepening and revision of the priorities announced in 2008 after discussions by the Mission and Pastoral Council. Until now, the Diocese of Niigata has made the 2012 Diocesan Mission Statement the pillar of its mission and pastoral activities.

Ten years have passed since then, and both society and the Church have changed dramatically. In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way people live. In the Church, a Synod is being held in pursuit of "walking together," and new forms of church communities are being sought. A synod is an assembly of representative bishops, including some priests, religious, and lay people from around the world who gather to discuss matters of faith, ethics, and Church activities in general, and assist the Pope by submitting a report.

The Church is seeking a new way of being a church community. In this context, based on the input from the Mission and Pastoral Council held in the spring of 2021, each community in the diocese reflected on the Diocesan Priorities of 2012 and discussed the questions on the Synod and Mission and Pastoral Policy. The feedback was discussed at the 2022 and 2023 Mission and Pastoral Council meetings, and the fruit is this Mission and Pastoral Policy. This policy, which is the result of the work of recognizing, reflecting on, and discussing the current situation in each community, will be a good tool for our community life.

Aims of the Mission and Pastoral Policy

The deepest nature of the Church is expressed through a three-fold responsibility: proclaiming the Word of God (mission), celebrating the sacraments (liturgy), and exercising the ministry of charity (service) (Encyclical "Deus Caritas Est" 25). All of these are interconnected, and none is dispensable.

It is the role of the Mission and Pastoral Policy to indicate our stance toward these ministries as a community. It is by no means a set of instructions saying, "Please do this in such and such a case". The parishes and the institutes of consecrated life in the Diocese of Niigata operate in completely different backgrounds. Therefore, it is not possible, nor should it be, to present a uniform set of activities. Rather, it is a tool to discuss what stance we should take in our community in addressing these essentials, and to review

our activities.

Three Pillars of the Mission and Pastoral Policy

The Mission and Pastoral Policy is based on the three pillars of the 16th General Synod, namely "Communion," "Mission," and "Participation. This is because they provide appropriate suggestions for considering the stance of the community in carrying out the above three-fold responsibility of the deepest nature of the Church. Before touching on each of the pillars, we will explain the understanding that is common to all of them.

- Each of the three pillars is composed of basic understanding or stance for addressing the pillar, followed by specific examples. The specific examples are not a requirement; they are just examples. In addition to what is described here, please consider what you can do as individuals and in your own communities.
- In each community, discuss on an on-going basis how you can live out the three pillars according to your own reality.
- In the discussion, the laity, religious, and priests of the community should discern together ("discerning" is to prayerfully explore what God wants), plan together, and fulfill the responsibilities of their roles together. To do this, it is important to listen. Try to listen to God and to others.
- In implementation, please work as individuals, as a community, with neighboring churches, and with district and diocesan committees, respectively.
- Walk forward without fear of change. To take a step forward, we must put one foot in the air, which could cause losing balance. We are always imperfect, but always guided by the Holy Spirit.
- We are all weak human beings, including the bishop. The Church community is a community that is aware of this. When we are aware of our weaknesses, we can trust in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Mission and Pastoral Policy

1. A community that values communion together

We aim to be a community where all the faithful and followers of Christ are respected as members of the community which Christ has gathered.

1. We deepen our awareness that we live in communion with God, nature, and people

(church and society).

2. We are all members of a community united by Christ, regardless of generation, nationality, role, length of membership, or ability to come to church. We learn from one another in dialogue, transformed by one another, and grow together.
3. The Sunday Mass is the center of communion of our church community. We attend the liturgy with an emphasis on communion with God and with others.

Examples:

- a) We utilize the richness of the cultures of the members of the community in our liturgy, including international Masses celebrated in many languages, children's Masses, and so on.
- b) Respect the culture of the faithful from abroad and consider that they can regularly participate in Masses in their own language.
- c) Learn prayers and songs from different cultures and languages.
- d) Meditate and share the Word in small groups.
- e) Appreciate the faith of elderly parishioners who have served and supported the church and strive for intergenerational dialogue.
- f) Work across parish boundaries to help youth, high school students and children grow together as one.
- g) Use a variety of means to deepen communion, including phone calls, letters, e-mail, websites, and bulletin boards.
- h) Increase opportunities to collaborate with neighboring churches, such as joint meditation meetings, pilgrimages, and Sunday schools.
- i) As a church community, be conscious of praying for and serving the people in the neighborhood. Be prepared to help each other in times of disaster and other difficult situations.

2. A community that goes forth together for mission

We share the gospel of Jesus with people and walk together for the realization of the society which God desires.

1. We who have received the love of God shown through Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection are invited to proclaim the gospel to others like the disciples after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Our faith matures when we proclaim the gospel to others.
2. Mission is God's plan, not "my" plan. As long as we are willing to participate in God's mission, no matter how little we do or how much we fail, God will surely make it a

part of His plan for good.

3. Pope Francis invites us to be a “Church that goes forth”. Mission is given to all the baptized. Children, the elderly, the sick, and students can share the Gospel by living their faith daily in their own capacities.
4. To walk with those who are vulnerable in order to build the world that God desires, that is, an evangelical society in which all peoples are cared for and live in harmony with God and all creation.
5. For the sake of evangelization, the members of the community, whether priests, religious, or laity, identify the signs of the times together, plan together, and fulfill the responsibilities of their roles together.

Examples:

- a) Pray for those who are close to us, such as family and friends, and for those who are vulnerable in society, and for peace.
- b) Act, either directly or through other organizations, to be close to those who face difficulties in the neighborhood.
- c) Interact and cooperate with other organizations in the neighborhood. (neighborhood associations, Christian denominations, civic organizations, etc.)
- d) Engage in evangelical activities in cooperation with Catholic educational and social welfare facilities adjacent to the parish. Cooperate in activities at such facilities, invite them to church events, etc.
- e) Shift to eco-friendly lifestyle and commit to preserve the local environment.
- f) Utilize bulletin boards, brochures and websites as a mission tool.

3. A community that is linked and participates together

We aim to be a community where everyone lives the gospel in their own place and way, and participate flexibly in the life of the church.

1. Recognize that the ways to "participate" in "communion" and "mission" in the Church and society have changed dramatically over time, and seek various ways to participate.
2. Reaffirm that the leadership role of the Church is to serve. The representatives of the church community, especially priests and parish councils follow the example of Jesus at the Last Supper, washing each other's feet and working together to form a community that serves.

3. Changes in society have made it impossible for more and more people to come to church. We recognize that these brothers and sisters live their faith in their own places and are engaged in church activities with Jesus, who said, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”. We devise ways to work together.
4. As a community, we walk together in faith with brothers and sisters who are unable to go out from their homes or facilities due to illness or old age. Prayers and any aspect of daily life (joy, suffering, etc.), offered to God is a way of participation in church activities.
5. Be mindful of brothers and sisters who are away from the church for various reasons, pray to God in trust, and contact them. Listen to each one with a humble heart.
6. Provide formation program opportunities so as to walk in communion as a church community and do mission.

Examples:

- a) In the decision-making process of the church community, the parish council listens to the opinions of the members of the community and clearly communicates its decisions.
- b) Devise church activities for members who are unable to come to church on Sundays, especially children and their parents.
- c) Improve formation for newly baptized faithful.
- d) Plan formation programs for priests and lay people at the diocesan, district, and parish levels. In particular, promote the formation of lay persons who can give bible and introductory catechetical courses.
- e) Foreigners participate as members of parish councils, either as representatives of the foreign nationals or as individuals.

The way forward

There is hope for those who believe in God. Hope is not something that can be obtained by planning for the future and fulfilling the conditions necessary for the plan. Hope is the joy of living in the present moment as we walk together trusting in God, sharing joys, sorrows, and everyday life. I hope that this Mission and Pastoral Policy will help us to walk together as a community with hope.

Let us pray and walk together. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace

in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Rom 15.13).

This Mission and Pastoral Policy is the fruit of the shared efforts of each community and the various diocesan committees, including the Mission and Pastoral Council. I would like to thank all of you who have worked with us. I pray for God's blessing on our future steps.

Prayer

O God, who created all things and invites us to salvation, we thank you for the gift of life.

Unite us in your love even as we live in the various regions of Akita, Yamagata and Niigata. May we, who have received your gospel, praise you as a community that communes together, proclaims the gospel together, and participates together, and be in harmony with creation and witness to your love among the people.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.