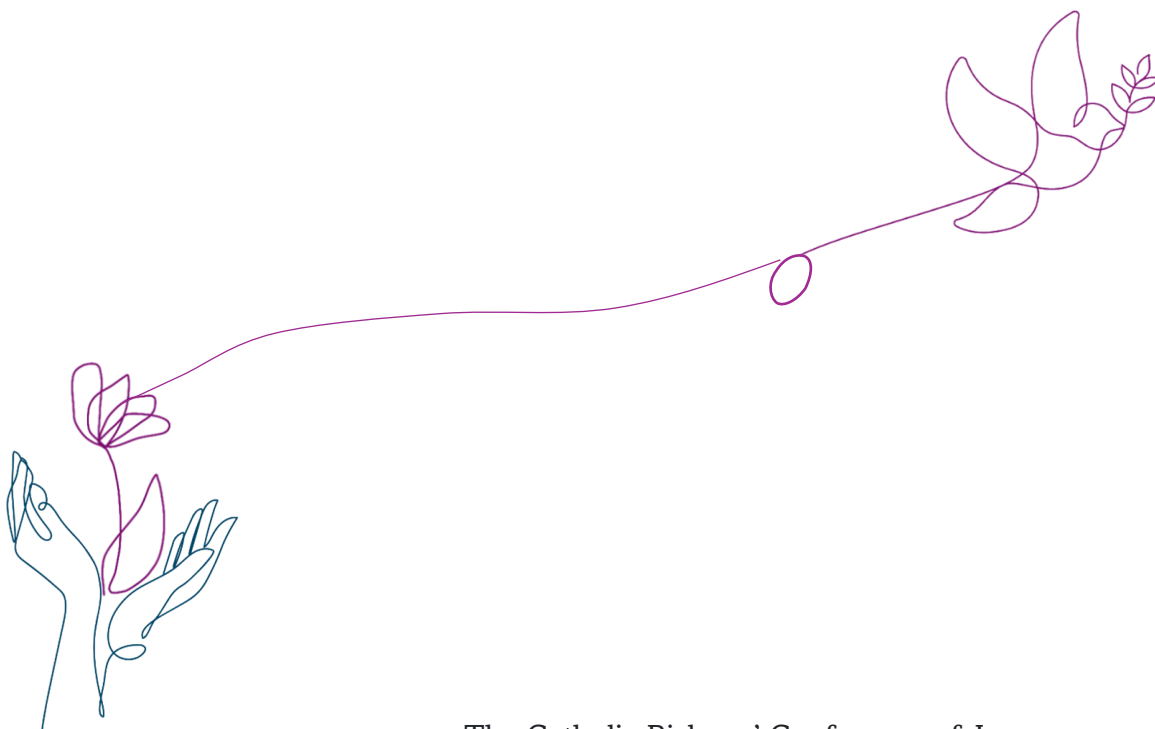


DAY OF PRAYER AND PENANCE
FOR THE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS
OF SEXUAL ABUSE

2025. 3. 21 FRI.



The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan
Division for the Protection of the Rights
of Children and Women

**THE 2025 DAY OF PRAYER AND PENANCE
FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE**

February 1, 2025

Dear Sister and Brother Catholics in Japan,

Pope Francis has called for the entire Church to take the problem of sexual abuse seriously, to acknowledge guilt, ask for forgiveness, and devote itself to restoring the dignity of victims. He has called upon the Church to mark an annual Day of Prayer and Penance for Victims and Survivors of Sexual Abuse. The Church in Japan has designated the second Friday of Lent as this day of prayer and atonement, and this year that will be Friday, March 21.

Please join the bishops on the second Friday of Lent or on a Sunday near it as we pray according to the wishes of Pope Francis.

2025 marks a Holy Year for the Catholic Church which occurs once every 25 years. Pope Francis in his decree announcing the Holy Year, "Hope Does Not Disappoint," called for this year to be "a Holy Year marked by the hope that does not fade, our hope in God," with the overall theme "Pilgrims of Hope."

In this year of grace in which we receive God's mercy and the forgiveness of our sins, the Church holds high the hope of living while journeying with all people.

In order to seek forgiveness for our sins, we must reflect on our past, admit our sins, and have the determination not to repeat them. A Church that invites us to walk together in this Holy Year cannot be a witness to hope unless it reflects on its past, admits its sins, and is determined not to repeat them.

As a Church that should bear witness to hope, clergy and community leaders must lead by example. In recent years in Japan as in the rest of the world there have been reports of clergy and community leaders committing violence against God's gift of life, especially by sexual abuse that disregards the dignity of people made in the image of God. There are clergy and leaders who have used their dominant position within the organization to commit sexual abuse and sexual assault that humiliates and violates human dignity and has deeply hurt many people.

There have been cases where people who have been violated by trusted clergy and have suffered deep and indelible wounds in their hearts are further injured by attempts to defend the perpetrators by speaking and acting as if the victim was to blame. These words and actions undermine human dignity even more deeply. Clearly, blame lies with the perpetrators who took advantage of their dominant position.

I express my sincere apologies to the many people who have been affected.

The final document of the Synod that concluded in October last year makes the following points in paragraph 150:

"Another area of great importance is the promotion in all ecclesial environments of a culture of safeguarding, to make communities increasingly safe places for minors and vulnerable people. Work has already begun to equip Church structures with regulations and legal procedures that allow for the prevention of abuse and timely responses to inappropriate behavior. ... The reception and support of victims is a delicate and indispensable task, which requires great humanity and must be carried out with the help of qualified people. ... Safeguarding processes must be constantly monitored and evaluated. Victims and survivors must be welcomed and supported with great sensitivity."

In addition, paragraphs 95 to 102 emphasize the importance of "transparency, accountability, and evaluation." In the future, we must constantly adapt our organizations and processes to be respected by society, while repeatedly reviewing our response to harassment and other issues.

Under the current organizational structure of the Church and the legal structure of Japan, each diocese and religious order is independent and cannot work together to address transparency, accountability, and evaluation. This has been strongly pointed out by many victims and their supporters. It is also true that there is a myriad of independent and different organizations, so it is not possible to respond quickly. Currently, with the help of the Pontifical Committee for the Protection of Minors, the Bishops' Conference and the Council of Religious Orders of Men and Women are hurrying to build a framework for a collaborative relationship that transcends existing frameworks.

It is impossible to respond appropriately to those who have been affected by abuse without the cooperation and collaboration of third-party experts from inside and outside the Church.

We will also listen to the voices of the youth who will lead the next generation and the Church as a whole, as we consider how to respond more appropriately and adequately, reorganize our organizations to achieve this, and enlighten the clergy and community leaders.

Once again, I sincerely apologize for the sins of the Church, including indifference, cover-up, and secondary harm. In this Holy Year, we pray that the hearts of those who have been affected will be embraced by God who is our true hope. I also ask that you pray for the clergy so that we may live our vocation faithfully.

+ Isao Kikuchi, President
Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan



PRAYER FOR THE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Heavenly Father,
who loves and cares for all of your children, especially the smallest and most vulnerable, we entrust to you the lives of the many children and vulnerable adults, who have been sexually abused, and whose trust and innocence have been destroyed. Help us to hear their cries of pain and to take responsibility for so many broken lives.

We pray that within their communities and families they may find understanding and support so that with the help of your grace their wounds may be healed, and they may again know peace.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who shared our weakness in all things but sin, and lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever.

Amen.

Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors



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