

From a Mission Start to Religious Freedom

Christian missionary work in Japan began in 1549 when a Jesuit, Francis Xavier, arrived in Kagoshima. After the Jesuits, members of the Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian, and other orders crossed the sea and came to Japan. They established churches, monasteries, schools, hospitals, and other facilities throughout Japan and enthusiastically engaged in missionary work. Some court nobles and feudal lords actively accepted their teachings - Christianity. The church achieved tremendous growth, and according to the statistics of 1614, there were 150 clergymen and more than 650,000 believers, including two court nobles and 55 feudal lords.

In 1582 The Tensho Envoys dispatched to Europe. Christianity flourished with the establishment of seminaries and colleges, and the printing of “Christian edition”, etc. During the reign of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a decree forbidding the practice of Christianity was imposed, and the persecution started. In 1597, 26 believers, religious and priests were martyred in Nagasaki, and in the Tokugawa period many were banished or executed. Later, Japan closed its doors to foreign countries.

In 1857, after the national seclusion order was lifted, a church was built in Yokohama, then in 1865 the hidden Christians were found in Nagasaki and Catholicism in Japan was finally restored. When religious freedom was secured in 1889, many Catholic and Protestant missionaries came to Japan. Churches, schools, hospitals, and other facilities were built throughout the country. Christianity flourished again in Japan.

During World War II, Christianity was once again persecuted and faced a period of hardship. After the end of War, the Japanese Constitution was promulgated in 1946, and freedom of religion was guaranteed.

With a current congregation of 428,748 (2020) and recent increase in the number of migrant workers and other foreign believers, the Church in Japan is expected to be vibrant through multicultural coexistence.

Reference: Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ)

Historical Chronology

- 1549** Francisco Xavier lands in Kagoshima.
- 1563** Omura Sumitada baptized as the first Christian lord.
- 1582** Delegation of four young envoys, “Tensho Shonen Shisetsu” sets out for Europe.
- 1585** Pope Gregory XIII receives the young envoys.
- 1587** Toyotomi Hideyoshi issues the edict forbidding Christianity and orders all missionaries to leave Japan. Takayama Ukon deprived of his fief and status.
- 1597** 26 Christians martyred at Nishizaka in Nagasaki.
- 1613** Tokugawa shogunate government implements the Ban on Christianity throughout Japan.
- 1614** Takayama Ukon banished to the Philippines. All churches in Kyoto and Nagasaki destroyed.
- 1619** The Great Martyrdom in Kyoto.
- 1622** 55 Christians (priests and laity) martyred in Nagasaki. (The Great Genna Martyrdom).
- 1626** The Great Martyrdom in Edo (now Tokyo).
- 1627, 1628/1629** Introduction of the “Fumie” (forced trampling of Christian images).
- 1637** The Shimabara Uprising. (-1638)
- 1856, 1857/1858** Nagasaki magistrate announces discontinuation of “Fumie” practice.
- 1862** The 26 Martyrs of Nagasaki canonized in Rome.
- 1865** Construction of Oura Church in Nagasaki completed. Descendants of the Hidden Catholics meet Fr. Petitjean at Oura, and confess their faith.
- 1867** 205 Japanese Martyrs beatified in Rome.
- 1868** The Meiji government takes over the ban on Christianity. 114 Urakami Christians are exiled to 3 different domains.
- 1870** More than 3000 Urakami Christians arrested and exiled to 21 different domains. (-1873)
- 1873** Abolition of signboards proscribing Christianity (tacit approval of Christian evangelization) by strong foreign protests.
- 1889** The Constitution of the Empire of Japan guarantees freedom of religion in Japan.
- 1945** Atomic bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan accepts the Potsdam Declaration and the war ends.
- 1947** The Constitution of Japan goes into effect, guaranteeing freedom of religion.
- 1981** Pope (John Paul II) visits Japan (Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki) for the first time.
- 1987** St. Thomas Nishi and 15 martyrs canonized.
- 2008** Peter Kibe and 187 martyrs beatified.
- 2017** Justo Takayama Ukon beatified.
- 2019** Pope (Francis) visits Japan (Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Tokyo).

Reference: “History of the Catholic Church in Japan.” Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ) and KAROLDVD-JC.

Catholic Church in Japan —The History and Present—



Oura Church, Nagasaki

Activities

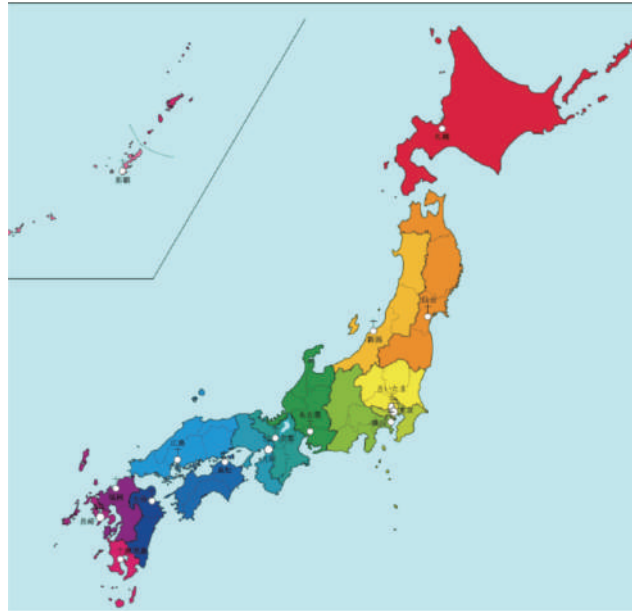


Arrupe Refugee Centre (NPO)
 Activity base: The Society of Jesus
 Martyrs of Japan Convent
 offers a shelter to refugees
 (Kamakura, Kanagawa Pref.)



SINAPIS
 The Social Action Center of the
 Catholic Archdiocese of Osaka
 supports refugees and children

16 Dioceses in Japan



- Diocese of Sapporo
- Diocese of Sendai
- Diocese of Niigata
- Diocese of Saitama
- Archdiocese of Tokyo
- Diocese of Yokohama
- Diocese of Nagoya
- Diocese of Kyoto
- Archdiocese of Osaka
- Diocese of Hiroshima
- Diocese of Takamatsu
- Diocese of Fukuoka
- Archdiocese of Nagasaki
- Diocese of Oita
- Diocese of Kagoshima
- Diocese of Naha

Statistics 2020

Lay Catholics 428,748
 Churches 960
 Religious Houses 713
 Educational Facilities 835



Caritas Minamisoma
 Support for Areas Affected by the Great
 East Japan Earthquake
 (Minamisoma, Fukushima Pref.)



**Korea-Japan Catholic Nuclear
 Abolition Group Working Together**



**Society of Jesus
 Shimonoseki Labor Education Center**
 runs diners for kids & all, and supports foreigners &
 Korean school (Yamaguchi Pref.)