

**2025 Diocesan Pastoral Council
Bishop's Summary of Block and Parish Reports**

In 2025, the nine blocks of the Kyoto Diocese submitted their pastoral plans and annual reflections, including “review of the year,” “particular joys,” and “challenges insufficiently addressed.”

After carefully reading and considering these reports, I have analyzed the overall situation and challenges of the Diocese. I express my heartfelt gratitude to all the blocks and parishes for their year-long prayers and service, for nurturing seeds of hope even amid difficulties.

This analysis is not merely a conclusion, but a starting point for discerning “where we stand and where we are heading” as a diocesan community. Trusting that the Lord will bless these efforts and guide us toward new hope, I present here the overall summary.

✝ Paul Yoshinao Otsuka

I. Overall Summary

- The 2025 fiscal year, centered on the Holy Year theme “Pilgrims of Hope,” saw initiatives focused on ① pilgrimage, ② exchange, ③ prayer, and ④ Interaction with Multinational Faithful unfold across the diocese, making it “a year where the Church's interconnectedness became visible.”

- In particular, the pilgrimage-centered efforts provided many believers with an opportunity to truly experience that the Church is not merely a “place to gather,” but a community walking together.

- Furthermore, rediscovering the Church's diversity and richness through exchanges with other parishes and fellowship with foreign-born believers was a significant blessing.

- At the same time, this year's journey also brought into sharper focus the challenges facing the diocese.

- ① There is a shortage of people supporting church activities, with a growing trend of fixed roles and an aging membership, leading to a concentration of burden on a limited number of individuals.
- ② The challenge persists where children and young people may participate temporarily but find it difficult to engage continuously in church life.
- ③ It is undeniable that missionary activities are often consumed by fulfilling annual events, obscuring their connection to the fundamental goal of “living and sharing the Gospel.”

- However, simultaneously, this past year has also shown significant signs pointing toward the next vision for the church.

- ① We see children and young people taking initiative to engage, foreign-born believers being naturally accepted as ministers of service, and relationships of trust forming through deepening prayer and sharing in small groups. These demonstrate the church's vitality, which cannot be measured by “size” or “numbers,” and suggest the direction for future mission and pastoral care.

- ② Taken together, these reveal that what the Kyoto Diocese is called to is not “growing the church” or “increasing activities” per se. Rather, this year's journey has made clear the need for a qualitative shift toward a “mutually supportive church” and a “church that grows together,” where each believer supports one another, prays together, learns together, and grows together.
- ③ The Holy Year “Pilgrims of Hope” showed us not a completed image of the Church, but the image of a Church that continues walking the path. Future missionary and pastoral work in the Kyoto Diocese must ensure this realization does not end as a temporary achievement, but is rooted in daily church life and passed on to the next generation.

II. ‘Particularly Pleasing Aspects’ (Common to All 9 Blocks)

1) Effectiveness of the Pilgrimage (The Power to Experience ‘A Church Walking Together’)

The pilgrimage confirmed its power to deepen solidarity among believers through the shared experience of journey and prayer. Walking the same path, offering the same prayers, and sharing time away from daily life served as an effective medium for rediscovering the Church not merely as a ‘place of activity,’ but as a community living faith together. This is a pastoral outcome difficult to achieve through verbal explanations or meetings.

On the other hand, some voices noted the limited number of participants and that the pilgrimage theme was not fully felt. We hope for improvements in the planning content and the sharing before and after the event.

2) Recovery of the Church Functioning as a “Community”

Post-Mass fellowship, bazaars, and small group activities, which had been suspended due to the pandemic, gradually resumed. The church began functioning again as a “place where people linger and converse.” This recovery signifies more than just the revival of social interaction; it means the church is regaining its essential character, where ‘prayer’ and “fellowship” are inseparably linked.

It is neither merely a place for prayer nor merely a place for gathering; prayer gives birth to fellowship, and fellowship sustains faith. The restoration of this cycle is crucial for preventing isolation among believers and fostering a sense of belonging to the church. The church's recovery from being merely a “place to attend events” to a “place where one can feel secure” is a foundational achievement for future pastoral ministry. It is hoped that the church will further mature into a “place where faith and hope are nurtured and where people are sent forth on mission.”

3) Participation of Foreign Believers (Source of the Church's Vitality)

The active involvement of foreign-born believers in liturgical service and event organization, along with the expansion of fellowship through song and shared meals, demonstrated that multicultural coexistence is not merely a special challenge to address, but a force that invigorates the Church itself.

The experience of praying and serving together, transcending language and cultural differences, is nurturing in each believer the awareness that “the Church belongs to no one in particular; it is a home for everyone.”

Building community with foreign-born believers certainly requires coordination and consideration. Yet, more than that, it has become a place of grace where the Church's universality (Catholicity) can be concretely experienced. This reality is not a burden for the future of the diocese; rather, it is an important source that should be actively positioned as a driving force for mission and renewal.

4) Hope for Children and Youth (The Future Shown by Small Buds)

While there are differences between blocks, a slight increase in children's Mass attendance, joint confirmation preparation courses, and conscious outreach to young people have generated positive responses. Even if the numerical changes are still small, the facts that “if you call out, there is a response” and “if you prepare the space, people will gather” clearly show the potential for next-generation pastoral care.

Particularly, initiatives transcending generations and parishes provide young people opportunities to experience the Church not as a “closed world,” but as a “broadly connected community.” Patiently nurturing these small sprouts teaches us the importance of missionary pastoral care grounded in a long-term perspective, rather than short-term results.

Common to all four points above is the clear realization that “when people connect, the Church begins to live.” The Diocese of Kyoto now stands at a turning point where it must move forward, not as a “Church that increases activities,” but as a “Church where people grow and relationships deepen.”

III. ‘Areas We Could Not Fully Address’ (Current Limitations and the Necessity for the Next Step)

1) The Church is Shrinking, but Relationships are Deepening

Due to declining membership and an aging congregation, the church's “size” is undoubtedly shrinking. However, this also allows us to deepen face-to-face relationships and mutual understanding. This should not be seen as decline, but rather as a process where the church's focus is shifting from ‘quantity’ to “quality.”

The problem lies in not consciously embracing this change and fully leveraging the deepened relationships as a strength for mission. The perspective of redefining the “closeness,” “sharing,” and “mutual support” made possible precisely because the church is smaller as its new strength has not yet been sufficiently shared.

2) Shortage of Leaders and Fixed Leadership Roles (Limits of a System Dependent on Goodwill)

In many small parishes, reliance on the same individuals, fixed leadership roles, and an aging membership are progressing, gradually eroding the capacity to generate new initiatives. This is not an individual failure; it reflects the surfacing limitations of a church structure long sustained by goodwill and dedication.

The fixation of key personnel leads to accumulated organizational fatigue, characterized by sentiments like “I want to change but can't” or “I understand the need but can't manage it,” ultimately causing stagnation in mission work.

To break this cycle, structural transformation is essential—not relying on individual effort, but lowering participation barriers through role decentralization, diversifying involvement methods, and introducing short-term or small-scale service opportunities.

3) Difficulty Retaining Younger Generations (From a “Church People Come To” to a “Church People Stay At”)

The current situation, where participation by children and youth is limited and groups like junior high/high school clubs have ceased functioning, indicates that while the church may be a “place to visit temporarily” for younger generations, it is not a “place they can stay.” A major challenge is that even when youth events and activities are held, they often fail to foster sustained relationships.

Younger generations seek “relationships” and “a sense of security” more than just “content.” Therefore, a shift is needed from event-centered pastoral care toward ongoing small-group engagement, intergenerational connections, and an atmosphere that allows for mistakes and absences. This is not just a youth issue; it challenges the entire church's approach.

4) Unclear Mission Direction (Events Continue, but Purpose is Not Shared)

While annual events run continuously in many churches, the direction they aim for is not sufficiently shared among the faithful. Consequently, “continuing last year's practices” becomes the goal itself, and events tend to become tasks to be maintained rather than means for mission. What is needed now is not adding new events, but for the community to discern and share “Why are we doing this?” and “With whom and toward what goal?”

With a clear direction, events can be reduced while their meaning deepens, also leading to a lighter burden on those carrying them out.

5) The Next Stage of Multicultural Coexistence (From a Church of “Being Together” to One of “Deciding Together”)

The Next Stage of Multicultural Coexistence (From “Being Together” to “Deciding Together” in the Church). The participation of foreign believers has steadily progressed, and relationships of praying and serving together have been cultivated in various places. However, in many cases, this involvement still remains on the “participating side,” not yet fully reaching the stage of actively participating in church decision-making and direction-setting. This situation can be described as “gathering together, but not yet fully shaping the church together.”

To advance community building with foreign believers to the next stage, we must receive them not as “those to be helped” or “objects of support,” but as subjects who build the church together, just like Japanese believers. Only then can the cooperative relationship deepen from one-way ‘support’ to mutual “fellowship.” This journey is progressing toward “intercultural communion.”

IV. Key Questions for the Future (Focus on Achieving a Shift in Direction)

1) How to ensure events are not merely “experiences” but connect to daily life of faith

Let us connect events not as mere experiences, but as forces that transform daily life. Pilgrimages and events deepen prayer and nurture relationships. Through preparation before events and sharing afterward, transforming special occasions into nourishment for our faith life

is the path to maturing our community and strengthening the foundation of our missionary pastoral work.

2) How to Transition from a “Church that Seeks Leaders” to a “Church that Grows Together”

We need to shift from a system concentrating roles on a limited few to one that allows for phased involvement and permits short-term or partial service. Leaders (officers, etc.) are not perfect from the start; they grow, learn together, and share within the community. Therefore, utilize the parish council officer training sessions and exchange meetings.

3) Moving the Church Forward to the Next Stage (“From a Church That Protects to a Church That Shares the Burden”)

What is now required of the Kyoto Diocese is the resolve to acknowledge the limitations revealed in our journey and to move the church's approach to the next stage. This means shifting from a “church that continues to protect” to a “church that shares responsibility anew,” and transforming pastoral care from one focused on ‘continuing’ as an end in itself to one centered on “people growing and relationships deepening.”

If this shift is postponed, the burden on the limited number of bearers will intensify further, deepening exhaustion and stagnation. However, if we take small steps forward rather than waiting for a perfect solution, the church can once again become a community that walks as pilgrims of hope. This is precisely the path of “Collaborative Ministry for Mission” and building a synodal Church that the Diocese of Kyoto is called to walk.

4) How to make ‘Pilgrims of Hope’ visible through life and action

The theme ‘Pilgrims of Hope’ is not a slogan that vanishes with the end of the Holy Year. Rather, it lives on in our mutual support, in sharing our weaknesses, and in continuing to walk together. Through small prayer gatherings, spaces for dialogue, and the accumulation of service, the Church is now being called to find the path to become a sign of hope within the local community and society.

V. Overall Summary

These questions are not meant to create a new plan. They are questions to discern what we must cherish, what we must let go of, and with whom we must walk together for the Kyoto Diocese to continue its journey. Answers will not come all at once. Yet, sharing these questions and beginning dialogue itself is already the first step of the ‘Pilgrimage of Hope’. Now is the time to begin prayer and dialogue, practicing ‘The conversation in the Spirit’, and take that first step of walking together.

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