



Series: 90 Years of the Diocese of Kyoto – Its Beginnings

Prayer, Discernment, and Faith Through the Trials of War

In 2027, the Diocese of Kyoto will celebrate the 90th anniversary of its foundation. Through this series, drawing upon the historical records of the Maryknoll Missioners, we will explore the prayerful discernment, courageous decisions, and enduring faith that led to the birth of the Diocese of Kyoto and sustained it through the trials of war.

Part 1: On the Eve of the Birth of the Diocese of Kyoto Kyoto and Shiga Become a New Mission Territory

In the early 1930s, there was not yet a "Diocese of Kyoto." At that time, Kyoto, Shiga, Nara, and Mie, together with Osaka, Hyōgo, and Wakayama, belonged to the vast Diocese of Osaka, which encompassed two urban prefectures and five prefectures. Despite this extensive territory, however, the number of priests, financial resources, and missionary centers remained limited. To bring the Gospel to people throughout this wide region and to foster local Christian communities rooted in their own culture and circumstances, it became increasingly evident that the existing pastoral structure needed to be reconsidered and that a new missionary approach was required.

The Reorganization of Mission Territories in Japan



Pope Pius XI

During this period, the Catholic Church in Japan was undergoing a broader reorganization of its mission jurisdictions. Large dioceses were being divided so that pastoral care and evangelization could become more deeply rooted in each region. Even with limited personnel and financial resources, the Church sought to send missionaries to areas where the Gospel had not yet been sufficiently proclaimed. The idea of establishing Kyoto and Shiga as a separate mission territory, entrusted to another missionary society, emerged within this wider movement of the Church in Japan. This initiative would later develop into what is now the Diocese of Kyoto, including Nara and Mie.

That the Gospel Might Take Root

Behind these developments stood the missionary vision of the universal Church. In his 1926 encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae*, Pope Pius XI emphasized that mission territories should not remain permanently dependent upon foreign missionaries. Rather, the local Church should gradually take root, mature, and eventually be entrusted to indigenous clergy.

Mission, therefore, was never intended to mean that foreign missionaries would remain at the center indefinitely. Its true purpose was for the Gospel to become deeply rooted in the faith and daily life of the local people, enabling the Church in that land to grow and flourish through its own leadership.

Bishop Castanier's Decision

Bishop Jean-Baptiste Castanier, M.E.P. (1877–1943), a missionary of the Paris Foreign Missions Society and then Bishop of Osaka, embraced this vision of the universal Church. According to the records of the Maryknoll Missioners, Bishop Castanier realized that, with the limited personnel and financial resources available, it would be difficult to proclaim Christ effectively throughout such a vast diocese. Rather than attempting to carry the entire burden alone, he sought cooperation with another missionary society and explored the possibility of establishing a new mission territory. His decision was not simply an administrative adjustment. It was a courageous missionary initiative, born of the desire to bring the Gospel to more people by sharing the Church's mission with others. Entrusting a mission field that had been patiently cultivated over many years to another community of missionaries was by no means an easy decision. Yet Bishop Castanier chose to place the mission of the Church above the interests of his own missionary society and thereby opened the way to a new partnership.



Bishop
Jean-Baptiste
Castanier, M. E. P.

At the heart of this vision stood Kyoto.

As the historic, cultural, and religious center of Japan, Kyoto presented significant challenges for evangelization. At the same time, it was one of the country's most important places for proclaiming the Gospel. Bishop Castanier envisioned Kyoto and neighboring Shiga as a single mission territory to be entrusted to new missionaries.

An Encounter with the Maryknoll Missioners

The missionary society that emerged as a possible partner was the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers (*The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America*), founded in the United States in 1911. Maryknoll had already committed itself to missionary work throughout Asia and was seeking opportunities to undertake new mission territories in Japan. The Apostolic Delegate to Japan at that time, Archbishop Edward Aloysius Mooney (1882–1958; Apostolic Delegate to Japan, 1931–1933), played a key role in bringing together the Diocese of Osaka and the Maryknoll Missioners, encouraging this new missionary initiative. Thus, the hopes of the Diocese of Osaka and the missionary zeal of Maryknoll gradually came together, opening the way toward Kyoto and Shiga.

More Than an Administrative Reorganization

This was far more than the administrative division of a diocese. It was a missionary decision to share responsibility rather than to cling to it, to work together for the good of the whole Church, and to entrust a

cherished mission territory to new hands. Long before it formally came into existence, the future Diocese of Kyoto was already being prepared through prayer, cooperation, and the courage to share the Church's mission.

Learning from the Origins of the Diocese of Kyoto

As we prepare to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Diocese of Kyoto, we can learn from these beginnings too. Rather than lamenting shortages of personnel or resources, we are called to recognize one another's gifts and to share the Church's mission together. When we do so, God opens new paths before us. The spirit that gave birth to the Diocese of Kyoto continues to inspire what we now call Collaborative Ministry for Mission.

In the next installment, we will examine how the Maryknoll Missioners responded to this invitation and why they turned their eyes toward Japan.