

**Catholic Mission  
Media Release  
14 March 2011**

**The people of Japan need your prayers and support**

Martin Teulan, National Director of Catholic Mission asks all Australians to join the international Catholic Mission prayer campaign for the people of Japan, especially those of the Diocese of Sendai where the Tsunami was at its worst. "All over the world Catholics are joining together to show their solidarity with their fellow Catholics and indeed with all the people of that devastated region" said Mr Teulan.

It has been the largest earthquake ever to have hit Japan. As the tsunami caused by the offshore megaquake struck the coast, it has the potential to be more widespread and devastating than if it had occurred inland. Incredible images of tsunami waters forging their way relentlessly inland do not show the number of unsuspecting individuals who were caught in its path. Televisions across the world have shown images of large fishing trawlers rocked, overturned and capsized as they struck buses, trucks and bridges. Walls and buildings collapsed in towns and cities designed to withstand the earth tremors which Japan constantly experiences. The death toll is rising and already at 10,000. Even the greatest experts of the world's seismologists admit that nobody could have been prepared for the disaster. The US Geological survey described the earthquake of 10 March as 'one of the great earthquakes' in history.

Measuring 8.9 on the Richter scale, its effects could reach across the entire Pacific coast, affecting countries as distant as Chile. Warnings to Pacific islands urged that coastal areas be evacuated. Some islands will be hit by waves higher than their own highest areas. Even Canada, Alaska and California issued tsunami alerts.

The Catholic diocese of Sendai was the first victim of Japan's tsunami following the earthquake. Covering a land area of 72,000 square kilometres, the diocesan territory includes the cities of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. Initial reports suggest that Miyagi and Fukushima were the first to fall victim to the ten metre tsunami caused by the megaquake. In Sendai, where a major oil terminal exploded when its cooling system failed, Catholics form 0.15 per cent of the total population of 7,207,624. In Tokyo Catholics are 0.51 per cent of a total population of 18,552,995 people. In both cities, the predominant religions are Shinto and Buddhism.

There are approximately 509,000 Catholics in Japan, of whom 10,944 are in the diocese of Sendai and a further 95,877 in the archdiocese of Tokyo, which also felt the force of the earthquake even though it is situated more than 400 kilometres from its epicentre.

Although relatively small, the Japanese Church is vibrant, perhaps nurtured by the seed of its many thousands of martyrs during the 500 years of its history of Christianity. As a result of a period of persecution which lasted from 1614 until 1858, Japan apparently has the world's greatest number of Catholic martyrs. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century alone, it is estimated that there were between 200,000 and 300,000 martyrs. The most famous were the 55 who were executed by crucifixion in Nagasaki on 10

September 1632. After 1632, so many died for their faith, often accompanied by excruciating and virtually unimaginable torture, that it became impossible to collect all their data.

Though for many, still part of the Church's 'mission territories', Japan no longer receives funding or missionaries from overseas. It now sends, through Catholic Mission Japan, Japanese Catholics contribute approximately (AUD) \$950,000 annually to help the Church in places where people are in greater need.

"Catholic Mission is not an emergency aid organisation: its purpose is to be present 'for the long haul' in the Church wherever it is young or poor. It is impossible within a few hours of the initial earthquake to know what the needs are and where they should be directed. At the moment, all we can do is to pray", declared Mgr John Dale, the National Director of Catholic Mission -England and Wales. "When we know more, we can do more."

On 22 February, the earthquake that hit Christchurch in New Zealand initiated a campaign of prayer amongst the 160 countries in which Catholic Mission is represented. Fr Paul Shannahan SM, the National Director of Catholic Mission New Zealand remarked at the time that "The biggest 'damage' is to people. Many were traumatised in the 7.1 quake last September but this one is worse in that it was in the middle of a working and school day. It hit with such vigour. It shook whole building violently. Hundreds have sustained injuries but shock and fear is scaring them even more. Thousands are trying to get home and many more are leaving the city to stay elsewhere."

The effects on Japan and the Pacific will be considerably greater. We offer our prayers and the promise of future support.

National Director of Catholic Mission, Australia, Mr Martin Teulan said "We should never underestimate how important the prayers of people around the world are for those whose lives have been devastated by a natural disaster. We always receive so many messages of thanks from those for whom we have prayed. Through these prayers, people feel the solidarity of the whole of the Catholic Church with them in their moment of despair, and most importantly feel the presence of God supporting them and holding them at this time of incredible distress and fear."

If you would like to send a prayer to the people of Japan, please email [prayers@catholicmission.org.au](mailto:prayers@catholicmission.org.au) and we will pass them on through Catholic Mission in Japan.

**For more information, please contact Catholic Mission's Media Officers on (02) 9919 7800**