

JAPAN PROVINCE

Official Language: **Japanese (Nihongo)**

Vision Statement

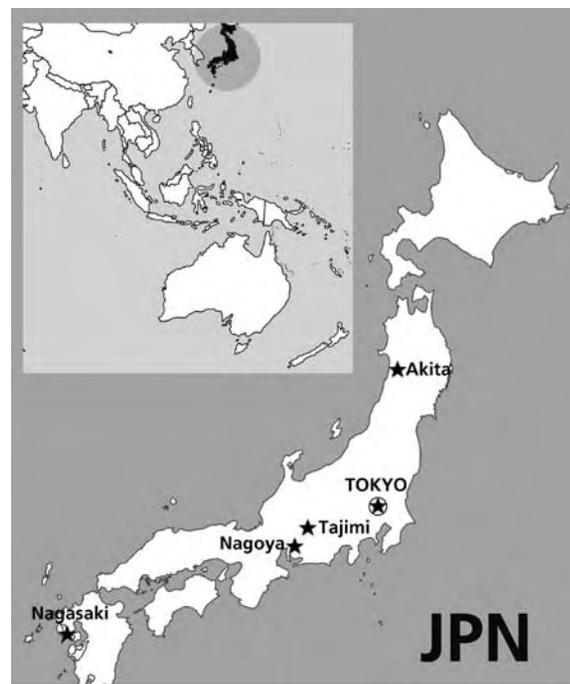
In keeping with the international character of the Society of the Divine Word, we serve everyone.

Mission Statement

In order to become more credible witnesses to the Gospel, we renew our spiritual life in the light of the Word and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We grow in community by sharing the Word of God and concretizing the spirit of the Constitutions. As members of a religious missionary congregation, we live in prophetic dialogue with modern society, accepting and living with the “other,” especially those in weak positions. In keeping with our international character, we recognize the diversity of values among cultures and put our own cultural diversity at the service of the foreign community in Japan.

1. Societal Setting

Japan is an archipelago located off the eastern coast of the Eurasian continent stretching 2,500 km from Hokkaido, near Russia, in the northeast to Okinawa near Taiwan, in the southwest. With a population of 127 million, Japan is the tenth most populous country in the world. About 1.5% of the population is non-Japanese, including many long-time Chinese



and Korean residents with roots going back to World War II, and more recently Latin American and Filipino migrant laborers. Most of the population, manufacturing and commercial centers are concentrated on the main island of Honshu, while the economics of the other major islands of Hokkaido, Shikoku, and Kyushu are based on agriculture and fishing.

Japan's modern society emerged in the second half of the 19th century under pressure from American and European colonial and commercial expansion into East Asia. Feudalism was dissolved and Western-style political, economic, legal, and educational systems were adopted. By the early 20th century, Japan had become a major economic and military power. Its expansionistic poli-

cies created conflicts of interest with the European powers and its Asian and Pacific neighbors, leading to World War II. After the war, Japan's economic, political and educational institutions were reconstituted on liberal democratic and capitalistic principles under the occupation policy of the United States.

After a rapid post-war economic recovery, Japan has grown into the world's third-largest economy. It is among the most highly educated countries in the world, with a literacy rate of 99 percent. About 50 percent of secondary school graduates go on to four-year university studies.

In the last two decades, a declining birth rate has caused a decrease in population, a smaller number of school-age children, an increase in the proportion of elderly, and labor shortages. To make up this shortfall, Latin Americans of Japanese-descent, mostly Brazilians and Peruvians, as well as Filipinos and other foreigners, have been admitted as migrant laborers. A small number of refugees from Vietnam were admitted to Japan in the 1970s and 1980s. Economic slowdown since the 1990s and a catastrophic earthquake and tsunami in 2011 have led to a stagnation in the standard of living, abandonment of traditional life-time employment in favor of part-time employment with fewer social and health benefits, and an overall sense of growing social and economic disparity.

2. Ecclesial Setting

The close proximity of China has greatly influenced Japanese culture, thought, customs

and language. Confucian thought continues to influence the Japanese value system, which stresses deference and obedience to parents, older persons, and superiors, as well as loyalty, diligence, and perseverance. Buddhism, also introduced from China, and Shinto, an indigenous animistic religion, are the main religious traditions. There are also a number of "new," mainly syncretistic religions, such as Sokagakkai and Tenrikyo.

Statistics vary according to methods, but about 50% of Japanese identify themselves as Shinto, 44% as Buddhist, and 1% as Christian. For most Japanese, however, religion is not connected to daily life or regular participation in religious activities, but rather is a matter of observance of traditional customs or "rites of passage". Many Japanese will visit both Shinto Shrines and Buddhist Temples for the New Year and other holidays, are married in Shinto or even Christian ceremonies, and are buried with Buddhist funeral rites. The catastrophic earthquake and tsunami of 2011 have led many people to reconsider the inadequacy of material prosperity and the importance of more permanent spiritual values.

Christianity, first introduced by St. Francis Xavier in 1549, flourished for almost a century before undergoing persecution until the middle of the 19th century. Several groups of Japanese martyrs, including the 26 Martyrs of Nagasaki, have been canonized or beatified, and are widely venerated. After the prohibition of Christianity was lifted in 1873, Catholic missionaries returned to Japan,

discovering groups of “hidden” Christians descended from the converts of the 16th and 17th centuries in the Kyushu area, where the Catholic population is concentrated even today. Catholic missionary efforts were led by French missionaries of the *Missions étrangères de Paris* and several orders of women religious, who were eventually joined by missionaries of other nationalities and orders, including the SVD in 1907 and the SSpS in 1908. Both Protestant and Catholic missionaries established parishes and schools, some of which have developed into prestigious secondary and university level institutions.

After World War II, a new wave of missionaries arrived from abroad. Many Japanese, seeking a new spiritual basis, converted to Christianity in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, many parishes and schools were established and new dioceses erected. According to 2015 statistics, there were 16 dioceses with 1,383 priests and 785 parishes, with a Catholic population of approximately 443,721 or 0.3% of the total population, many of them immigrant Filipino and Latin Americans. Other Christians number over a million, or about 1% of the population. Catholic schools include 526 kindergartens, 53 primary schools, 215 secondary schools, and 35 colleges and universities.

The Society continues to work in the first mission area begun in Akita and Niigata in 1907, building up the area in the 1920s and 1930s under two Prefects Apostolic, Msgr. Joseph Reiners, SVD and Msgr. Anton Ceska, SVD. The largest SVD presence is in the Nagoya area, which was

entrusted to the Society in 1922. Msgr. Reiners, SVD, the first prefect apostolic of Nagoya, built up many parishes and founded Nanzan School Corporation in 1932. After World War II, the SVD was invited to the Nagasaki area, where a new parish and secondary school were established. Many Japanese SVD confreres are originally from the Nagasaki or Niigata areas. It is an honor that Archbishop Isao Kikuchi, SVD is serving in the Archdiocese of Tokyo now.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	44	37.3	30.3	32.3
Education	29	24.6	26.8	31.4
Schools	10	-		
Universities	19	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	5	4.2	3.2	4.0
Administration/ Support	5	4.2	1.6	4.9
Other Apostolates	4	3.4	3.3	4.4
JPIC	1	-		
Bible	0	-		
Communication	0	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	2	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	6	5.1	14.6	9.7
Retired/Sick	23	19.5	17.0	11.5
Others	2	1.7	3.2	1.8

Parish Ministry: The Society in Japan is entrusted with 21 parishes – 1 in Nagasaki, 12 in Nagoya, 1 in Tokyo and 7 in Akita. At the request of the bishops, 7 confreres have been assigned to work in the dioceses of Fukuoka, Sendai and Niigata. Many of the parishes minister not only to Japanese, but also to the Filipino and Latin American communities. Many parishes have kindergartens. All parishes face the same problem of a decreasing birth rate and the aging of the population, which results in declining Church membership and declining enrollment in kindergartens.

Educational Apostolate: Twenty-nine confreres work exclusively in schools: 23 confreres in Nanzan School Corporation based in Nagoya (two kindergartens, one primary school, one junior and senior high school for boys, three junior and senior high school for girls, one junior and senior high school for boys and girls, one university); 5 confreres in Nagasaki Nanzan School Corporation (one junior and senior high school for boys; and 1 confrere in Fuji University in Hokkaido.

Apart of the above mentioned schools, many confreres who work in parishes are involved in Educational Apostolate. These are as follows:

4 confreres of Nishimachi Church run Nagasaki Nanzan Second School Corporation (one kindergarten, one primary school), 2 confreres of Nagoya District run 2 kindergartens, and 6 confreres of Akita District run 6 kindergartens. The educational apostolate has a total of 17,000 pupils and students ranging from kindergarten to graduate school.

Characteristic Dimensions

The **biblical apostolate** is carried out both in parishes, which offer Bible study classes, as well as in the schools, where religious instruction focuses on the basic message of the Gospel as proclaimed in the scriptures. As for **communication**, the province communications committee maintains a website and the parishes and schools also make use of the internet to publicize various activities. **Mission animation** is the main focus of the province mission office, which publishes newsletters to inform our benefactors about activities of the province and of Japanese confreres working abroad. The pastoral and educational activities of our parishes and schools also strive to heighten awareness of our mission to reach out to those in need both on the local and world level.

In its **JPIC activities**, the province cooperates with the Nagoya Diocese social welfare program, especially the soup kitchen. The SVD's own Mikawa Catholic Center offers consultation on religious matters and support for general problems of foreigners living in Japan, and provides Masses and celebration of the sacraments in various foreign languages. Many parishes have

ministries for the Filipino and Latin American migrants. Peace and social justice issues are discussed in the classroom as well as in special lectures and talks in the schools. Volunteer groups in the parishes and schools also help to heighten awareness of social issues. Nanzan University's Institute for Religion and Culture, Anthropological Institute, and Institute for Social Ethics are engaged in research, seminars, and publication in the areas of interreligious dialogue, intercultural studies, and contemporary social problems such as peace, environment, and bioethics.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

Our province's priorities are as follows: a) **Primary and New Evangelization** is naturally a priority since Christians comprise only 1.0% and Catholics less than 0.4% of the population. Since the vast majority of students and

Peace and social justice issues are discussed in the classrooms as well as in special lectures and talks in the schools.

faculty in our schools are people of other faiths and faith seekers, the schools provide an important opportunity to bring them into contact with the Gospel message. b) **Inter-religious dialogue** on an academic level is the focus of Nanzan University, especially Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. c) **The promotion of a culture of life** is an important part of our activities in a society where utilitarianism and materialism is rampant and respect for more permanent spiritual values is declining. *For Human Dignity*, is the motto and educatio-

nal philosophy of the Nanzan Schools Corporation. d) **Family and youth**, our parishes and schools are dealing more and more with the problems of breakdown in family relationships. Schools naturally maintain close contact with students and their parents. e) **Education and research** is the natural focus of our schools and the research institutes of Nanzan University. f) **Migration/Social Justice**, the JPIC committee and Mikawa Catholic Center are the main coordinating forces in the province, but the parishes and schools are also involved as described above. g) **Integrity of Creation**, the province has been collaborating with Caritas Japan and has made confreres available for work in the areas devastated by the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami of 2011, supporting the people as they continue to rebuild their lives.

Cooperation with SSpS and others

The province has been cooperating with the Holy Spirit Sisters since their arrival in Japan shortly after our Society. Apart from cooperation in teaching and administrative posts of the Nanzan School Corporation, which merged with the Nagoya Holy Spirit School Corporation in 1995, there is a joint SSpS-SVD Spirituality Committee, which organizes joint retreats, workshops, recollections, and Founder's Day Celebrations. For many years, the major seminary in Nagoya has been hosting seminarians, both Japanese and foreigners, from the various orders such as Passionists and Viatorians during the years of their Japanese language or theology studies at Nanzan University.

SVD Lay Partners

Two lay organizations cooperate in the activities of the province. One is the *Formation Sponsors Association*, whose members support the province's formation programs with regular donations and prayers. The second is the *Ludovico Omoto-kai*, an organization of former seminarians of the St. Ludovico Minor Seminary founded to support the seminary financially and with prayer. The group assumed the main responsibility for organizing the minor seminary's 60th anniversary held in 2016.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishop	1	1	1
Clerics	118	122	108
Brothers (final vows)	4	4	4
Brothers (temporal vows)	0	0	1
Scholastics	13	11	17
Novices	0	1	0
Total	136	139	131

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	55.3	53.1	49.1
Nationalities	22	24	22

Spirituality: The annual province retreats are an opportunity to reaffirm the spirituality of our founder and to reexamine how we live it out in our own personal spiritual lives and daily activities.

The retreats are planned in cooperation with the JPIC and AJST coordinators.

Community life: There are a growing number of retired confreres in the province. While they continue to share in the province's activities as far as possible, a systematic plan on the province level for providing comfortable and adequate living conditions for the elderly confreres, including nursing care, is urgently needed. Geographical separation, difference in work and activity schedules, areas of specialization, etc., tends to create a feeling of isolation among confreres, especially those who live and work alone. This makes finding time for a common life of fellowship and prayer all the more important. Regular meetings in the districts allow confreres to meet for Mass, meals, sharing and fellowship.

Leadership: More confreres are needed in the schools. The six confreres currently pursuing higher studies abroad are expected to play an important role in the schools. Confreres also need to be systematically trained to assume administrative posts in the future. The small proportion of confreres in the schools makes it a high priority to cooperate with the lay faculty and staff to ensure a missionary orientation and a philosophy of education appropriate for a Catholic institution.

Finance: Over the years, there has been much discussion on how to make better use of the facilities and resources at Tajimi. There is an urgent need to come to a decision. Since the salaries

of the confreres working in the schools provide the only steady source of income for the province, and the number of confreres in the schools is decreasing, it is very important to train more confreres for future work in the schools. Confreres are informed of the state of province finances in order to heighten solidarity and motivation for economizing at both the community and personal level.

Formation: The decline in the birth rate makes it difficult to recruit vocations among the Japanese. As of 2016, St. Ludovico Minor Seminary in Nagasaki had an enrollment of 3, and Divine Word Seminary in Nagoya had 2 deacons and 7 confreres in temporary vows, as well as 4 seminarians in OTP. Some of the OTP seminarians remain in Japan to study theology, which is an important source of vocations for the province.

The formation program is being strengthened through better coordination with the Pontifical

Faculty of Theology at Nagoya and the Department of Christian Studies and Graduate Schools of Christian Thought and Religious Thought of Nanzan University. The Province Committee for Formation and Education is currently re-evaluating the Province Formation Program that was implemented five years ago.

Spiritual Renewal in Initial and Ongoing Formation

In order to provide opportunities for growth, seminarians at the major seminary in Nagoya choose and meet regularly with an individual spiritual director. The annual workshop for recently ordained, recently finally professed, and recently appointed missionaries, is an important means of ongoing formation for younger confreres, providing an opportunity to re-examine their spiritual lives in view of their missionary experiences and to deepen fellowship with other confreres.