

## **Welcoming the Jubilee Year 2025 as “Pilgrims of Hope”**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Kyoto Diocese,

### **The Grace of the Jubilee Year 2025**

The origin of the Catholic Jubilee Year is in the “Jubilee Year” of Leviticus chapter 25 of the Old Testament. In Judaism it was a special time every 50 years during which the restoration of landholdings and the emancipation of slaves took place. The Catholic Church inherited this spirit, and in 1300 Pope Boniface VIII instituted the first Jubilee Year. Since then, a Jubilee Year has been celebrated every 25 years as a special time of grace for believers so that people of all ages can experience it at least once in their lifetime.

The Jubilee Year is primarily a period to encourage conversion. Throughout the Jubilee Year, the Church provides abundant opportunities to receive indulgences, the grace of reparation that comes with the forgiveness of sins. If you meet certain conditions, you can receive a plenary indulgence while deepening your faith through pilgrimage and prayer. The Jubilee Year celebrated by the entire Church is also an opportunity to strengthen the bonds among believers and promote unity.

### **The Proclamation of the Jubilee Year 2025**

Pope Francis has called the message of the Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025 "Pilgrims of Hope" and issued a papal bull promulgating the Jubilee Year on May 9, 2024. The Pope begins with a sentence from Paul's Letter to the Romans: “Hope does not disappoint” (Romans 5:5), and goes on to say: “In the spirit of hope, the Apostle Paul addressed these words of encouragement to the Christian community of Rome....My thoughts turn to all those pilgrims of hope who will travel to Rome in order to experience the Jubilee Year and to all those others who, though unable to visit the City of the Apostles Peter and Paul, will celebrate it in their local Churches. For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the ‘door’ (cf. Jn 10:7.9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as ‘our hope’ (1 Tim 1:1).”

Pope Francis hopes that the faithful will be reminded of God’s love and hope and that they will be inspired to bring hope to prisoners, comfort to the sick, support to youth, safety and educational opportunities to refugees and migrants, friendship and understanding between other generations and the elderly, and an increase in concern for the poor.

## **A Symbol of Hope**

The four figures in the logo of the Jubilee Year 2025 represent all of humanity from all the earth. They embrace each other to show the solidarity and fraternity that unites all peoples. The leading figure holds the cross, that is, Christ. At the feet of the four figures is a wave of hardship as they face the journey of life, but the long cross becomes an anchor, a symbol of hope supporting the pilgrims on their journey of faith.

The Pope sees the Jubilee Year as an opportunity to read “the signs of the times” and urges us to look at the good in the world today rather than assuming that we have been defeated by evil and violence. Therefore, he calls on us to change the “signs of the times” to “signs of hope” and to move forward with a heartfelt desire to seek God’s salvation.

The Pope calls for peace through the end of wars and conflicts and that money should not be spent on weapons or war expenses, but on a global fund to end hunger. At the same time, he calls for debt cancellation for poor countries that are unable to repay their debts. Showing that “we have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19), he encourages us to never lose the hope that has been given to us, but to find our place in God and to hold fast to it.

## **The opening of the Jubilee Year and the Jubilee Door (Porta Santa)**

In the Jubilee Year, there is a tradition that pilgrims visit the four papal basilicas in Rome and pass through the Jubilee Doors, which are usually closed and only open in Jubilee years. This comes from the teaching that Jesus Christ is the gate of fellowship with God and “the way, the truth, and the life” to the Father. Pilgrims who pass through the Jubilee Door in the Jubilee year confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord” and remember the forgiveness of their sins in order to live a new life.

On Tuesday, December 24, 2024, the eve of the Nativity of the Lord, the Jubilee Door of St. Peter’s Basilica will be opened by the Pope, thus opening the Jubilee Year. Then, on Sunday, December 29, on the Feast of the Holy Family, the Jubilee Door will be opened in the Basilica of St. John Lateran. On the same day, in the Diocese of Kyoto in accordance with the pope’s instructions the bishop will offer the opening Mass of the Jubilee Year at the Kawaramachi Church, our cathedral. On Wednesday, January 1, 2025, the feast of Mary, Mother of God, the Jubilee Door at the basilica of St. Mary Major will be opened and on Sunday, January 5, 2025, the feast of the Lord’s Epiphany, the Jubilee Door of the basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls will be opened. As for the closing, the Jubilee Doors of the three basilicas except St. Peter’s will be closed on Sunday, December 28, 2025, bringing an end to Jubilee Year observances in lesser churches. Then, on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, the Epiphany of the Lord, the Jubilee Door of St. Peter’s Basilica will be closed, bringing the Jubilee Year 2025 to a close.

## **Pilgrimage sites in the Diocese of Kyoto**

Pilgrimage is a fundamental element of the Jubilee Year, and the Pope hopes that in the coming Jubilee Year Pilgrims of Hope will experience the Jubilee Year through traditional and modern pilgrimages.

The pilgrimage sites of the Diocese of Kyoto are the cathedral at Kawaramachi and the churches at Miyazu, Fukuchiyama, Nara, Otsu, Suzuka, and Yokkaichi.

Those who are ill or too old to make the pilgrimage can receive the Jubilee Year indulgence by receiving Jubilee Communion or attending Mass or community prayer in person or through television or radio.

## **Indulgence**

We may sin out of human weakness and stray from the path to God but God's mercy is poured out in forgiveness of our sins. Forgiveness of sins is usually given through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but in order for the scars (residue) of sin to be removed, a "penance" is required, such as a specific prayer or good deed which is recommended by the priest. Please note that an indulgence is an exemption from such penance, not the forgiveness of sins.

In general, those who desire to obtain an indulgence must be free of great sins and unite their hearts with God. They receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, attend Mass, recite the Creed, and pray for the good of the Pope, the Church, and the world. An Indulgences can be obtained not only for oneself, but also at any time for the dead through a form of vicarious intercession, which is encouraged as an act of charity towards those who have passed away.

## **Conclusion**

As we head into the Jubilee Year 2025, Pope Francis calls upon us to walk as Pilgrims of Hope. Let us in the Diocese of Kyoto take this opportunity to renew our faith and hope, to experience God's love, to keep hope in these difficult times. Let us forgive each other for the mistakes of the past and have the courage and strength to take new steps forward while supporting each other in the spirit of synodality.

For more information, please visit the official websites of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan and the Diocese of Kyoto.

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