

**Toward the “Second Stage” of Collaborative Ministry for Mission.
in the Diocese of Kyoto (2001–2026)
— From “Collaborative Ministry for Mission” to a “Synodal Church” —**

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Introduction

Since the 1990s, the Diocese of Kyoto has gradually introduced Collaborative Ministry for Mission. In 2001, the New Year pastoral letter, “**Looking to the Future of Kyoto Diocese: We’re aiming at *Collaborative Ministry for Mission.*”** For the past twenty-five years, the Diocese of Kyoto has continued on this path.

As we now look back on these twenty-five years, two things are required of us. First, we must discern how to evaluate Collaborative Ministry for Mission. Second, we must honestly face the missionary challenges that have become clear in the Diocese of Kyoto through this journey, and on that basis clarify the direction of its second stage.

**I. Evaluation of Collaborative Ministry for Mission
— How should we understand these twenty-five years? —**

1. A farsighted choice, not only a response to the shortage of priests

Collaborative Ministry for Mission in Kyoto began in the context of a decrease in the number of priests. But it was not simply a response to that shortage. Rather, it was a way of rethinking the very nature of the Church. It was not an emergency measure to maintain church life, but a proactive and farsighted choice to renew the Church for the sake of evangelization.

2. A renewal of ecclesiology beyond institutional reform

The great importance of Collaborative Ministry for Mission lies not only in reviewing church structures and roles, but in rethinking how we understand faith and the Church. It sought to deepen our understanding of the Church: from “a Church where priests lead and lay people support” to “a Church where priests, religious, and lay faithful share together in the mission of evangelization.” This was not merely a change of structure, but a renewal of ecclesiology and a call to deeper awareness and growth in faith.

3. A shift from dependence on individual ability to service that supports the community

Collaborative Ministry for Mission did not seek to weaken priestly authority. Rather, it sought to clarify more fully the priesthood as service. One of its important fruits was to move away from a model in which the whole community depends on the ability or judgment of one priest, and toward a Church in which priests, religious, and lay faithful walk together in discernment. The role of the priest was re-understood not as “the one who carries everything alone,” but as “one who supports the Church community, together with other ministers, so that it may walk according to the Gospel.”

4. Shared discernment, not simply shared activities

An important point of Collaborative Ministry for Mission is that it placed the heart of communion not in simply sharing activities, but in sharing discernment. Joint Masses and joint activities are important signs of communion, but they are not the goal. The goal was that priests, religious, and lay faithful would pray together, listen together to the Word of God, discern together the path the Church should follow, and share responsibility together. This understanding is connected with what is now emphasized as the essence of a synodal Church: the People of God walking together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

5. A broader vision beyond the parish alone

Collaborative Ministry for Mission has led us beyond thinking only in terms of “my parish.” It has helped us to see the Church from the wider perspective of the block and the whole diocese, beyond the difference between diocesan priests and religious. This was an important step in understanding the Diocese of Kyoto as a larger communion and in fostering a spirit of mutual support and shared journey.

II. Missionary Challenges Facing the Diocese of Kyoto **— What is being asked of us as we move into the second stage? —**

The basic direction of Collaborative Ministry for Mission was right. However, during these twenty-five years, the situation surrounding the Church has changed greatly. The decrease in priests, the aging of the faithful, and the increase in foreign-born Catholics have made the missionary challenges of the Diocese of Kyoto more visible. To move into the second stage, we must honestly accept these questions as part of our journey.

1. Maturity in the culture and spirituality of the Church, beyond structures

The second stage means moving from a phase centered on building systems and structures to a phase in which Collaborative Ministry for Mission matures as a culture and spirituality of the Church. The goal is not to create some final perfect model. Collaborative Ministry for Mission is not a system that ends once its structure is in place. It is an ongoing path of a Church alive in the Gospel, a Church that continues to ask, pray, and listen. Therefore, the second stage is less about adding new structures and more about allowing what we have already received to take deeper root in everyday church life.

2. Sharing the purpose and direction of mission

In the blocks and parishes of the Diocese of Kyoto, many activities and efforts are sincerely continued. This is important. Yet there is also the danger of simply repeating what was done the year before, without clearly sharing what we are aiming at and for whom we are doing it. What is needed now is not more activity, but a clearer discernment and sharing of the purpose and

direction of mission throughout the diocese. Only when the purpose is shared can activities become true means of evangelization.

3. A shift from administration-centered to mission-centered life

Good budget management and the smooth running of events are important for maintaining the community. But if that is all, administration itself becomes the goal, and the Church turns inward. The Church is not simply an organization that functions in an orderly way. It is a community entrusted with the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Therefore, church administration must always be examined from the perspective of mission. What matters is whether it truly serves evangelization and bears missionary fruit.

This also applies to meetings. Block meetings and parish councils should not be only places for reports, coordination, and approval. They should be places where we look together at reality, discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit in prayer, and seek together the direction the Church should take. In this way, meetings must grow from mere “places of processing” into Gospel-based and spiritual “places of shared discernment.”

4. Building structures in which leaders can grow

In many parishes today, responsibility is concentrated in the hands of a limited number of people, and leadership roles are becoming fixed and older. If this continues, a system based mainly on goodwill and generosity will gradually become exhausted, and both the life of the Church and the spread of mission will weaken. What is needed, therefore, is not only to find people for each task, but to build structures in which new leaders can grow.

For this reason, we need to make better use of training sessions and gatherings for parish council members, and to promote the formation of lay ministers in a more intentional and continuous way. It is important to clarify terms of service, define roles, and prepare good systems of succession. Short-term and partial forms of service should also be welcomed as meaningful participation, and the Church should foster an atmosphere in which newcomers can take part more easily.

5. Living the reality of being a “small flock” as a missionary strength

It is a fact that the size of the Church is becoming smaller because of the decline in the number of faithful and the aging of the community. Yet our goal should not be simply to recover the size we once had. Rather, we should receive this reality as a call for the Church to rely less on numbers and size, and to live more deeply the Gospel and a more profound communion. Within the reality of being a small flock, we are called to deepen the faith of each person, strengthen our bonds with one another, and connect this way of life with the power of witness and mission.

6. Forming a Church where all generations can remain

As the birthrate declines, children and young people are finding it easier to drift away from the Church. At the same time, adults in their thirties to fifties, who carry many responsibilities for work and family life, often find it difficult to participate fully in church life. What is needed

now is to build a community in which all generations—from children to the elderly—are welcomed, grow through relationships, and can gather in peace.

What matters is not simply increasing programs. The real question is whether the Church itself is a place where anyone can feel at home, and where even those who have once stepped away can return again. For this, we must create more flexible ways for children, young people, and families to participate. We must also create opportunities for different generations to meet and support one another, so that everyone may be welcomed as a member of the Church and entrusted with some role.

7. From “being together” to “building the Church together”

The participation of foreign-born Catholics is a great blessing for the Diocese of Kyoto. Today, it is impossible to think about the Church community without them. In many places, a shared life of prayer, service, and fellowship has already grown steadily.

Precisely for this reason, the next step is not simply to remain at the stage of “being together” or “participating.” We must deepen this relationship so that we think together, discern together, share responsibility together, and build the Church together. This means opening ways for participation in councils and committees, improving dialogue and information-sharing across languages and cultures, and widening opportunities for foreign-born Catholics to take active roles in liturgy, catechesis, church events, and service. Multicultural coexistence is not merely a matter of care or support. It is an essential and hope-filled task for enriching the communion of the Church, widening the possibilities of mission, and building the future of the Diocese of Kyoto together.

Conclusion

— The second stage means living the true meaning of Collaborative Ministry for Mission more deeply in today’s reality —

From all this, the direction of the second stage of Collaborative Ministry for Mission in the Diocese of Kyoto becomes clear. It means moving from “a Church that only preserves” to “a Church that shares responsibility,” from “an administration-centered Church” to “a mission-centered Church,” and from “a Church that only accepts participation” to “a Church that is built together.”

This does not mean adding a new ideal. It means living more deeply and more seriously the true meaning of Collaborative Ministry for Mission in the reality of today. Therefore, what is asked of the Diocese of Kyoto now is not to add one new principle after another, but to live anew, in the reality of 2026, the principles that have already been entrusted to us.

Collaborative Ministry for Mission is not simply a system that began twenty-five years ago. It is an ongoing journey of conversion for the Church. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may we continue to walk this path steadily as a path toward a more synodal Church in the Diocese of Kyoto.

End.