



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

*Christian and Shinto Followers Together:
Fostering Moral Values*

MESSAGE TO FOLLOWERS OF SHINTO
2019

Vatican City

Dear Shinto Friends,

1. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends you heartfelt greetings and best wishes on the occasion of the New Year, a solemn feast day for all Japanese people and especially for you, the followers of Shinto. Renewing our tradition, on this joyful occasion, we express closeness and affection to you and all the Japanese people. *Akemashite omedetou gozaimasu!*
2. We offer our greetings this year in the hope of reflecting together on the challenge of transmitting our respective moral values to our followers. It seems that moral values have less and less impact on society in today's world. Surely, the decline of religion as the centre of people's lives results in a lack of morals and common understanding about social exchange. We share the view that moral development and religious attitudes go hand in hand, resulting in commitment to social and religious duties.
3. The New Year, as we know, is for you a time when Shinto temples attract great numbers of pilgrims and visitors. Such religious and cultural events attract hundreds of thousands of our respective followers, bespeaking the human desire for the spiritual. Today we are left with the perplexing question of how far these important and meaningful religious feasts actually contribute to create and foster moral values in those who take part in them. How does "religion" practically influence the lives of people? How can religions once again contribute to prepare responsible and honest citizens and influence selfless service to society despite the global movement away from moral values? How can religions help in creating solid and valuable convictions about human dignity, human rights and ecology and other key global problems?
4. We can all agree that right religious practices and observances could mould the character of a person. Authentic religious life can strongly contribute to the formation of honest, just, kind, loving and respectful people. Mere observance of the ritual practice according to tradition is certainly not sufficient. The moral implications of these ancient rituals, often so rich in meaning and of great spiritual beauty, should be the clear focus. For us in our Holy Scriptures, we have the reminder when God says "This people honours me with their lips, but

their heart is far from me; [...]" (Isaiah, 29:13). Pope Francis notes that "Actually, a man or woman who lives in vanity, in greed or in arrogance and at the same time believes and shows him or herself as being religious and even goes so far as to condemn others, is a hypocrite" (*Angelus*, 2 September 2018).

5. Dear followers of Shinto, as believers, let us together at the beginning of the new year reach out to our followers who come to celebrate these different religious festivals and observances, so as to strengthen their awareness of how the teachings represented in these feasts can become part of their everyday lives. To realize this, let us emphasize our lived witness to our beliefs, giving to our respective followers a real ground of hope for a better world.
6. Let us, therefore, celebrate this festive season rejoicing in our commitment as religious leaders to offer to others a formation in the values of moral integrity through our beliefs, and thus contribute to the greater good of the world at large. With this common wish, we offer our cordial greetings once again to you, your families and to your communities.

Happy *Oshogatsu* to all of you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot in a cursive script.

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
00120 Vatican City

Tel: +39.06.6988 4321

Fax: +39.06.6988 4494

E-mail: dialogo@interrel.va
<http://www.pcinterreligious.org/>