

Magome Church

Magome Church is located on Iojima, an island just outside Nagasaki Bay. During the two and a half centuries that their religion was prohibited, many Christians migrated here because it was administered by the Saga domain, whose officials did not renew their religious persecution with the zeal shown by other domains nearby. However, the 1865 discovery of the Hidden Christians, when French missionaries in Nagasaki reestablished contact with the Hidden Christian community, prompted a new wave of repression that included the Saga domain. It started in 1867 and lasted until 1873, when the Meiji government finally revoked the ban on Christianity.

Once their religion was accepted, the island's Christian inhabitants promptly decided to build a church. Initially, they probably just adapted the house of the local Christian leader. Then, in 1890, Father Joseph Marmand, a French priest from the Paris Society of Foreign Missions, constructed a proper church; however, that structure was destroyed by a combination of a lightning strike (1927) and a typhoon (1930). The current Gothic building with its five spires and white plaster finish dates from 1931. After the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, public buildings throughout Japan began to be built in ferroconcrete rather than the more fragile brick. The switch gave architects greater freedom of expression. The versatility of this material, coupled with the absence of any pressure on Christians to keep a low profile, allowed churches to take on more exuberant designs, like this one.