

St. Francis Xavier Memorial Church

St. Francis Xavier Memorial Church preserves the legacy of Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (1506–1552) who propagated Christianity in western Japan in the mid-sixteenth century. The church is modern in its design, with clean lines and a triangular form. The current building was constructed in 1998 after the original, built in 1952, was destroyed in a fire in 1991. The first floor is a museum dedicated to the life of Xavier and the development of Christianity in Japan. The chapel is on the second floor and has bold modernist stained-glass windows, some of which are almost floor-to-ceiling in height.

Francis Xavier arrived in present-day Kagoshima Prefecture in 1549 from Portuguese India. He began his missionary work in Kyushu, encouraging daimyo to convert to Catholicism along with their retainers and subjects. He visited what is today the city of Yamaguchi for two months in 1551 and met with the daimyo, Ouchi Yoshitaka (1507–1551). Yoshitaka permitted Francis Xavier to proselytize in his domain and granted him a temple, which Xavier repurposed as the first Christian church in Japan. During his two months in Yamaguchi, Francis Xavier is said to have baptized some 500 people.

Exhibits in the church introduce the life of Francis Xavier through paintings, maps, and other historical documents. They also explain the development of Christianity in Japan, from its introduction in the sixteenth century to its prohibition in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. A gilded folding screen depicts Xavier's arrival in Japan and subsequent episodes during his time in the country. Artifacts including Buddhist-style stone lanterns with concealed Christian imagery offer insights into the lives of Hidden Christians (*kakure kirishitan*) who maintained their faith in secrecy in isolated communities after the religion was outlawed.

There is an admission fee for the museum, and visitors may look around the chapel when services are not being held.