

MISSION



NEWS AND VIEWS

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AUTUMN 2008

On Mission in Melbourne



BERNIE
McDERMOTT

“Bernie, it looks as though Myanmar is a non-starter due to your asthma condition, but the Australian/New Zealand region have asked to have you assigned there to help co-ordinate their mission education programme!”

How would you feel if we assigned you to Australia?” ... This was part of a conversation I had with the Columban Superior General in 2005.

I was disappointed in 2005 at not being able to respond to the challenge of overseas mission in Burma (Myanmar).

Australia, though far away, seemed to me at the time to be a poor second to missionary work in Burma but there was a certain appeal in working in another culture again. Somewhat reluctantly I said Yes!

Three years into my Australian ministry I feel as much ‘on mission’ here in Melbourne as the Philippines or Burma!

Mission is all about crossing boundaries of race, language, religion, culture and gender and all those elements are present here in Australia.

My assessment after three years is that Australia is a multi-ethnic society with a growing immigrant population, receiving people (often reluctantly and conditionally) from all over the world. This has created tensions and problems for the existing communities who at times feel threatened and fearful that their ‘Australian way of life’ is being diluted. There is also the historical relationship between the Aboriginal community and the old ‘settlers’ who see themselves as ‘the real Aussie’

and have never fully embraced their aborigine brothers and sisters as equals.

Throughout Columban history accompanying people in their search for a better way of life and a more enlightened faith has been the daily fare of Columbans. Helping communities struggle against injustice and oppression has been at the heart of our missionary task and is a story worth sharing.

It has been challenging to share my story of mission in Mindanao in the Philippines with people in the Melbourne archdiocese.

Domestic matters dominate people’s lives at the macro and micro levels but I have found there is a great wellspring of good-will among the Catholic population to understand the reasons for poverty and oppression and help where and when they can.

The presence of different ethnic groups in their midst is a very positive element in helping people understand their own problems as well as the difficulties of overseas communities struggling like themselves.

I have always received a great welcome from priests and people, many who wish to further their interest and commitment to Columban mission by agreeing to accept The Far East magazine into their homes.

It is an important part of the missionary task and links our Catholic communities here in Australia with the peoples with whom Columbans have lived with and continue to do so in different parts of our world.

I am glad I said ‘Yes’ to the Superior General to come and share my missionary experience in Australia and feel that Columban mission is alive and still a challenge whether it is in Myanmar or Melbourne. ♦

BERNIE McDERMOTT

90 YEARS OF MISSION 2008

This year St Columbans Mission Society celebrates its 90th year as a Catholic missionary organisation.

In the first issue of The Far East magazine produced in Melbourne in October 1920, Bishop Fogarty an Irish prelate wrote, *‘While we lay buried, as if in sleep, the Spirit of God has passed over Ireland in an extraordinary manner. We woke one morning to find at our doors the strangest sight imaginable - a band of young priests, the finest and most gifted we had, begging for assistance. And for what enterprise! That they may be allowed to go and preach the Gospel to China’s heathen millions.’*

Young Australian and New Zealand priests volunteered to join this new missionary venture. The Far East published stories that these missionaries sent back home. Both exotic and interesting stories from ‘the missions,’ came into the houses of Catholic people who knew little about China.

As one Columban Priest once said: *“Cynics say: Missionaries go to places to do good and did well. But I don’t think we ever really did well, we did good”*. ♦



Capital “E” for Experience

THE COLUMBAN PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The Columban Partnership Program aims to establish partnerships between communities here in Australia and communities in the Philippines or Fiji.

It has done this by taking small groups to those countries to meet with many people in places where Columbans work and to discover what partnership possibilities exist. To date there are four active partnerships in which people work together to achieve common aims and to develop mutual understanding.

In February, representatives of the four groups in Melbourne gathered at the Columban Mission Centre in Essendon to share experiences and ideas with each other and with the Columbans whose life's work has established the infrastructure of contacts in the Philippines and Fiji that make the program possible.

By the end of the gathering everybody was speaking of the values of this sharing of past experiences and of enthusiasm for the future. We are looking forward to continuing the

journey, working together, enjoying the outcomes and sharing our sense of personal growth in our local communities. This is mission with a capital E for experience.

I am hoping that the next year or two can see another four partnerships established. If you are of any inclination to join the program or just to find out more about it please feel free to contact me. ♦

DICK DANCKERT

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Quezon City Partnership

Alan Doherty, a member of The Partnership Program and a teacher at Holy Spirit School in Manifold Heights, Geelong has been in constant contact with many of the workers at Kazama Grameen in Quezon City since his visit to the Philippines.

Below are a few lines from one of the many emails that are exchanged between Anna Lisa from Kazama Grameen and Alan:

“I am so glad to hear you again. I had received your parcel last Wednesday Jan. 30. I really appreciate your effort and your family for sending me a beautiful shopping bag please tell my thanks to your loving wife for the gift. I kept it as I kept our friendship carefully and with love, maybe I could use it when we go to Baguio this coming April for our KAPATIRAN (one week conference for annual planning of every branches of KAZAMA Grameen).” ♦



Above: Alan Doherty visits Anna Lisa at Kazama Grameen, Quezon City.

Mission in Myanmar

Myitkyina is the capital city of the Kachin State, at the extreme north of Myanmar (Burma).

Life in Myanmar is oppressive under the military regime. The Catholic diocese of Myitkyina covers an area of 78,000 sq kms. Villages lie deep in the mountains, road conditions are poor and paths through jungles are often the only access to many of these villages. There are 99,000 Catholics and only 44 priests but the Church in Myitkyina is active and vibrant due mainly to the faith and dedication of village catechists. They develop the prayer and faith life through

teaching catechism, leading Sunday services, conducting funerals and prayer services. They prepare people for the sacraments which are administered when the priest visits throughout the year.

Columban priest, the late Fr Bernard Way, set up the first catechist training school 50 years ago which today has a two year theology and scripture program. From this direct involvement with people at the grassroots, the catechists learn how to listen to the sufferings and joys of the people, and together find ways of meeting their needs. ♦

Columban WYD08 Pilgrims Prepare

World Youth Day 08 in Sydney is fast approaching and the excitement is certainly building across many sectors of the Church. Four young pilgrims from the Columban Parish of Ba in Fiji are certainly getting very excited!

As an initiative of the Columban Mission Education Program, two Melbourne schools were approached at the beginning of 2007 with a view to their each sponsoring two young people from a disadvantaged background to attend World Youth Day as their guests. Penola Catholic College in Broadmeadows and St Columba's College in Essendon rose to the challenge and began their fundraising efforts.

Meanwhile, in the parish of Ba, a selection process was instigated. Potential pilgrims were invited to submit an application detailing why they wanted to attend WYD08 and how they may use the experience

to enrich the life of their parish on their return. A selection panel was established and interviews conducted.

Four young people were chosen. They are Cyril Tavui, Mere Ranuku, Alisi Keasi and Unaisi Vunisina. These four are now in the process of preparation through a retreat program prior to their pilgrimage. The exciting tasks of Passport and Visa applications are underway. Penola Catholic College students have already introduced themselves and begun to get to know the pilgrims via email. The travelers will be billeted with local families so they can better experience life in Australia.

One of the great experiences these young pilgrims can look forward to is meeting with other Columban youth from Brazil and the Philippines who will be performing as part of Theatre of the Oppressed in the WYD Program in Sydney. We believe this will be a wonderful opportunity to build solidarity with other young people who

Below: Four enthusiastic young pilgrims will be visiting WYD from the Fijian Parish of Ba.



have been nurtured in their faith by some of the many Columbans working in overseas mission.

We are confident this will be a life-changing experience and we are very grateful to both Penola and St Columba's for giving this opportunity to young people who would never have been able to attend were it not for their generosity and interest in building bridges across culture. ♦

Living the Gospel: Responding to Challenge

Australia is the world's driest and flattest inhabited continent with the lowest percentage of rainwater reaching our rivers as runoff, the lowest amount of water found in our rivers and the smallest surface area of permanent wetlands.

Over 50% of Australia receives less than 500mm of rain annually; over 80% receives less than 600mm. The recent decade of drought has added significantly to Australia's water crisis.

Why should Christians be concerned?

Without water, we die. Water is life in the most simple of ways. The richness of the symbolism of water in the Scriptures is immense. At creation, God's spirit moves across the face of the deep, hovering over the waters. From these waters God brings forth Earth and all it contains. It is little wonder that the people of Israel, a desert dwelling people, often used water as a symbol of what is essential to spiritual life in the same way that it is basic to physical life. *'Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty... come to me, listen, and your soul will live'* (Is 55:1-3). ♦



What can you do?

- The Rule of Thumb: Measure and Monitor; Reduce; Re-use and Substitute.
- Always look for water efficiency rating on appliances. The more stars the better.
- Drastically reduce water use in the home. Turn off the tap!
- Re-use water wherever possible, for example, a bucket of water captured in the shower can be poured into the washing machine.
- Take careful note of the information provided on water bills. Have a family competition to reduce use! Reward yourselves when you succeed.
- Support and applaud government initiatives towards a more sustainable water policy. Urge them to prompt action in this area.

Columban News



BERNIE LANE

Father Bernard from Strathmore recently wrote to Columban Mission Centre from Peru. One area of his work is with "Columban Missionary Companions" where approximately 60 people from former Columban administered Parishes have committed themselves to do pastoral work in areas on the margins of Lima where there is no established Church presence. Bernie is pleased to have the chance to work with the programme.



TEDDY COLLINS

Irish Columban Father Teddy Collins visited family and friends in Melbourne in February. He is teaching English in a university in Changchun, China in the north of the country near the borders of Russia and North Korea. He has been in China 10 years and seven years in his present assignment. Their passion for education is unrelenting, he said. The students are under tremendous pressure because the family and even the extended family student is depending on the student to graduate and get a good job and help the family.



TONY COX

Melbourne born Fr Tony Cox is currently working as Parish Priest at St Joseph's, Boronia and St Bernadette's, The Basin in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. After spending 10 years at Columban Mission Centre in Essendon and on Mission in Japan for 18 years.

Tony says "The roles may be different but the responsibility for proclaiming, living and sharing the Gospel of Life continue to be paramount."



KEVIN O'NEILL

Father Kevin O'Neill from Geelong completed six years in Ireland as a member of our Society's General Council (2000 -2006). After a holiday at home in Geelong recently, Kevin went on mission to Hong Kong and China in early March 2008.

Having spent 10 years in Taiwan before going to Ireland in 2000 he said he was looking forward to returning to live and work among the people of Asia.



PETER O'NEILL

After working at the Columban Hope Worker's Centre in Taiwan for 12 years Father Peter O'Neill accepted the bishop's invitation to become diocesan chaplain for migrant workers and new immigrants.

He co-ordinates the diocesan response to the pastoral and social needs of the migrant workers and new immigrants. Peter returned to Taiwan in early March after a two month vacation with family and friends in Australia.



DOMINIC NOLAN

Melbourne born Father Dominic Nolan is working in the Philippines on mission. At the Columban Mission Centre Dominic is responsible for raising mission awareness. He is lecturing in Scripture, Life and Prayer at the Biblical Apostolate and assisting the Missionaries Sisters of Charity with a Renewal Program. Dominic is passionate about his work with the Centre for Ecozoic Living and Learning (CELL) which is a practical place to tell the Story of Creation and demonstrate sustainable living. Dominic is currently home on leave to visit family and catch up with friends. ♦



60, 70 & 80 YEARS FOR THE COLUMBAN BAKER BROTHERS



Above: Frs Patrick, Leo and Christopher Baker.

In July, there will be a reunion of the Baker Brothers to celebrate Fr Leo Baker's 60th year as a Columban Priest, Fr Patrick Baker's 70th birthday and Fr Christopher Baker's 80th Birthday.

Fr Leo is currently residing at St Columbans in Essendon, Fr Patrick is on mission in the Philippines and Fr Christopher is retired in Peru. ♦



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St Columban became 'A Wanderer for Christ'. One of his greatest sayings summarises his life and his work, *'Let us be of Christ not of ourselves'*.