

# The Far East

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# The Far East

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Young residents in the rebuilt village for victims of Typhoon Sedong at the new fresh water outlet.

see pages 14-15

Photo: Fr Paul Oxley



# From the Editor

## Going forth

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, that was released at the end of November, 2013, Pope Francis asks all of us as baptised Christians to discern the path that the Lord is pointing out to us, so that we can then "go forth" to the edges, to the margins with the light of the Gospel.

*".....all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zones in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel..." 20.*

Ten Columbans (nine of them newly ordained) left their comfort zones and went forth in 1933 to the periphery, to the city of Mokpo in Japanese occupied Korea. Today 80 years later in Korea, Columbans are celebration 80 years of going forth to other peripheries through wars and dictatorships and rapid industrialization.

In 1951, two Columbans arrived in Peru to begin a new mission. They were given the northern periphery of the city of Lima. For the next 60 years, Columbans like Fr John O'Connell who arrived in 1958 and died recently, have left their comfort zones to bring the light of the Gospel to the peripheries of Lima, where hundreds of thousands

of impoverished families began moving from the Andes Mountains. In this issue of *The Far East*, there are many stories of Columbans "going forth", of leaving their comfort zones to go to the peripheries with the light of the Gospel. Columban Sr Julietta Choi from Korea ministers in the Philippines to impoverished families living amongst the mausoleums of a cemetery.

*".....all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zones in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel..." 20.*

Columban Fr Kevin Mullins lives and works in what has been described as one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Living in Juarez, Mexico, on the periphery, can be difficult at times. Recently Fr Kevin's Chevy Ute was stolen while he was hearing confessions.

Columban Fr Paul Oxley recently visited the work of Fr Paul Finlayson and Lay Missionary Ana Belma Flores, at the Mother of Divine Mercy Village in the Philippines. This village has been built largely with funds

provided by the Columbans and the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro. It has been built for the victims of Typhoon Sedong which swept through the island of Mindanao, Philippines, two years ago.

Columban Fr Chris Saenz reminds us that being on mission in another country, more often than not, is about learning lessons from the ordinary things of life.

Fr Marino Nanjha went forth from his native Myanmar to work amongst the poor in the peripheries of Lima, Peru.

What is the path the Lord is pointing out to us to follow? Are we ready to leave our comfort zone for the peripheries, in need of the light of the Gospel?

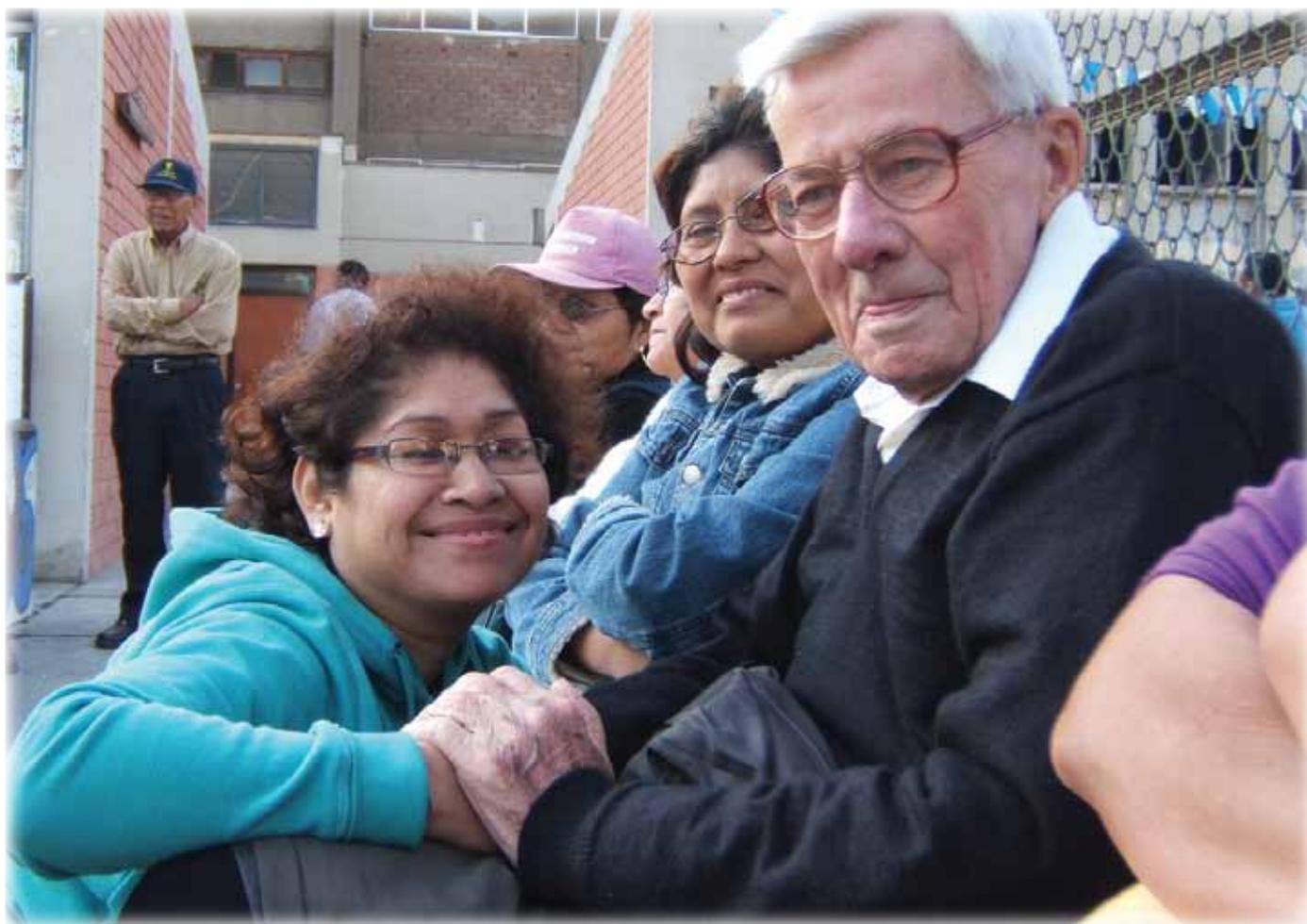
*Dan Harding*

Fr Dan Harding  
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# The smell of the sheep

*Columban Fr John O'Connell died peacefully in hospital in Lima, Peru, on October 24, 2013, aged 80. The story of his missionary life amongst the Peruvian people exemplifies the Columban vocation of priests, sisters and lay missionaries across the world, who in the words of our patron St Columban, leave their own land and people to become voluntary pilgrims for Christ amongst other peoples in other lands.*

*Australian Columban, Fr Leo Donnelly, ordained in the same year as Fr John and a close friend of his during their many years together in Peru, wrote to us about his friend Fr John. While the majority of Fr John's missionary life as a priest was spent in Peru, he also spent several years back in Ireland promoting Columban Mission amongst supporters and benefactors. The story of Fr John O'Connell is the story of Columban Mission in Peru and indeed the story of every Columban and every Columban supporter and benefactor.*



*Columban Fr John O'Connell RIP was revered by the Peruvian people.*

## *The Wake*

*D*uring the three-day wake that followed Fr John's death, hundreds of parishioners and friends from the four parishes in Lima where he had served, queued up to touch his coffin and to express their deep love, respect and thanks to their beloved "Juancito".

Fr John will be missed by the many people who made up his Peruvian family - people whose lives he touched in so

many different ways, working to bring dignity to their lives through projects related to education, health, transport, food, shelter and housing. At a Eucharist celebrated during the wake Columban Fr Noel Kerins used the words of Pope Francis during the 2013 Chrism Mass to describe how the life of a priest should be. He said Fr John was "a shepherd with the smell of the sheep."

*...There was a warmth to the man that we don't all possess and on one occasion this was presented as he being likened to a peat fire in the hearth gently warming the room and its people."*

### *The first few years - The invasion of Lima*

Fr John was ordained a priest at Dalgan Park, the Columban Seminary in Ireland, on December 22, 1957, and within a short period was informed that he was being assigned to Peru. On January 4, he sailed to the United States to see relatives and friends. From there, he flew down to Lima, arriving in late March 1958.

The Columban mission in 1958 in Peru was only six years old. In 1951 two Columbans had arrived in Peru to discuss with the different bishops which diocese would be the best for the Columbans to work in. In the end, they accepted the offer of the Cardinal Archbishop of Lima, to take pastoral responsibility from 1952 onwards for an area of 100sq.kms on the northern outskirts of the city.

This area was covered by 15 haciendas, growing cotton through irrigation and worked by farm labourers living in wretched conditions. It had a total population of around 15,000 people.

Over the next 60 years of Columban presence in this area, the Columbans would establish 24 parishes and the population would grow to two million people. Fr Leo writes of the background to Fr John's mission and that of all Columbans, during those early years.

### *Fr John - the man*

*"The invasion of Lima had begun. Thousands and thousands poured into Lima from their tiny farms in the mountains. They came in search of jobs, education and a future in our world. They began to invade and occupy land further and further out from the city. We followed them. Mass and the sacraments were our priority, but with tremendous emphasis also on trying to feed them as they struggled to establish themselves in the factories and in the State Schools being built. Stretching out into the north of the city we set up parish after parish thanks to the marvellous support of our Columban benefactors."*

Fr John's first assignment was as an assistant priest in the new Columban parish of Blessed Martin de Porres. Within three years, he was given the task of building a Basilica with the name of Martin de Porres, who was about to be canonized in Rome in 1962. Fr John undertook this task with great effort and soon had the Basilica of Saint Martin De Porres built.

Fr Leo Donnelly says that his friend, Fr John, was a Kerryman to his fingertips (coming from County Kerry, Ireland). He could be often seen in his parish in Lima sporting the jerseys of the Kerry Gaelic Football and Hurling teams. According to Fr Leo, this meant that as a true Kerryman, Fr John would often go off visiting people at 11:00 at night.

It has been said that Fr John was loyal to three Kingdoms - the Kingdom of Kerry, his birthplace, the Kingdom of Peru where his heart lay and the Kingdom of God in which he lived, moved and had his being. (Act 17:28)

According to Fr Leo, Fr John was among our finest, *"Dealing with mostly poor and often semi-literate migrants, he helped so many to become aware of their dignity as persons and to trust one another. He countered the racism inherent in the culture while he empowered the despised 'nobodies' to achieve grassroots social change.*

*Finally, what gift in this prayerful man identified Fr John as a priest for his people? There was a warmth to the man that we don't all possess and on one occasion this was presented as he being likened to a peat fire in the hearth gently warming the room and its people."*

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*The Far East acknowledges the contribution of Columban Fr Leo Donnelly and Sylvia Thompson in Peru and the Diocese of Kerry, Ireland for material for this article.*



*Columban Fr John O'Connell RIP celebrated Mass with the local Bishop.*

# Children living among the dead

SR JULIETTA CHOI

*Columban Sr Julietta Choi tells us about teaching poor children in a cemetery, a place for the dead, not for the living.*

Before coming to the Philippines from Korea in 2012, I heard that some of our Columban Sisters had started a ministry for the children who live in a cemetery among the graves in Manila. How is that possible? I asked myself, aren't Cemeteries for the dead, not for the living.

This really distressed me, as before I joined the Columban Sisters, I had taught children in school and I could not imagine the little ones among the dead.

Then I went to visit and meet the people who have no place to live but in the cemetery where they eat and sleep on top of the tombs. Many earn their living by cleaning the tombs. The children were dirty, some with no clothes and most without shoes.

In my fear I thought, is it dangerous to stay here? Will I be safe with them? Will it be possible for me to love them? I was not comfortable holding the children's dirty hands. No way could I hug them. I felt I could not stay with them even for one hour.

I felt I was not a missionary, I was a tourist. I just wanted to see the way the people lived in a cemetery - that was all. I wanted to get out of there as fast as I could. It was a dreadful moment.

When I left the cemetery, I realised my world had turned upside-down and inside-out. All the theology that I had studied did not fit at all with the reality that I had just experienced.

I was a tourist, curious and wanting to see how people outside my world

lived, but I had no understanding of what it might mean to follow Jesus all the way. It was an hour of shocking self-revelation. I realized I hadn't yet found the meaning of mission.

Next morning, Sr. Venus, with whom I live in community, took me to see the classroom in the cemetery. The classroom was a plain tomb in an open area with no roof on it, no chairs, no desks, no shelter.

*On my way home, I had some strange feelings and although I did not want to go back to this dreadful place, I knew I could not reject the children who showed such a hunger for learning. So I went back.*

After a while the children began to come and it was bedlam. The class started but some of the children were jumping and flying like Tarzan from tomb to tomb. I felt I would go out of my mind and to make matters worse, it started to rain. But that didn't bother them at all. In fact, it was only the missionary Sister (me) who ran for shelter.

On my way home, I had some strange feelings and although I did not want to go back to this dreadful place, I knew I could not reject the children who showed such a hunger for learning. So I went back.

The first thing was to look for another meeting place and I found a lovely spot a little apart from the graves. Initially only five to ten children

attended but as time went by the number increased to 45. Every time I go to the cemetery for my class, I bring a small white board, coloured pencils, a keyboard and some snacks. Sometimes I feel like a walking classroom.

I try to speak Tagalog, the national language, and somehow the children understand what I'm saying to them.

We correct and finish each other's sentences both in Filipino and Korean and whenever I make a mistake, they burst out laughing while vigorously clapping their hands.

I know that Jesus loves the cemetery children and I too have come to love them very much.

---

*Sr Julietta Choi is a young Korean Columban Sister on her first missionary appointment in the Philippines.*



Photos: Sr Julietta Choi

*Columban Sr Julietta Choi teaches children at the cemetery school.*



Listen to: Reflection - Leave your comfort zone

# Leave your comfort zone

At Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome, on 24 November 2013, Pope Francis issued his apostolic exhortation, "**Evangelii Gaudium**", (The Joy of the Gospel). This document highlights the Church's mission and gives a special focus to the poorest and most vulnerable.

The document begins with this inspiring statement: "The joy of the Gospel is the best answer to the world's suffering and evil."  
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In the article printed below, Columban Fr Peter Woodruff highlights the importance of the document, "**Evangelii Gaudium**".

## Becoming a Church that Evangelizes

The title of the first chapter, "The Church's Missionary Transformation", sets the tone for the whole document. Pope Francis uses the word "missionary" 70 times and the word "mission" 48 times throughout his Exhortation.

Pope Francis begins by spelling out his vision of Church renewal.

15) "...today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church" and "the missionary task must remain foremost".

He reminds us that the missionary mandate is taken from Jesus' words of farewell to his disciples:

19) Evangelization takes place in obedience to the missionary mandate of Jesus: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20).

He insists that all Christians have a role to play in this mission in which Gospel joy is equated with missionary joy (No. 21) and we go out on mission in the firm knowledge that the Lord has loved us first [1 Jn 4:19] (No. 24).

20) "...Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel.

We as Christians are required to go beyond our comfort zone: "Mere administration" can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be "permanently in a state of mission" (No. 25).

27) I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation...



Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff



Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff



Photo: Fr Barry Cairns

# Port zone

Francis released the Apostolic Exhortation, "**Evangelii**  
 ts the importance of evangelization for the Church and

of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter

ghlights for us the missionary perspective running through



## Going forth to all

Pope Francis proposes a simple but profound approach to our missionary outreach: *"the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary"* (No. 35).

He insists that the Church *"has to go forth to everyone without exception. But to whom should she go first? When we read the Gospel we find a clear indication: not so much our friends and wealthy neighbours, but above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked, "those who cannot repay you" (Lk 14:14)"* (No. 48). Then he goes well beyond a first-aid approach to the poor – those pushed out on to the periphery:

*53) ...Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a "disposable" culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society's underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the "exploited" but the outcast, the "leftovers".*

## Effort and dedication required for mission

While emphasising the joy of mission in No. 160 the Pope also reminds us of the effort and dedication required to follow through with our missionary responsibility:

*...it is clear that the first proclamation also calls for ongoing formation and maturation. Evangelization aims at a process of growth which entails taking seriously each person and God's plan for his or her life. All of us need to grow in Christ. Evangelization should stimulate a desire for this growth, so that each of us can say wholeheartedly: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).*

He goes to the heart of some of the requirements of missionary commitment:

*262) Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work. Mystical notions without a solid social and missionary*

*outreach are of no help to evangelization, nor are dissertations or social or pastoral practices which lack a spirituality which can change hearts.*

*264) The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him.*

## Not our mission but God's

While we may not be able to verify our progress empirically we are challenged to trust in God. After all, it is not our mission in which we are engaged, but God's:

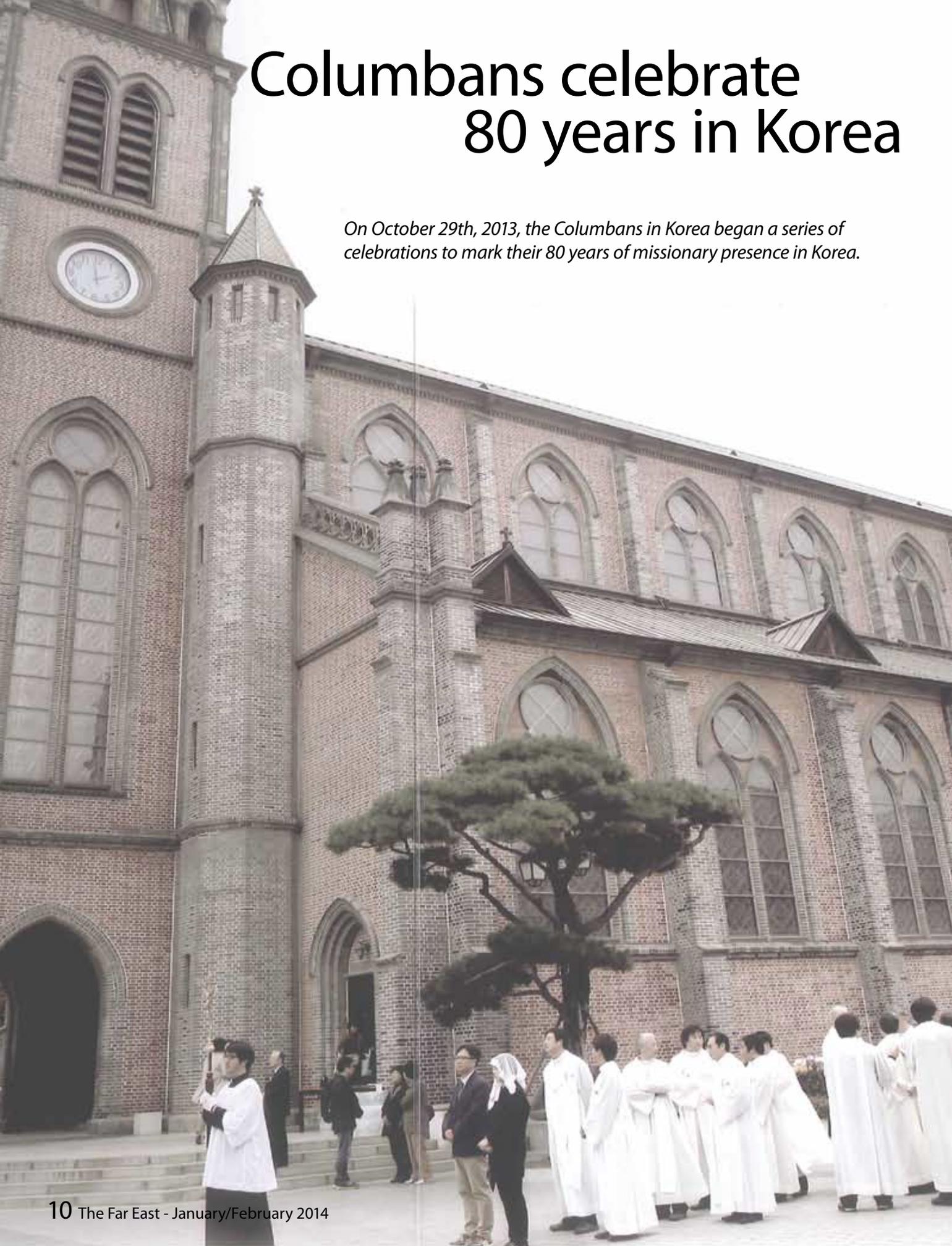
*279) Because we do not always see these seeds (of a new world) growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks: "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). This certainty is often called "a sense of mystery". It involves knowing with certitude that all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit (cf. Jn 15:5).*

We walk our missionary path constantly asking the Holy Spirit to support and guide us:

*280) Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is he who "helps us in our weakness" (Rom 8:26). But this generous trust has to be nourished, and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavour.*

# Columbans celebrate 80 years in Korea

*On October 29th, 2013, the Columbans in Korea began a series of celebrations to mark their 80 years of missionary presence in Korea.*



The Columban Superior General, Fr Kevin O'Neill joined Archbishop Yeom of Seoul and Columban priests, sisters, lay missionaries, benefactors and parishioners from former Columban parishes in a commemorative Eucharist in St Mary's Cathedral, Seoul, to give thanks to God for these 80 years of missionary presence.

"The Columbans have made a wonderful contribution to the Korean Church and people. We are truly grateful to them," said Archbishop Yeom at the commemorative Eucharist.

The first Columbans arrived in Korea on that same date, October 29th, in 1933. There were ten of them, nine having been ordained the previous year. Their average age was 25 years. One of them, Fr Dan McMenamin, was to die four years later of tuberculosis at just 29 years of age.

On the Second Sunday of Easter in April 1934, the newly arrived Columbans took possession of their first parish in Korea on the outskirts of the city of Mokpo. This was to be the first of 129 parishes that the Columbans would establish during

those 80 years in Korea. In the city of Seoul alone, Columbans established 25 parishes.

The 80 year celebrations of missionary presence in Korea will continue until the Second Sunday of Easter, 2014, and will give thanks to God for the work of Columbans in nine different dioceses throughout the country.

*"The Columbans have made a wonderful contribution to the Korean Church and people. We are truly grateful to them," said Archbishop Yeom at the commemorative Eucharist.*

The 80 years of Columban missionary presence in Korea were years of struggle and instability. When Columbans arrived in 1933, Korea was occupied by the Japanese. World War II saw Australian, New Zealand and American Columbans repatriated to their home countries while the Irish were either imprisoned or lived under house arrest.

Later the Korean War brought untold destruction to the country. Seven

Columbans died during this war and two survived imprisonment. In the post war period, Columbans followed the people from the rural areas into the large cities such as Seoul, Incheon and Busan, which were in the process of rapid industrialization.

Here they set up parishes and accompanied the people, now as industrial workers, in their struggles for justice and basic human rights. This was also the period of military dictatorships, which lasted until the end of the 1980s.

The Columbans have only one parish left in Korea today. As well as parish work over the past 80 years, they have ministered in a wide variety of apostolates. These include: migrant workers, the intellectually challenged, university students, the aged, farmers, the urban poor, sufferers from gambling and alcohol addictions and the rights of workers.

Today Korean Columban Priests and Diocesan Associate Priests, Columban Sisters and Lay Missionaries work across the globe in Latin America and other parts of Asia. Eighty years of missionary service continues to bear fruit.

Columban Superior General Fr Kevin O'Neill (third from right) and fellow Columbans cut the ribbon to begin the celebrations.



# Back on the road

*Australian Columban Fr Kevin Mullins is parish priest of Corpus Christi parish in Juarez, Mexico. Due to poverty and the drug trade, life remains fragile and dangerous.*





Photo: Fr. Kevin Mullins

*Columban Fr Kevin Mullins lives in Juarez, Mexico.*

*I*n recent correspondence with *The Far East*, Columban Fr Kevin Mullins wrote of the frequency of gunfire shots at night and how eight family members had been stabbed to death the previous Saturday night on the other side of the city. The children were stabbed first in front of their parents, so as to make the parents suffer before being stabbed to death themselves.

Recently his Chevy Ute was stolen as he was hearing Confessions outside a University Gymnasium, in Juarez, Mexico. At the time, there were 3,000 married couples attending a Marriage Congress at the Gymnasium and 'nobody saw anything'.

Fr Kevin said that the chances of finding the truck were slim.

*"It is probably in pieces down in México City by now.*

*Not having the truck is a monumental "pain" to put it mildly. The roads are poor here and I am always using the 4-wheel drive function.*

*We use the vehicle, and have done so for the last 10 years, for our street ministry of public Masses and Prayer meetings.*

*The truck is used at times to take sick babies and the elderly to hospital. It is not a luxury vehicle but rather a pragmatic vehicle for our terrain and pastoral needs.*

*Fortunately, I have the use of a small low slung car which is less than ideal in the sand, and grinds over the boulders with alarming frequency."*

Since writing to *The Far East* Columban Fr Kevin Mullins has received a donation from a generous benefactor in Australia to buy a new ute.

He is now back on the road.

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*Columban Fr Kevin Mullins has worked for 13 years in Corpus Christi parish, on the outskirts of Juarez, Mexico. It has been considered one of the most dangerous cities in the world.*

# Rebuilding after Typhoon Sedong

FR PAUL OXLEY

*In early part of November, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan, slammed into the Philippines, leaving a path of devastation and death through the islands of the middle part of the country. Two years previously, Typhoon Sedong, smaller in size, but also very destructive, had likewise left a path of destruction and death across the southern Filipino island of Mindanao.*

*Columban Fr Paul Finlayson together with the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, in Mindanao, has been involved in a project, partly sponsored by the Columbans, to provide individual housing in a new, safe area for 600 families who were victims of Typhoon Sedong. This new village is called The Mother of Divine Mercy Village.*

*Recently Columban Fr Paul Oxley, who is the Bursar General for the Columbans, visited the Mother of Divine Mercy Village to see what progress has been made and how the funds have been spent. Fr Oxley writes:*



Photo: Fr Paul Oxley

*Columban Lay Missionary, Ann Belma Flores, works with the community.*



"It was a surprise and a delight to see what has been accomplished over the last 12 months. This has ranged from the purchase of land, the development of facilities such as roads, water, drainage, electricity, and the construction of over 350 houses so far.

"I joined in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist in a roughly constructed 'multi-purpose' centre. What was striking was the large number of children and babies. This suggests that the population of the village is going to grow quite rapidly over the next few years and place serious demands of various social infrastructure and services which as yet do not exist (social services, mid-wives, medical clinic, community meeting places etc).

"Visiting the village, it is very clear that the funds received, the donations, have been well spent. The 480 foot deep well, 100,000 litre water tank, the local chlorination system and the underground piping are complete and are effectively distributing potable water to the current population. The local engineers consider there is enough capacity to cater for the whole village when all the planned houses are built.

"I met with Ana Belma Flores, the Columban Lay Missionary working mainly with the community now in the village. Ana, along with a couple of other key persons, has assisted in the final selection of the residents for the village. This selection was based on the registered groups of affected refugees from Typhoon Sedong and certified by the government as being still in need of housing. There is no criteria for selection that excluded anyone because of religious belief or of social status.

"It does mean however that various social sub-sectors are also included, including some who previously came from a life of crime. It is this group which has been causing some problems in the new community with instances of theft occurring. Some local residents have acquired handguns supposedly for their own protection and this in itself is causing other social problems.

*"The work that is done so far is excellent overall and the people involved are to be congratulated for a work well done and for their perseverance so far to achieve it."*

"Ana and her companions have attempted to build some community structure and the current residents are due to elect their leaders for the second year. If these leaders are not effective in the eyes of the community, it is likely de-facto leaders will arise and the probability is that these will come from the criminal elements.

This is another reason for an education programme to assist the residents live together in greater harmony and understanding of the new situation. Many who are already established are doing their best to improve their surrounds with flower and vegetable gardens around their homes.

"Regarding the houses themselves, they are larger than what is provided in similar sites for refugees from Typhoon Sedong in the Cagayan de Oro area. There is also more space provided in the street so that the rows of houses do not seem to overcrowd each other.

"Funding is still needed for some community infrastructure. One of the unused houses is currently used as a preschool and will soon need new premises. A local family has established a bakery in an unused house that will also need new premises soon. Ana and her team need space for a library for school children. The school is some way outside the village. Groups are willing to donate the books but at the moment there is nowhere to place them.

"There is a plan to develop a village office and a small meeting place. The multi-purpose centre needs major redevelopment as does the village plaza. There is need for a medical clinic, especially for a visiting midwife and for a village pharmacy. A number of houses have turned their front window into a small shop with daily essentials while some others have placed a table in front of the house where they sell food."

Fr Paul Oxley concludes his letter by stating that:

"The work that is done so far is excellent overall and the people involved are to be congratulated for a work well done and for their perseverance so far to achieve it."

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*Columban Frs Paul Oxley and Paul Finlayson have been missionaries in the Philippines since 1975.*

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*Peruvian Columban Lay Missionary Ana Belma Flores has been in the Philippines since 2009.*



# Mission World

**We ask your prayers:** *The prayers of our readers are requested for the repose of the souls of friends and benefactors of the Missionary Society of St Columban who died recently: also for the spiritual and the temporal welfare of all our readers, their families and friends.*

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## Vatican Radio hosts "Why Poverty?" Exhibition



Photo: bigstockphoto.com

The photography exhibition, entitled "Why Poverty?", is part of a broader initiative of the same name which aims to bring awareness of the millions of people who live today in extreme poverty.

Made possible by the Prospettiva 8 Cultural Association, the exhibition, which was inaugurated today, is being hosted by Vatican Radio from December 9-14.

Mounted on simple planks of raw plywood, the photos provide a glimpse into the lives of those who live in extreme poverty: images of children scavenging through garbage and living in squalor; elderly men and women begging on the streets; people curled up on the floor of a train station, trying to stay warm as they sleep.

Each photo is accompanied by an excerpt from the popes from the past century on the theme of poverty.

"Believing in Jesus", reads one of the excerpts taken from the words of Pope Francis, means "giving him our hands, to caress the little ones and the poor."

The inauguration of the "Why Poverty?" exhibition comes hours after Pope Francis, during his weekly general audience address, described hunger as a "scandal."

The photos being displayed in the "Why Poverty?" can also be viewed on Vatican Radio's at [http://www.radiovaticana.va/why\\_poverty/whypoverty.asp?lng=it](http://www.radiovaticana.va/why_poverty/whypoverty.asp?lng=it)

(December 11, 2013) © Innovative Media Inc.

- VATICAN CITY, December 11, 2013 (Zenit.org)

*From December 9-14, 2013, Vatican Radio hosted a photographic exhibition entitled "Why Poverty?". This exhibition aimed to bring awareness to the needs of the poor worldwide and what our response should be as Christians. Below is printed a report of the opening of the Exhibition.*

Just inside the entrance of Vatican Radio, 30 photographs dedicated to the theme of poverty have gone on display, giving a face to the men, women and children who live each day without the basic necessities for life.

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## Mission Intention for January

That Christians of diverse denominations may walk toward the unity desired by Christ.

## Mission Intention for February

That priests, religious and lay people may work together with generosity for evangelisation.

Listen to: From the Director - The mirror  
of our lives



# From the Director

*The mirror of our lives*

When I was a student at the seminary one of the staff, Fr John McGrath suggested that we keep a book of quotes. He said when we came across a quote, long or short, that seemed to leap off the page at us, write it down, the name of the book, author and page on which the quote could be found. I liked the idea and started the practice immediately. At least 40 years later, I am still doing it. I am on my third book of quotes, the third being only one quarter full which indicates that I am highly selective.

Some of the quotes don't 'speak' to me anymore as I failed the basic rules laid out by Fr McGrath, of writing down the essential details of why the quote made such a strong impact on me at the time.

*A person doesn't have to be a Christian to reach out to those who struggle with being overlooked or having lives seemingly without purpose. We believe that God is present in these situations, which brings an added challenge - we need to be as respectful of the other, as Jesus was. It is like looking into a mirror and the image reflected back is 'Jesus in me'. This is my outlook for 2014.*

Recently I read a few lines from John Shea, the American poet; unfortunately I cannot remember it's name but the words go something like this.....

*one thing we are promised*

*that our lives are not without purpose*

*and we are not overlooked.*

Whilst many people can't believe this is true, these words just stayed with me for many years; this is God's view of us.

Author, Sally Vickers also has a couple of quotes in my latest book of quotes from her novel, *The Other Side of You*. One of the characters is a doctor who deals with people who have failed to commit suicide. There is a comment from one of his patients which struck me: "*the problem is not about dying, the real problem is about not knowing how to live. I think about that quite often.*"

These words might seem to be a long way from missionary concerns but as Pope Francis, said last year in his *World Mission Sunday* address; "*mission is not just geographical or cultural, but aimed for the heart of every man and woman.*"

A person doesn't have to be a Christian to reach out to those who struggle with being overlooked or having lives seemingly without purpose. We believe that God is present in these situations, which brings an added challenge - we need to be as respectful of the other, as Jesus was.

It is like looking into a mirror and the image reflected back is 'Jesus in me'. This is my outlook for 2014.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr Gary Walker  
director@columban.org.au

# It's the small things that matter

FR CHRIS SAENZ



Photo: Assunta Scarpino

*Fr Chris has lived and worked amongst the Mapuche people.*

The “small things”, as St. Therese the Little Flower would say, are an important aspect of spirituality and mission. Yet don’t get a romantic notion of what that means or how it looks like. Often the small things can be a nuisance, an inconvenience and a pain in the side. That is the moment we have to be alert to what God teaches us in the small things. I learned such some years ago when I worked in southern Chile.

I was living in the rural countryside populated by the indigenous Mapuche people of Chile. One day, after visitations and meetings I arrived home late, tired and hungry. With a cup of tea I sat down to watch

the local news. Suddenly there was a knock on my door. What! Who can that be! My mind raced thus, completely upset by the intrusion. I opened the door to see Kata, one of the Fijian lay missionaries who lived next door. “Sorry to disturb you,” she apologized, probably seeing discontent on my face. “There is a woman here to see you. She is in our house.” I told the Kata that I will be there. With a huff and grump I changed my clothes and went over.

It was unusual that someone, most of all a woman, be out at this hour. I was surprised to discover that there were two women waiting for me, one being Maria who lived quite far from our location. They greeted me.

We from North America and Europe value being direct- “getting to the point”- so as not “to waste time.” However, in rural Chile, being direct is not a value. It is consider rude and poor education. The women began the usual general questions of how was I doing, my family, my health, etc.

Being in Chile for several years I was accustomed to it, but tonight it was a torture. I begrudgingly participated. After about 30 minutes they finally got to the point. Maria explained to me that after shopping in the large city (two hours away by bus), they arrived late to town missing the last bus to her area.

*Yet, I believe my contribution to mission has been the friendships formed and transformed with the people I minister to. That is a small thing that matters.*

In fact, no buses were running except the one bus that passed by my house. Maria told her companion, "This bus goes by Father's house. Father is my friend, he will help us." Darn! I thought. They want me to take them home! More than an hour of wasted time! Yet, I told them, "no problem".

After I took the first woman home, I drove to Maria's house engaging in small talk. We arrived and it was completely dark except for the lights of the house. When I parked the truck in front of the house Maria looked at me and said in a cautious tone, "Father, please stay in the truck while I get down first." I thought it was strange request as I had been to her house many times before.

I looked at the doorway and saw a figure standing there, her husband. The inside lights highlighted his aggressive stance. It was then that I realized the complexity of Maria's situation of which I was completely ignorant of due to my being "bothered" with Marie's small request for a lift home.

The rural culture is very macho. Maria was a married woman who did not

arrive in the last bus of the night. Her husband's mind would be filled with thoughts of what Maria could be doing at such a late hour. This was further complicated by the fact that Maria, a poor woman, could not hire a taxi from the small town because the distance and hour would be a large fare.

Furthermore, even if a good Samaritan were to take her home, all the drivers were men. Who could this strange man be bringing Maria home so late, her husband would think. Maria was caught in a no win situation until she saw her only way out-possibly the only man who could save her from this misunderstood but tense situation - the priest. Her friendship with me could make a difference.

Maria began conversing with her husband. Things sounded and looked tense. Eventually, I stepped out of the truck and shouted, "Don Jose!" The aggressive man turned towards me with a puzzled look. "Don Jose," I repeated, "How are you doing? How are crops this year?" When Jose recognized my voice, his body posture

relaxed. "Father, is that you?" he said. "Yes", I responded, "I was out late and ran into your wife who was waiting for the bus.

Since the bus already left I decided to bring her home." Jose looked at his wife, then at me and said, "Father come in, we will drink some tea and have something to eat." Food is a good sign that all will be fine. The tense mood was gone. Maria was relieved and thankful. I shared a meal with them and arrived home very late.

Mission is not necessarily about sacraments (catechism, formation) or about construction (churches, parish buildings), but more often is about the small things, the daily living with people.

I myself cannot boast of any great buildings or other works in my name during my years in Chile. Yet, I believe my contribution to mission has been the friendships formed and transformed with the people I minister to. That is a small thing that matters.

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*Columban Fr Chris Saenz has been in Chile for nearly 20 years.*



## *Remember the Missions*

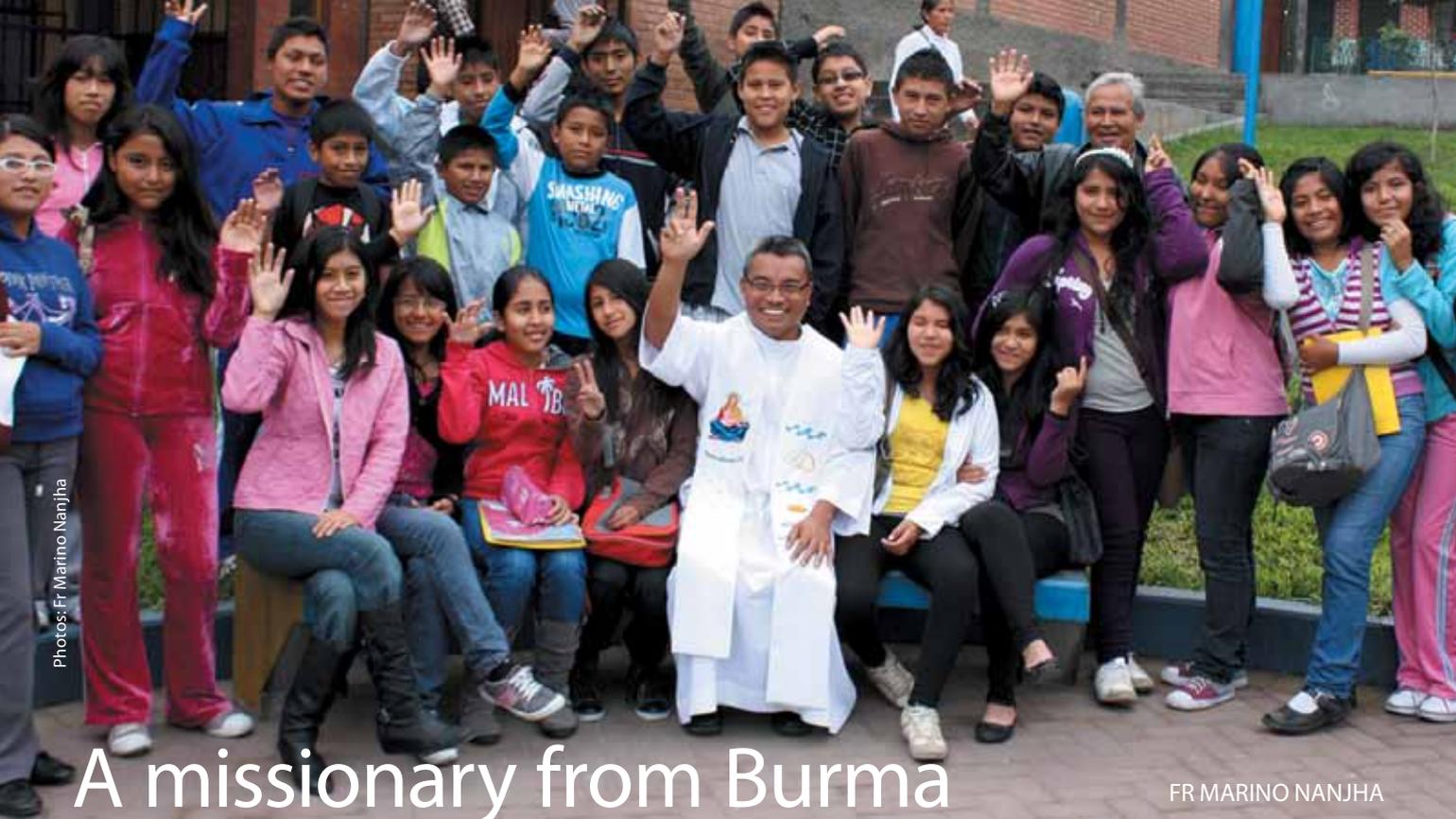
### *in your WILL*

*We cannot take our earthly possessions with us, but we can so dispose of them that our good works will continue after we are gone.*

*A bequest to help missionaries being God's saving message to non-Christians is a practical way of showing our love for Christ.*

*Why not speak to your lawyer about it?*

<p><b>AUSTRALIA</b>          St Columbans Mission Society          PO Box 752, Niddrie Vic 3042          Tel: (03) 9375 9475          email: info@columban.org.au</p>	<p><b>NEW ZEALAND</b>          St Columbans Mission Society          PO Box 30-017          Lower Hutt 5040          Tel: (04) 567 7216          email: columban@iconz.co.nz</p>	<p><b>FORM OF WILL</b>          I give devise and bequeath to the Superior for the time being of St Columban's Mission Society (see local address) the sum of \$..... for the use of the said Society.</p>
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Photos: Fr. Marino Nanjha

# A missionary from Burma

FR MARINO NANJHA

*Peruvian parishioners farewell Fr Marino as he returns to Myanmar.*

I am a priest of the Diocese of Loikaw in eastern Myanmar (also known as Burma), a country ruled by harsh military dictatorship over the past 45 years. We do not have much industry; most of the people look to the soil for a living. Our natural resources of gas, oil, timber and gemstones are exploited by foreign countries, principally China. I have worked as a missionary in Peru with the Columban Fathers for six years.

## *The Church in Myanmar*

About 89% of Burmese are Buddhists. Just 4% are Christians, and are found mainly among the northern tribes with a background in animism. Italian, French and Irish missionaries brought Catholicism to these tribes. Today, Myanmar is one of the few countries in Southeast Asia where most of the priests and religious are indigenous.

The Church's activities are pastoral and social, with little emphasis on education and health as the State insists on total control of those areas.

Priests, nuns and lay-missionaries from Myanmar are presently found in a variety of countries such as Fiji, Japan, the Philippines, USA, Papua New Guinea, France, Australia, Thailand, Italy, Tanzania etc. For a relatively young Church, evangelised in the not too distant past, it is remarkable how swiftly we, in turn, have become evangelisers.

## *On Mission in Lima, Peru*

When I first started to work in San Pedro y San Pablo Parish in Lima I felt quite powerless. Language was a challenge as I needed to become proficient in two languages simultaneously (since most of the Columbans are English speakers they tended to use that language among themselves).

Becoming fluent in Spanish was easier as I had the chance to speak and hear Spanish all the time in my pastoral work. I found men, women and children to be very generous with their time and very kind; they became my Spanish teachers.

I felt happier going out to meet them rather than hanging about the parish house. I did make some problems for myself by eating food from street-vendors' stalls.

My first parish priest, the late Columban Fr John O'Connell, who had already spent 53 years in Lima, warned me, "*Marino, your stomach is not used to what Peruvians are used to, so please be careful.*" I wasn't involved in construction projects but focused on building up relationships with the people and am happy to have chosen that way of working.

## *Similarities and Contrasts*

I found the faith life of Peruvians to be quite different from ours in Myanmar. In Peru they believe that God is very present in their lives. I remember celebrating the feast of St John the Baptist and seeing how the devotees danced before the image of the saint in homage to God. They seemed to include all that they were living in their relationship with God. All I could

do was to affirm the beauty of how they live their faith.

Our religious practice in Myanmar seems to me more Roman. Our Catholic faith has not been integrated with the ancient religious rites of our people. We have not yet put our own stamp on the faith as the Peruvians have done. Also, in Myanmar our church life is quite clerical, with little lay participation at any level of leadership.

#### *Returning to Myanmar*

I am now looking forward to returning to my own people and taking on whatever mission my bishop may entrust to me. I am grateful to the good Lord, and to all the Columban missionaries who have supported me unconditionally with magnanimous hearts. I am happy to have served as a missionary overseas. I am proud of my family who prepared and guided me and are always present through their prayers and moral support.

I am proud of my country and my people who were once evangelised

and now offer some of its own men and women to be missionaries elsewhere. We, the new missionaries in other lands, are the fruit of the missionary work accomplished by those former missionaries who generously shed their blood on our soil.

*With this experience, I am sure that we now have a deeper understanding of Christian mission which will help us immensely in our work as Christian missionaries wherever we may go.*

#### *The Baptismal Call to Mission*

Fr Robert Kuhn of Phekhon Diocese, who recently returned to Myanmar, and I, of the Loikaw Diocese, are the first missionaries to have gone from our country to South America. I am from Kayah State and belong to the Kayah Kangan tribe.

We are one of seven tribes in the State, each with our own language,

so our common language is Burmese. We come from that part of Myanmar evangelised by the PIME Italian missionaries.

We have been blessed by the foreign missionaries and we feel indebted to them. Our Myanmar bishops constantly invite all Catholics to become missionaries, either locally or in foreign lands, in response to our Baptismal call to mission.

We are grateful to the Missionary Society of St Columban which has given us this opportunity to be short-term cross-cultural missionaries in Latin America.

With this experience, I am sure that we now have a deeper understanding of Christian mission which will help us immensely in our work as Christian missionaries wherever we may go.

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*Since he wrote this article, Fr Marino Nanjha has returned to pastoral work in Myanmar.*



*Fr Marino with the late Columban Fr John O'Connell celebrate Sunday Mass together in Lima.*

# A quiet gentle woman

*December 14, 2013, marked the 30th anniversary of the tragic death of Irish Columban Sister, Joan Sawyer, in the Lurigancho Prison in Lima, Peru.*

The Cross still stands there, bleak and bare near the main road to Lurigancho Prison in Lima. No Mataras, the inscription reads. You shall not kill. People come to stand or kneel there, to bring flowers, to pray. Thirty years after she was killed, Joan Sawyer, the Columban sister from Belfast, who ministered to the prisoners in Lurigancho, is remembered.

The prison is also there, as drab, as unwelcoming, as overcrowded as when Joan walked the corridors. Lurigancho holds thousands of men, young and old, all hoping for a better life, for freedom. Men that Joan knew and loved, men who called forth the best in her, who knew that her gentleness would never fail, knew she would never give up on them.

On that fatal Wednesday, December 14, 1983, she was, with other pastoral workers, taken as a hostage by desperate men, hoping to escape from prison. After hours of negotiation the authorities allowed them to drive out in an ambulance but as they went the police opened fire and Joan with seven of the nine prisoner hostages, was shot dead. In death as in life she remained with the poor, with the prisoners, with her friends.

Thirty years later we remember the quiet, gentle woman and the prisoners who died with her. She was, as one of her teachers said, "A beatitude person". Her simple poverty, her gentleness, compassionate and peace-making ways, were the source of her strength and influence." Her story continues to inspire us, calls us to be compassionate, to work for justice especially for those in prison, for the poor, for those on the margins of our lives.

Joan lives on in the hearts of the poor in Lima, the people she loved, and in the hearts of all who knew her, especially the Columban family who never cease to thank God for the gift she was, and continues to be, to all of us.

*May she rest in peace*

You shall not kill,  
but they did



*The inscription reads "No Mataras - You shall not kill."*

*Columban Sisters carry the coffin of their comrade into the church at Cueva, Lima, for the funeral. This photo (below) appeared on the cover of The Far East, April 1984.*







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