The Far East
November/December 2013
Vol 95, No. 10

THE FAR EAST is devoted to furthering the missionary apostolate of the church and is published by St Columbans Mission Society.

THE SOCIETY was founded in 1918 as a society of secular priests dedicated to the evangelisation of the Chinese and other overseas people. It is an exclusively missionary society.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: $15 per year (AUSTRALIA)

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Our Lady of the Southern Cross - Read more about this beautiful image below.

To donate to the 2013 Christmas Appeal see pages 12-13 or www.columban.org.au

Photo: Our Lady of the Southern Cross - Help of Christians, Copyright © Paul Newton 2008

From the Editor

Advent and Christmas greetings

For our Advent and Christmas issue of The Far East, we decided to use for our cover image, the beautiful painting of Our Lady of the Southern Cross, painted by Paul Newton, that hangs in St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney.

Advent is a time when we remember that Jesus will return again at the end of time and also to remember, as we do at Christmas, his first coming, as a baby in the stable of Bethlehem.

This issue of The Far East magazine offers us Advent and Christmas stories and reflections from around the world on the true meaning of Christmas.

November 23rd is the Feast of St Columban, the patron of the Missionary Society of St Columban. On this day, in the different parts of the world where Columbans are present, they celebrate this feast, along with their parishioners and friends.

Most years, in honour of St Columban, there is an organized pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Columban across six European countries during the month of June or July.

May all the readers and supporters of the Columbans and The Far East magazine have a happy and holy Christmas, with every blessing on them and their families and friends.

Fr Dan Harding
TFE@columban.org.au

Our Lady of the Southern Cross - Help of Christians, Copyright © Paul Newton 2008

Our Lady of the Southern Cross - Help of Christians

At World Youth Day in Sydney in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI blessed the painting of Our Lady of the Southern Cross, Help of Christians, which hangs in St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney. Sydney portrait artist, Paul Newton, had been asked to paint this new image of Our Lady and the Child Jesus to coincide with World Youth Day 2008.

Using Australian icons and motifs, Paul was able to create a uniquely Australian image of Our Lady presenting the baby Jesus to the world. He did this after doing a lot of research on other paintings of the Mother and Child from the history of traditional Western Art.

Speaking of his painting, Paul said, “The wattle was an obvious symbol of Australia as the golden wattle is the national emblem of Australia, and I gave her this garland instead of giving her a halo or crown, the thing that you traditionally would see Mary wearing.

“The landscape was again meant to be symbolic on a number of levels. The water flowing through in that meandering river was symbolic of the Holy Spirit, as well as in more literal ways suggesting the Australian outback with the scattered gums trees and a barren landscape.

“It’s a twilight sky so I could show both the landscape and the suggestion of the Southern Cross. ‘The stars in the sky, in addition to the Southern Cross, are as accurately as I could paint them, in their correct positions in the southern sky.”

- Taken from The Catholic Weekly, August 2008. Copies of the image of Our Lady of the Southern Cross are available from The Catholic Weekly newspaper, Sydney.
Who was Christ like this year? How Christlike was any of us during the past year?

At Christmas each year the church celebrates the birth of Christ, the baby boy born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. God become human to live in our midst to show His love for us.

To help prepare for the liturgy of Christmas we gathered in semi darkness in the main hall of our Columban Mission Centre in Seoul in the Advent spirit of waiting in expectation for the coming of our Saviour. We read some of the main readings from the prophet Isaiah from the daily Masses of Advent and sing Advent hymns. We then moved to the Christmas readings. A young couple with their own children carried the “baby Jesus” in slowly as the gospel was read.

As the congregation came forward to pay homage to the child in the manger we sang the appropriate Christmas hymns. After some silent reflection we watched a PowerPoint presentation of important events of the last year that relate to the meaning of Christmas in our lives today.

With Christmas coming at the end of the year I like to avail of the occasion of the Christmas liturgy to reflect on and ask ourselves how we have lived Christ’s Gospel during the past year. I picked the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4, verses 14-22, as a theme for our PowerPoint reflection for 2012. In Luke 4 Jesus tells the people what His mission on earth was: To heal the sick, set captives free, share the Good News with the poor.

Last year (2012) was a special year in Korea and in many other countries across the world. Many leaders came forward to run as the Presidents of their countries and promised the people how they would set up their “Kingdom”, what their reign would look like. Wars and violence raged on across the world, there were typhoons, floods and many poor and destitute people suffered many calamities. Huge social and economic problems were front page news on a daily basis.

The world today is not much different in such matters than in Christ’s time. I felt an important question for us at Christmas to ask was: Were the leaders we choose trying to bring about the Reign of God as in Luke 4 or were they just caring for their own cronies and safe-guarding their own power? Do they plan to set captives free, care for the sick by having good medical programmes, have the good news of faith, truth and justice in their education policies? We looked at some people in power across the world in church and states and ordinary people who in their daily lives seem to be doing their part to set up the kingdom of God here and now and of course as always ask what can I and am I doing?

At the offertory people brought up gifts and symbols and offered prayers that related to our theme in Luke 4.

You can’t have Christmas without some fun and joy for the children. Before the final blessing two men in Santa clothes gave out gifts to all. Amidst the joy and laughter our choir spontaneously led us all in a Korean rendition of Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer and other Christmas songs.

We hope and pray that the spirit of sharing and caring will last with us each year at Christmas.

Each year we donate the offertory collection to some urgent cause in our mission countries. Before Christmas this year the Island of Mindanao, in the Philippines, where Columban missionaries work, was devastated by a monster typhoon that ruined the banana crop, destroyed homes and roads and bridges. Our congregation donated generously as they always do, in the spirit of sharing and love of neighbour.

There is no real festivity in Korea without Duk Guk - Special rice dumpling soup. A group of women, as usual, prepared the food from early in the day for all in attendance. It was much appreciated as it was a cold, cold night. We had some to spare and that was shared with the Filipino migrant workers that had their ceremonies and festivities after we had finished.

We hope and pray that the spirit of sharing and caring will last with us each year at Christmas.

Columban Fr Sean Conneely has been a missionary in Korea since 1969.
Feast of St Columban

November 23rd is the feast day of St Columban. In a special address about St Columban in 2008 Pope Benedict XVI refers to St Columban as one of the fathers of Europe.

"With his spiritual energy, with his faith, with his love for God and for his neighbour, he truly became one of the fathers of Europe: He shows us even today the roots from which our Europe can be reborn." - Pope Benedict

Standing on the shore of the Island of Iona, Scotland, Lord Clark, the great historian of Western civilisation, said: "It was from here that the Irish monks set out to rekindle the lamps of western civilisation that had become extinguished all over Europe."

He was speaking of a time Europe was in a dark age. The Roman Empire had collapsed. The barbarian hordes had destroyed and looted everything in their path. To all reasonable people looking at the situation, the end was no longer in doubt – their world was in its last days. They could see no hope for the future.

But hope would come from the most unlikely place, from an island in the western edge of Europe, an island that had escaped the ravages of the barbarians and had kept alive that faith and civilisation which was being destroyed in continental Europe.

In the sixth century monastic settlements were the great centres of learning. It was from them that the monks set out to "journey for Christ" across Europe. The leader and the most influential of this missionary movement was Columban.

In his day people generally lived and died in the place they were born. They rarely travelled more than 10kms from home, but not St Columban. He was one of the most travelled men of his age, crisscrossing at least five countries of mainland Europe.

Monasteries were the universities of that time, so the influence of St Columban on western civilisation may be judged from the following quotation from the historian Thomas Cahill: "At this great distance in time, we can no longer be sure exactly how many monasteries were founded in Columban’s name during his lifetime and after his death.

But the number, stretching across vast territories that would become in time the countries of France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, cannot be less than 60 and may be more than 100."

Common faith and values

In 1950 during the 14th centenary celebration in France of the birth of St Columban. Mr John L Brow who was representing the American Ambassador in Paris said in his address: "St Columban would not have been out of place among the rugged and courageous men who colonised our Far West. But much more precious for us are those achievements of his which symbolise the unity of a civilisation, formed amid diversity, on the foundation of a common faith and common moral values."

The best-known speaker to address the Congress was Robert Schumann, Prime Minister and later Foreign Minister of France, the man credited with being the founding father of the European Union. In his address he said:

"St Columban, this illustrious Irishman who left his own country for voluntary exile, willed and achieved a spiritual union between the principal European countries of his time. He is the patron saint of all those who now seek to build a United Europe."
Celebrating Columban

The feast of St Columban is celebrated in many countries where Columbans work. Here are some celebrations in Chile.

I was surprised at the way the people of Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland and Italy remember and revere St Columban today. His name is everywhere - mountains, streets, towns, churches, orchestras and businesses. Even the dry-cleaning shop and a lingerie boutique in Luxeuil near his former monastery are named after him. There are groups of people in these countries such as Les Amis de St Columban (The Friends of St Columban) in Luxeuil, in Baden-Baden (Germany), Olivone (Switzerland), in Bregenz (Austria), and in several towns in Italy, who keep his memory and his spirit alive.

We travelled by bus and a few kilometres on foot. St Columban of course did most of his travelling by foot and during his life covered amazing distances. He also travelled by boat; his original journey was by sea from Ireland to mainland Europe, down the Loire River in present day France and later by the Rhine to Austria. He was 70 years of age when he walked across the Alps into Italy.

Pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Columban

During the last 10 years, Columbans have begun organizing pilgrimages during the European summer across Europe that follow in the footsteps of St Columban. On the St Columban pilgrimage in 2008, Columban Fr Ray Scanlon describes his surprise at the reverence St Columban receives in many European countries.
It’s December. Our minds and hearts ought to be turning towards the celebration of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, that is if we are steadfast in resisting the distractions and temptations thrown at us by the commercial traders. They have made of this great feast a materialistic perversion.

Christmas is irrelevant to many; it’s no longer associated with Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the one who came to save the world from destroying itself. Christmas has to be saved and restored to its true meaning.

We need to make Christmas a time for reflection and action for good. We need to relearn its meaning and see beyond the twinkling lights, drunken parties and meaningless revelry. We have to see beyond the pious religious rites and rituals to the heart of what Christmas is.

We need to cut to the essentials of life and be aware that the world has never had so much wealth, power and ability to solve the global problems of humankind. They are man-made problems: hungers, diseases, disasters, wars and all the suffering that flows from such conflicts. Much of it because of the primitive, baser urges of individuals and groups, greed and selfishness, vice and depravity of the spirit.

Never has the world needed salvation as it does now. Christmas is about changing from uncaring attitudes to help others in need without asking for payment.

The uncaring and irresponsible rich and powerful are driven by these ambitions to retain and extend their wealth, power and control of sources of minerals, raw materials and people. Their wealth and vested interests control governments, armies and mercenaries to achieve their goals.

Human suffering is not an accident, it’s the result of the few, the oligarchy, dominating the many by manipulating political power for their own ends and disguise their motives as in national interest and national security.

We need to make Christmas a time for reflection and action for good. We need to relearn its meaning and see beyond the twinkling lights, drunken parties and meaningless revelry. We have to see beyond the pious religious rites and rituals to the heart of what Christmas is.

Most people in the world, including the poor, (despite all the media) are ignorant of the causes of poverty
Columban Fr Shay Cullen has been a missionary in the Philippines since 1969.

We all desire with much hope for global justice, equality, peace and dignity for all. This is what one man sent by God, born into the world, came to do.

and world hunger. It’s not the lack of resources and food and wealth but the inequality in their distribution.

The disasters of man-made climate change affect the poor. Their needs are ever greater, poverty worse and the need for land, water and basic resources bring violence. Conflict and war is the inevitable outcome and with them come millions of refugees, hunger, death and suffering.

When violence and injustice are allowed to grow unchecked then tyrants and genocidal leaders emerge, victims themselves of brutality and abuse perhaps, but they end hopes of peace and cause mayhem and murder. They abduct children and abuse and torture them and turn them into killers.

We all desire with much hope for global justice, equality, peace and dignity for all. This is what one man sent by God, born into the world, came to do.

Change the world and turn it toward doing good. He taught us to be non-violent, to love truth and justice, to care for each other and yet he came also to confront the leaders, hold them to account, make them responsible.

He came to inspire the downtrodden to replace peacefully the mighty on their thrones and rule justly with mercy and compassion. He came to challenge the poor to help each other all the more.

He saw that global change starts in the heart and mind of each individual and He showed the way and called all to repent and live a life worthy of humans with a spiritual destiny. He inspired all to break free from selfish ways and bring global peace and justice. Lose your life he said and you will find it.

He showed the way and left it to disciples to continue teaching by example and make a society ruled by love, compassion and equality. This is His rule of love, justice and truth to replace the lies and rule of selfish tyrants.

We need to make it happen again in our daily lives until his ideals and hopes and infinite goodness comes to enlighten others and change society.

That is what Christmas celebrates, Jesus of Nazareth, who came to change the world.
Recently I was travelling by train from Yokohama to Odawara. In the carriage sitting opposite me I watched a young mother cuddling her baby. The baby was so tiny, so vulnerable, so dependent on its mother.

I wonder if any of us, given the choice, would come into this world in such a fragile condition. I doubt it.

But that is exactly what Jesus was willing to do for us. The Son, the second Person of the Trinity, chose to put aside the power and glory of God and become a weak, fragile human just like us. Jesus was a baby and like the baby in the train was completely dependent on his mother, Mary.

Let us look at the Christmas Crib and ponder this: our God deliberately took on our human weakness and consequent reliance on another. Jesus did this because he loves each one of us in our human frailty. That frailty which Jesus willingly accepted made him one of us and also made him our human representative before God.

This is what led him to offer his life for us, his brothers and sisters, on the Cross. The Crib and the Cross are intimately connected.

Jesus says to each of us: “Unless you become as a little child you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt: 18:3). Jesus does not mean that we become childish. He means that as adults we acknowledge our human weakness and become completely dependent on God. He calls on us in our powerlessness to rely on God’s strength.
If we ourselves acknowledge our human powerlessness and hand ourselves over to God we will become free, and more truly human. When God chose to become a weak human like us, he chose to be very close to us.

But we humans like to be in control. Christmas is a time when we look at the human infant Jesus in the crib. He is asking us to give up control and put ourselves into the hands of God. “Into your hands, Abba, Father-God, I give my life” (Lk 23:46).

Our Abba-God is gentle and understanding towards us his children. He wants our happiness. We can trust him when we put our lives in his hands. Let us look at the infant Jesus in the crib and realise how utterly dependent and weak he was. If we ourselves acknowledge our human powerlessness and hand ourselves over to God we will become free, and more truly human. When God chose to become a weak human like us, he chose to be very close to us.

Our God has experienced the human condition. He accepts as we are in our human frailty.

That is love. That is the meaning of Christmas.

_Columban Fr Barry Cairns first went to Japan in 1956._
In this issue of The Far East we are publishing the material for our Christmas Appeal. This appeal is inspired by the words of Pope Francis, “This Christmas, step outside ourselves to attend to the needs of the poor.”

Prayer For Mission

Let us pray
that we find the signs of God’s presence
in our world
and to give thanks for the gift of faith.

Let us be compassionate,
forgiving and kind to those
who most need it.

Let us pray
that we might remember the example
Jesus gave us:
love Me in your brother and sister,
that’s where you will find Me.

Amen.
Dear Far East Subscriber,

This Christmas we are called to follow in Christ’s footsteps... To step outside ourselves so as to attend to the needs of others: Pope Francis

Pope Francis asks us not to remain in our own secure world like the 99 sheep who never strayed from the fold, but to go out with Christ in search of the one lost sheep.

With your support, Fr Brian Gore from the Philippines will be able to maintain a feeding program for 150 children at Colambo Primary School in the Philippines. These children were often too hungry to attend school.

To combat malnutrition and hunger, the children are given a free lunch from Monday to Friday, 200 days in a school year. The feeding project is now in its second year, and attendance is almost one hundred percent, as children now have the energy to walk to school.

Because you are our partner in Columban Mission, Fr Brian Gore and other Columbans across the world are able to attend to the needs of the poor.

As missionaries, we can all seek out the lost sheep. We can make a difference, like the good news from Fr Brian Gore.

We ask for your support to ensure that we strive for a just world for all.

To make a donation to the Christmas Appeal, please return the attached coupon. Your donation will be put to work by Columbans reaching out to those in need.

May the joy and peace of the newborn child be with you, your family and friends during the festive season.

With every blessing,

Gary Walker
Regional Director
Australia/New Zealand Region

DONATE ONLINE - www.columban.org.au/donations

Thank you for supporting the 2013 Christmas Appeal

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Subanen Christmas Cards 2013

"God is with us"
- Theme of this years Cards

This year the Subanen artists have carefully hand cut and inlaid 10 Christmas cards that celebrate the Word becoming flesh within the miracle of God’s Creation.

Creation begins with the words, “Let there be light”.

And so each Christmas card features rays of light, one of which becomes a biblical scroll, whose words affirm the life-giving presence of God throughout the history of creation until, in the fullness of time, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

From the first card which proclaims Jesus as the “Firstborn of all Creation” to the last card which shows Jesus in His Earthly manger these colorful cards announce tidings of great joy - “God is with us”.

The Subanen people and the Columbans

The Subanen people are indigenous people native to the Zamboanga Peninsula and surrounding provinces of the southern Filipino island of Mindanao. They live closely with the miracle of God’s Creation. The soil, rivers, trees and plants of their mountain habitat provide them with food, water, shelter and medicinal herbs. Keeping the miracle of God’s Creation in good repair is a matter of survival for them and is their way of thanking God for that miracle.

For decades Columban missionaries have shared the struggle of the Subanen people to protect, nurture and celebrate their life-giving habitat.

Through the sale of their cards Subanen artists can better care for their families and their land. Thank you for your support.

Subanen Crafts Project

Subanen Crafts is a livelihood project for Subanen women who live in the rugged mountains of Northwest Mindanao in the Philippines. Their handicrafts focus on the Sacred Story of the Universe and the Wonders of Creation. This focus honors the deep spiritual bond that the Subanen People have with their habitat.

Through the Subanen Crafts project Subanen women are able to produce, promote, and market their art and jewelry. With modest incomes from the sale of their crafts the Subanen women can provide decent food, basic education, and proper health care for their families.

To order your 2013 Subanen Christmas Cards fill out coupon on page 15 or visit www.columban.org.au
Celebrating 70 years

Columban Fr Keith Gorman

Fr Keith Gorman was ordained on December 18, 1943, at St Joseph Cathedral, Buffalo, USA, by Bishop Duffy of Buffalo.

Later when parish priest of Wakayama, Japan, 65 years ago, Fr Keith Gorman’s mode of transport around the parish was a bicycle. These days it is a wheelchair that carries him to the chapel and the dining room of Mercy Place Parkville Aged Care Home in Melbourne.

When in his room and not asleep, he spends a lot of time watching movies, mostly comedies and musicals, on DVDs. His favourite is a Walter Matthau comedy called *Hopscotch* in which Matthau plays a former CIA agent intent on publishing a memoir exposing the inner workings of the CIA and KGB.

Fr Keith enjoys seeing Matthau beating the proud and powerful and getting away with it! What does that say about Fr Keith? He certainly loves a laugh, jokes against himself and the success of underdogs.

Charm is one of his special gifts and has made him much loved wherever he has served. He takes great interest in all his relatives and friends and all those who care for him.

Earlier in his life he worked as a chaplain to a retirement home and has reflected much on ageing and the blessings of that time of life.

We give thanks for Fr Keith’s many blessings and his fun and joy and faith.

We congratulate him on 70 years of missionary priesthood.

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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.

Pope Francis sends condolences to Australian Wildfire Victims

Devastating fires destroy hundreds of homes

In a message sent through Vatican Secretary of State, Archbishop Pietro Parolin, Pope Francis expressed his concern for those affected by the wildfires devastating New South Wales in Australia. The message was sent to the Bishops Conference of Australia.

Archbishop Parolin stated that the Holy Father is praying “especially for those who have died and for those who have lost their homes and workplaces, as well as for the numerous personnel working to combat the fires and provide comfort and care for those who are suffering.”

“Invoking the spiritual gifts of solidarity and perseverance upon the communities touched by these trying events, the Holy Father sends his blessing,” the message stated.

The wildfires claimed one life and destroyed over 200 homes in New South Wales and damaging over 100.

Government authorities warned that high temperatures would most likely maintain the fires for some time.

- VATICAN CITY, October 21, 2013 (Zenit.org)

Mission Intention for November

That as fruit of the Continental Mission, Latin American Churches may send missionaries to other Churches.

Mission Intention for December

That Christians, enlightened by the Word Incarnate, may prepare humanity for the Saviour’s coming.
From the Director

We celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas with joy and freshness this year; we will do the same next year and the year after that, we will always celebrate Christmas.

We should ignore all the complaints about Christmas: that Christmas is either is too commercialised, that people have lost the true meaning of Christmas, that children don’t even know who Jesus is. These complaints are accurate and truthful.

At the same time we will celebrate the religious feast of Christmas because we honour the presence of God among us, Jesus who became human like us, for our sake, God’s initiative, in order that we might become ‘people of destiny’.

What does that mean? It means that we were made, born, came into the world and later realising that when we die we will be with God. This is our destiny, it is mind boggling. We believe it is true for all peoples, for people of religion or no religion. We know what to expect when we die, for others it will be a surprise, a very pleasant one.

Today we know there is no room in the world for millions of people seeking a better life. Part of our human condition is that we are both merciful and merciless. We both admire and fear the inner authority of people like Jesus Christ and St Paul, because they have the power to change us, to challenge us to be merciful rather than merciless.

Christian faith is a wonderful gift which is rooted in our lived experience. We are fortunate to connect with our God in Jesus Christ in very human terms that we can understand. We read the New Testament in which the Gospels relate what Jesus said about life with Him, the promises He made us, the new life He gave to people, especially those from whom He would derive no benefit except their thanks. Yet astonishingly, He made enemies through those very acts of mercy.

St Paul who is a hugely influential figure in the New Testament became a follower of Jesus in an extraordinary manner. In his Epistles we read what he thinks life with Christ will be like for us as people and what it meant for him.

That God became one of us is a stumbling block for many people in the world. Nevertheless, we celebrate the beginning of that extraordinary and unique event every Christmas. It means that God is very near to us, especially when we are baptised and become ‘children of God’ in the special sense that the Sacrament of Baptism bestows. The celebration of the Eucharist brings us closer to our God and is made possible by the surprising and wonderful event we call the Resurrection of Jesus.

My words are upbeat as Christmas is a time for positive feelings but we know only too well the darkness that shadowed this bright event. The Gospels relate that Jesus was born in a stable, there was no room in the inn.

Today we know there is no room in the world for millions of people seeking a better life. Part of our human condition is that we are both merciful and merciless. We both admire and fear the inner authority of people like Jesus Christ and St Paul, because they have the power to change us, to challenge us to be merciful rather than merciless.

During this Advent Season, let us prepare to welcome the God who became one among us.

May you have a blessed Christmas, giving thanks to our great God for the gifts we receive.

Fr Gary Walker
director@columban.org.au
Eighteen pilgrims from New Zealand (NZ) arrived in the parish of San Columbano in the El Bosque region of Santiago, Chile, for the Columban Mission Experience on their way to WYD in Rio de Janeiro, July 2013.

“Go and make disciples of all Nations” (Matt 28:19)

Owen Kowalewski

Eighteen pilgrims from New Zealand (NZ) arrived in the parish of San Columbano in the El Bosque region of Santiago, Chile, for the Columban Mission Experience on their way to WYD in Rio de Janeiro. The parish is divided into seven small chapels, all within walking distance of each other. We gathered in the Capilla (chapel) of Santa Elena, were warmly welcomed, given lunch and then handed over to our host families. Manuel and Maria Ostorga took me into their home.

Many challenges immediately confronted me. Firstly I could not speak Spanish and they could not speak English. To overcome this they asked their grand-daughter Tania to help and thanks to computers and Google Translate basic conversations became possible. Secondly, living conditions in this part of the city appeared intimidating; narrow rough-paved streets, high fences with spikes, houses joined together, no letter boxes, lots of barking dogs, few open green spaces, loud city noises, sewage smells and personal safety concerns.

The excitement, joy, love, warmth, openness, friendship and hospitality that I experienced became deeply intimate and personal. Their home became my home. Conversations grew into friendships where we could share about our families, our faith and our future.

Three of us pilgrims were assigned to Santa Elena chapel, Sarah, Josiah and myself and our task was to help the local youth to paint a street wall outside the chapel. After much discussion and design work and many hours of painting the end result was striking and challenging. We joined NZ and Chile flags, a kiwi and a dog, people working together and the powerful reflective statement from the youth of today;

LA HUMANIDAD ESTA EN COMA PORQUE NO VE CON OJOS DE DIOS which translates to mean

HUMANITY IS IN A COMA BECAUSE IT DOES NOT SEE WITH THE EYES OF GOD

We prayed and celebrated Mass together daily in various chapels. We ate, danced and sang till late into the evenings, visited many shrines and special places around the city, walked by the Pacific Ocean and became immersed into life in Chile. The two Columban priests, Fr John McLaughlin and Fr Gerry Markey, were outstanding examples of what it means to be missionaries today.

Faith is the Word of God being lived out on a daily basis. To be a young NZ missionary pilgrim in Santa Elena chapel is to experience faith in action. Living and sharing our faith with those we meet is being missionary.

I wish to sincerely thank all those who made this experience possible, both in Chile and in Australia. I and the other pilgrims deeply appreciate everything that was given to us by our host families, the people of Santa Elena chapel and all the members of San Columbano parish.
The missionary experience week in Chile was amazing. I absolutely loved it. I believe the thing that did make it so special was that we were posted individually or in pairs with host families. This was so good for us for several reasons:

1) to have some time out from the rest of the group;
2) more importantly to be able to see how the Chileans live their daily lives and to make stronger connections with individual families and to be able to share our stories and points of view with each other. We were able to have deeper conversations with them and to form a closer relationship.

I cannot say enough about how amazing the hospitality was that I received from my family and the whole Parish community. It was clearly evident that a huge amount of preparation had gone into organising our stay. Everything was well run. I enjoyed all of the excursions and found all of the places we visited very valuable. This week was a great lead up to World Youth Day week. Thank you!

Josiah Francis Kilkelly

I have to admit that before World Youth Day (WYD) 2013, I didn’t quite know what to expect. Having never been out of NZ before, the crowds and cultures of other countries have mostly been quite distant to me and I was worried that I may not be able to adapt to them.

However, I quickly learned, upon arriving in Chile for our Mission Week, that I had nothing to fear. The people in the parish of San Columbano were so hospitable and humble that I felt like I was part of their family. Their love and generosity really touched me and I found myself at home around them despite speaking an entirely different language. They were a real example to me of how I should live as a Catholic and I am grateful to them for that experience.

I had to work hard to get to World Youth Day but the experience I had was so brilliant that I would have done so much more to get there. WYD is the best experience I have had in my life and I would thoroughly encourage everyone to try and attend future WYD events!

Maneka Fernando

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Waiting for the light

Advent in Pakistan

Columban Sr Rebecca Conlon asks the question, "How does one celebrate Christmas in the midst of life's suffering?" and how this question relates to Pakistani people during the Advent season.
The quotation written in Urdu says: “Look, that light is coming.” Advent is a good time in our lives when we are asked to look towards the light. May the light of Christ be the light in your life, as you journey to the manger this Christmas.

The world lies waiting for light to shine in so many dark areas Zaire, Rwanda, Burma, Pakistan, Northern Ireland, Iraq just to name a few. Advent calls us to: Wake up, that light is coming! What light are we looking for and where do we look for it?

Pakistan has been in the limelight many times due to its many struggles. Pakistani Christians are often faced with these looming questions. Who will remember us? For what will we be remembered?

The light of ‘God as Liberator’ is one real light we can see shining.

Some will be remembered for the prestigious schools/institutions they run, mostly for the rich but 97% of our Christians will be known as “sweepers,” who don’t matter or society’s outcasts.

The networking through various awareness programmes is proving to be a necessary ingredient to enable the people to reflect on themselves and study the laws that effect their lives and in this light they are awaking from their slumber. The light of ‘God as Liberator’ is one real light we can see shining.

This is the God I have met, in Muslims, Hindus and Christians and this God can only work, if we work together. At the heart of God there is no religion, but a heart of compassion for the most unwanted nobodies in society.

‘Allah Akbar! God is Great!’ is proclaimed from the mosques five times a day but the greatness of God is revealed in His smallness, the tiny baby, the nobody. There was no place for Him in the Inn. There was no place for Him in life, until finally, He had to be gotten rid of.

The “real light which gives light came into the world” and the world didn’t accept Him. One spotlight that God the Liberator has shone, is on the setting free of bonded labourers from the chained enslavement to their feudal lords, going back for generations. These feudal Lords have their own private jails and have control of a lot of Sindh province.

The cry of the poor is real, even to the extent of two village women immolating themselves in the streets of Hyderabad so that justice might be done. Both women died but it took this daring act for their cry to be heard.

How does one celebrate Christmas in the midst of all this? Perhaps it is in rejoicing in seeing the light shining in the eyes of this Muslim, who is daring to put their life at risk, in confronting the feudal Lords and being with the people who are growing into self-awareness of their dignity. One celebrates by enjoying the dramas in the Christian “Bastis” (areas), as the children love to portray the Christmas story.

Above all, in being present to Emmanuel (God with us) and welcoming Him into our lives, so that He might change us, so we can change our world into His world of justice and love.

May His light, light up your life this Christmas.

Columban Sr Rebecca Conlon was assigned to Pakistan in 1990.
Columbans, blessings and the Mayor of Lima

FR CHRIS BAKER

Columbans have worked in many poor areas of Lima over the last 60 years. Earlier this year, the Mayor of Lima, Susana Villaran, invited Columban Fr Chris Baker to a site in a former parish for the inauguration of a new sporting complex built by the Lima City Council. This sporting complex is only a few blocks from where the Association for People with Special Abilities (ASPHAD) has its centre and where Fr Chris is actively involved.

It’s normal in Peru for priests to be invited to bless all kinds of services, businesses and government programmes such as newly built sporting complexes.

Mayor Susana stood next to Fr Chris who gave the blessing with plenty of holy water. Mayor Susana then addressed the gathered crowd recalling her close association with the Columbans over the past 40 years. She spoke of how the Columbans had accompanied the humble people of the area during the past 50 years.

Fr Chris Baker who recently celebrated his 63rd anniversary of ordination to priesthood, was delighted to see such big improvements as this sporting complex in this former Columban parish.

Fr Chris Baker first went to Peru in 1977.

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Columban Sisters also work to help people such as bonded labourers be freed from the enslavement to their feudal lords which goes back generations.

With your help the Columban Sisters can continue to provide low cost housing and help for those in need in Pakistan.

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This Christmas we are called to follow in Christ’s footsteps... To step outside ourselves so as to attend to the needs of others: Pope Francis

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