



The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

OCTOBER 2011

PRICE \$1

The Far East

October 2011
Vol 93, No. 9

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: \$10 per year (AUSTRALIA)

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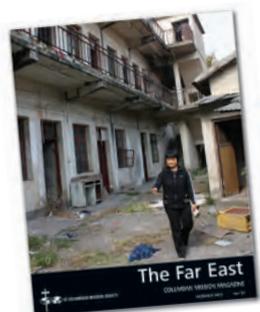
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Cover: The sisters want to convert this derelict building into a home for old people.

Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff

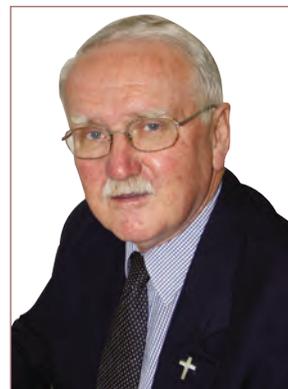
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From the Director

On the road to Portumna



Every Lent and Advent I think of the story of the Irish priest who was driving along a country road in Galway. He wanted to go to Portumna. The west of Ireland is flat, the roads are edged with hedges or stone walls so you can see little and the few road signs there are, are not that reliable. He came across an elderly farmer standing by the side of the road with his cap pulled down. He asked the farmer, "Am I on the road to Portumna?" The farmer was not in the habit of sharing too much information, especially with strangers, but seeing it was a priest he eventually said, "Well, you are, but it would help if you turned your car around."

Lent and Advent are times when we stop to reflect on the direction of our lives. Our hope is that we are on the right road and not heading in the wrong direction but often we may be stopped, stuttering along or heading slightly bush.

The reason why this story appeals to me at this stage is that I am about to take a radical turn. This is my last Director's Column. I finish as Director on St Columban's Day, November 23, and Fr Gary Walker will take over and write the column for the November-December issue.

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So it is a time for reflection and questions. Actually most of my life as a missionary priest has been a time for questions. I was ordained in 1969 at the peak of the vocations surge. We were young and energised by Vatican II. There were plenty of priests and sisters. Superiors were in their forties and the Church scandals of those days were minor compared to today. However, priests and religious had begun to leave in worrying numbers and confronted by the insights of Vatican II about the worth of other religions and the newly gained

independence of many of the countries where we worked we were asking ourselves some basic questions about our role as missionaries.

I don't think I ever welcomed any question or pain. If I had had my way none would have come my way but in retrospect I now realise that life would have been very boring and I would have missed out on a lot. As they say in sport, "no pain - no gain". We never change or learn anything significant until the pain of not changing is greater than that of changing.

I am also reminded of my favourite cartoon, Hagar the Horrible. As you may know Hagar is a big, beefy Viking fond of pillaging castles and not very sensitive or reflective. He has a mate, Lucky Eddie who is even more "mentally challenged". One day when they are sitting on a rock, the monk philosopher tells them, "As Descartes says, 'I think, therefore I am'." Hagar and Lucky Eddie look totally confused and vacant until Lucky Eddie asks, "So where does that leave me?" It is our ability to think and to question which may cause us pain but also brings insight, life and possibilities.

We live in a time of questions. It is the role of theology to enable us to look at things in a new way [re-visioning]; to help us live creatively, peacefully and even joyously with realities for which there are no easy explanations.

Thank you for sharing my questions over the past six years. Thank you to those who wrote me, and thanks especially to friends and supporters who share a commitment to mission.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noel Connolly".

Fr Noel Connolly
director@columban.org.au

A blessing priest

BARRY CAIRNS

Fr Barry Cairns uses 'sacramentals' as a form of mission.



Photos: Fr Barry Cairns

Fr Barry Cairns give a blessing to an expectant mother.

I am a blessings Priest! I use the *Ritual Book of Blessings* with its numerous liturgical blessings and I find it a powerful form of mission.

As I write this, I have just come from blessing an expectant mother. After receiving the blessing she said, using a special Japanese simile, "My fears have

evaporated like the morning dew, my tension and aloneness have gone. I feel confident." And this first-time expectant mother really meant it.

Her eyes just lit up. It is a beautiful blessing. It starts with a prayer expressing how this mother is sharing in God's own creation. The short

Gospel reading is from *Mark 10:13-16* where Jesus blesses each child and mother. The prayers emphasize joy and trust.

In Japan on November 15, there is a traditional blessing of children aged 7, 5 and 3. In the country parents take their children to their local Shinto shrine. But urbanized and Christian Japanese have no such shrine. We give the children and their parents a blessing at the church. I would usually have about 250 children, plus their parents (95% non-Christians) from the local kindergartens. I urge the parents to seek God's help in raising their children in our present unsettled society.

I have found it is important to give time and care to these blessings. A perfunctory set of words is disastrous. This time is sacred for the person receiving the blessing.

I have noticed the great influence that blessings have on people's hearts. God enters into their daily lives. In talks, in the catechumenate, and in sermons we can tell people that our God is close and cares for each one of us, but often it is not until a blessing is received at a time of crisis for a particular purpose that realization comes. 'Yes, the Church is relevant in my daily life'.

Blessings have been part of Church life for a long time. They are mentioned in the third century Apostolic Tradition by Hippolytus. One, called in Latin *Itinerarium* (Going on a Journey) became popular in the sixth century when monks, such as St Columban, were setting out on dangerous missionary journeys. I recently blessed a young student who was going overseas to attend a meeting on behalf of her university.

Kaori-san had never been on a plane before nor had she ever left the country. She had never travelled alone even within Japan. The blessing had an amazing effect. Fear replaced by trust in God. She looked forward to the experience.

The Scripture reading used is from *Genesis 28:21*. Jacob sets out on a journey and promises, "*If God will be with me and watch over me on this journey of mine till I return home, the Lord shall be my God.*"

When I was pastor in the southern village of Sakitsu, the Catholic communities were all connected with fishing. Near my home town in Island Bay, New Zealand, our bishop used to bless the Italian fishing fleet every year. So in Sakitsu I held the annual blessing of boats.

What a festival they made of it! All the boats were festooned with a mass of colourful flags. I remember as I went across from boat to boat each man lifted the hatch cover to allow the holy water to fall directly onto the small but vital diesel engine. The Gospel was the storm on the Sea of Galilee where Jesus calls from the fog, "Fear not, it is I," and then creates a calm sea. The final prayer is beautiful:

May Jesus lead you always to a safe harbour and to the final harbour which is Heaven.

I bless the ground before work starts at a building site. Here there is much scattering of blessed salt. There is another blessing when the roof beam is raised and finally another when the family moves into their new home.

During this blessing, a medal is put over the front entrance. I emphasize the blessing of the family altar which is very much a part of Japanese households following the Buddhist tradition. I pray with the family before the altar and urge them to keep praying before it as a family.

There is a blessing for the saddest of occasions when a mother loses a baby through a miscarriage, a stillbirth or sudden infant death syndrome. This blessing embraces the distraught mother with gentleness, using words like, "Comfort this woman in the emptiness which gnaws within her. God's love seems to be contradicted. Give her hope O Lord." The document from Rome, *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Baptism* (January 19, 2007), is a great help here.

I have found it is important to give time and care to these blessings.

A perfunctory set of words is disastrous. This time is sacred for the person receiving the blessing. God is showing His personal love for this person in this particular circumstance.

I have found that blessings touch people. Through blessings Jesus says in a living voice that reaches the ears of the heart, "Fear not! I am with you." That surely is the Good News. That is mission!

Fr Barry Cairns first went to Japan in 1956.



Blessing a young man on the official 'Coming of Age' day.



A Chinese welcome

WARREN KINNE

Fr Kinne's introduction to China and the new friends who welcomed him to mission.

Fr Warren Kinne chats with an 'internal' immigrant mother and child.

In the beginning

I came to China 14 years ago, settled into Beijing to learn Mandarin for three years and then came to Shanghai.

Mrs Cecilia Tao Bei Ling, whom I met about 20 years ago in Manila where she was studying to improve her English had suggested that I might be able to help her translate books at Guang Qi Press.

Along with our friendship, two practical matters influenced my decision: my need to find a way of being on mission in China and perhaps Cecilia's need for someone who might check the accuracy of her translations or at the least explain

what the English meant. I began going to her office each day and with the help of Chinese friends I gradually found my way into other jobs.

In one paper a student wrote: "Those who lived in the Age of Enlightenment gradually cut the doctrines of Christianity out of their brains. They then filled them with scientific knowledge."

Four churches in Shanghai now have Masses for the English speaking community and I help out with these Masses in two places. As is the custom with many priests, I greet worshippers

at the church door after Mass and through such contacts I have made a few friends who have helped me move deeper into my missionary commitment in a variety of ways, beginning with a concern for the life of the Church itself. I see it as an ongoing dialogue with the local Church.

I've taught a bishop, priests and sisters the English language and I am ready to help in the translation of documents or in polishing up English translations. I do what I can to help in the pastoral care of the large and scattered expatriate Catholic community in Shanghai. I have a good relationship with Bishop Jin who was born in 1916 and who has supported me in my life here.

Lecturing at Fudan university

During my second year in Shanghai, Cecilia spoke to Evelyn and Jim Whitehead about me. They are consultants in education and ministry who serve university programs and other institutions throughout the United States and internationally - and they spoke to the Fudan University authorities in the school of philosophy.

The University sent out Rachel Zhu Xiao Hong to see whether I was worth talking to. I then met Professor Zhang Ying Xiong who invited me to teach a course the following semester. I have taught there for nine years but my contract to teach a philosophy course to post-graduate students each semester has come to an end. I have had a better than average tenure. It is one of the top universities in China with an enrolment of around 50,000 students.

The comments and questions of the students often allow me to introduce ideas and perspectives quite unfamiliar to them. In one paper a student wrote: "Those who lived in the Age of Enlightenment gradually cut the doctrines of Christianity out of their brains. They then filled them with scientific knowledge." In response I remarked that, "Such an imbalance led to the greatest slaughter of human beings in the 20th century wars and revolutions", which of course prompted a lively discussion.

On the topic of religious faith and science, one student wrote: "Just as science give us the eyes to perceive the physical realm, faith grants us the eyes to discern the spiritual realm.

Science and faith are not mutually exclusive."

This is a position that flies in the face of so much of what they have been taught and what has coloured all their formal education in this communist

context, although one must always add, "with Chinese characteristics."

On the topic of Jesus of Nazareth, the thoughts expressed in student papers are many and varied: "The deed of Jesus reminds me of those Communist Party members and warriors who died in wars for a new China. Just like Jesus, in order to make people have a happy life, they sacrificed their precious lives."

With a concerned group of Catholics, both expatriates and Chinese, I began to put some practical shape on our shared concern and eventually the You Dao Foundation was formed.

Friendship

Rachel, the university's scout who first contacted me became much more than a fleeting one-time encounter. We were teaching in the same department, got to know each other and became friends. The whole family has in fact become Catholic. Then, once it was clear to them that I intended to remain in China for some years they invited me to be godfather of the younger son.

On returning from study in the USA where their second son was born they had a hard time in the university due to their breach of the one child policy, but that has passed and I generally have dinner with the family once a week.

About five years ago I was talking to friends about the difficult lives of internal migrants in this city of 20 million inhabitants, 6 to 7 million of whom are migrants. By "internal migration" I mean people who have

moved to the big cities but were born and brought up elsewhere in one of the 32 Provinces outside Shanghai Province.

You Dao Foundation

With a concerned group of Catholics, both expatriates and Chinese, I began to put some practical shape on our shared concern and eventually the You Dao Foundation was formed.



We felt we were responding to a need that no government, individual or organisation would be able to solve alone. Every day each one of us saw migrants sleeping rough on the street or on building sites and in makeshift shanties. We researched the matter professionally with the help of Audrey Leung, a well qualified business executive with a Kellogg's MBA and also an attorney-at-law, who came onto our Board. We formed an NGO, which we then registered in Hong Kong.

We would prefer to register in mainland China as it would permit us to regularise our way of working and so make many things easier. However, few charities have been able to do so as the government is slow to allow what it does not fully control

An observer may wonder why we put so much effort into doing so little in the face of such a massive challenge, such as the injustices suffered by the millions of migrants in Shanghai.

My response can be summed up in the saying: "Better to light a candle than a curse the darkness!" the origin of which is uncertain but some maintain that it is derived from a Chinese proverb.

Fr Warren Kinne is chiefly engaged with the work of the You Dao foundation at the present time.

First taste of mission

TAVITE TUKUTUKUBAU

FIJI



Photo: Tavite Tukutukubau

Tavite is doing part of his training in the Philippines.

*A*s a young boy growing up in a Fijian village I used to admire big planes flying over us especially at night. Every night I used to look forward to admiring the level of technology we have reached.

But on May 9, 2011, my dream was fulfilled by getting into this Korean Airbus on my way to the Philippines for my Spiritual Year. Our route with my companion Pat, was to spend three days at the Formation House in Korea and then to Manila.

Coming from the western side of Fiji where it is hot and dry, the first thing that struck me in Korea was the

weather. They said it was spring but coming from a tropical island and this being my first trip overseas, it was really cold for me. Also the food was totally new but I had to take it otherwise I would be starving.

Then we flew over to the Philippines landing in Manila airport. As we were making our way to our taxi, my first impression was the children who came running after us. Then I came to realize that this is the reality of Manila that I'm experiencing.

As all the excitement of being in this country was still with me I was still eager to experience everything on my

The first journey in one's missionary life is exciting and wonderful.

first few days. I was anxious to see and to feel everything that I always heard from others about this country.

After few days I realized that I am in a country that is totally different from mine. Loneliness struck and I began to think of home and all the fun they would be having at this time.

After the excitement has gone, I remembered that my main reason for being here is my Spiritual Year. I'm training to be a Columban missionary priest and one important aspect of our Society is about crossing cultures. Even though I'm here for my Spiritual Year, a vital factor will be my living in a culture that is so different from mine.

What really struck me is my need to continually develop my personal relationship with my Savior in a new country. That means getting away from my comfort zone in living and developing in a place where I will face challenges in life especially in my faith journey.

Through the spirituality of Saint Columban, I will try to develop the values of Christ and to be a witness to others.

"I live for Christ not for myself..."

Tavite Tukutukubau is in his third year of student formation at the Columban Formation House in Suva, Fiji.

Your kingdom come

DANIEL HARDING

CHILE



Photo: iStockphoto.com

It is a privilege to be involved with the people of Chile.

"*B*eing a Columban missionary priest in today's world" means being involved with ordinary people in their aspirations to construct "the Kingdom of God" here on Earth. It means trying to live out in little, concrete ways, the prayer of Jesus, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven."

In Chile, we Columbans do this by helping to develop parishes that are caring and dynamic, that are liturgically vibrant and alive and that listen to the aspirations of the people. We want our parishes to promote justice, liberation and reconciliation, to promote healthy self-esteem among the people, and to be involved in the personal, social and spiritual development of the people.

My life as a missionary priest, with all its beauty and richness, and suffering and traumas, is meaningful and fulfilled, interesting and challenging.

One of the great blessings of priestly ministry is the privilege of participating with people in their everyday lives, in their struggles and difficulties and in their achievements and happier moments.

I feel one of the most important tasks of priestly ministry is to help people awaken a sense of God's active presence in every event of their lives.

We Columbans minister in parishes in poor areas with many social problems. It is precisely in these areas that people are

crying out to hear the great comfort and hope offered in the Christian message that God sent his Son to be born as one of us, to give his life for us and to be resurrected from the dead.

In poverty stricken areas of Chile and other parts of the world, where there is a sense of abandonment, despair and exclusion, the New Testament symbol of "The Kingdom of God" is powerful as it represents the presence and the power of God's Son Jesus, risen from the dead, in our very midst.

Against a background of social exclusion, discrimination, inequalities, injustice, poverty, violence, crime, drugs, gangs, high unemployment, stagnation, powerlessness, despair and hopelessness, the Kingdom of God represents hope, inclusion, self-esteem, justice, peace, personal and community growth and development, empowerment, equality, and human rights.

I would certainly recommend the life of a Columban to any young man who feels drawn by the Holy Spirit to missionary priesthood.

After 20 years in Chile Fr Dan Harding has been assigned to the Australia and New Zealand Region for three years beginning January, 2012.

Twitter from Our Lord

DAN MCALOON



Last year at a Catholic media conference in Sydney a distinguished theologian said that what our world today cries out more than ever for parables as powerful as those of Jesus.

He was talking about the art of communicating the gospels in the constant chatter of the digital age; of the Church finding a pithy voice able to cut through the confusion of geopolitical strife, national borders, fears and prejudices, sensations and 15-second news grabs.

But if one goes down that road it can be fun. Can you really summarise the New Testament in the key phrase, "Do 2 Others as U do 2 Yrself"?

He might have also lamented the loss of stories as effective as the parable of the Good Samaritan for the iPod generation who'd rather Twitter and Facebook and keep it down to a few telegraphic sentences and key symbols (@work!!!!??).

But if one goes down that road it can be fun. Can you really summarise the New Testament in the key phrase, "Do 2 Others as U do 2 Yrself"?

Why not? Get that out into the biosphere and you might get the recipient asking where that phrase originates, or a Google search that would unveil references to Moses and Jesus and the Good Samaritan. If they searched further still, they would find contemporary justice stories - probably unresolved and possibly under-reported, being undertaken by men and women of good faith, in greater



"Yes, now go and do the same"- A 'Twitter' from Our Lord?

numbers than ever, doing extraordinary things in Jesus' name.

In an age fashionably irreligious, flip and cynical, they might even wonder what motivates such people to act by Jesus' example and to go the extra mile for the underdog even though powerful forces may be arraigned against them. One never knows where and when the Samaritan will appear. But Jesus wrote him into the story of the world for all time just the same.

The chronicle of Jesus' earthly ministry is filled with many instances of His reaching out to the shamed, afflicted, and broken people whom the polite society of his day had passed judgment on and rejected as unworthy. The needy respond to Jesus' outreach.

The gospels are full of instances where Jesus is challenged by figures taking umbrage at his words and acts because he is undermining their moral authority and social status.

Consider the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Gospel of Luke records an exchange between a man described as well versed in Jewish religious law who asks Jesus this pertinent question, "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What does the law of Moses' say? How do you read it?" Jesus retorts.

The man recites by rote "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind." We can imagine him being very satisfied with the correctness of his answer. And yet Jesus doesn't reply.

There is a pregnant pause as if Jesus is waiting for more from this expert. And we can imagine the learned man a bit flustered now, unstuck, he fairly blurts

out "And love your neighbour as yourself."

"Right!" affirms Jesus. "Do this and you will live!" The question is resolved.

But this inquisitor isn't satisfied with this answer or the way Jesus got it out of him. He wants to paint Jesus into a tight theological corner. We can almost hear him asking pointedly in a loud voice "And who is my neighbour?" "He probably smiled and looked around to see that everyone had heard him.

The Good Samaritan parable does contain this explicit challenge to those who would exclude others. Inclusion is the whole theme of the New Testament. Class, race, gender are no obstacles to God's redemption.

So Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, of a Jewish man set upon by bandits, beaten mercilessly, stripped bare and left for dead by the side of an isolated road. As he lies in pain, two pious Jews, a Rabbi and a Levite pass by, ignoring his plight.

By their moral code this is an unclean man and so they keep moving. Along comes a Samaritan - much despised by the Jews - who is moved to pity. He acts. He gives assistance to the victim. He dresses the man's wounds, gets him up on his donkey and leads him to an inn where he pays for the man's board, caring for him overnight, telling the inn-keeper on his departure that if there are extra expenses he'll pay those on his return journey. The innkeeper must know him to be a man of his word.

We can imagine Jesus looking the man hard in the eye when he asks him, "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by bandits?" And we can sense this virtuous man's discomfort as he gives the answer that he never expected to give, "The one who showed him mercy."

"Yes," Jesus responds. "Now go and do the same."

We will never know if the learned man could put aside a lifetime of prejudices to take this lesson to heart. He might have.

The Good Samaritan parable does contain this explicit challenge to those who would exclude others. Inclusion is the whole theme of the New Testament. Class, race, gender are no obstacles to God's redemption. Everyone is capable of achieving grace in this life through their own actions.

However to live that life you have to unpack all your baggage off your late model fuel-injected donkey and make room for it. You have to be open to what Pope John Paul II called "the Spirit that surprises us", what Abraham Lincoln called "our Better Angels", or The Beatles' singing "All you need is Love."

Dan McAloon works in Catholic Media as a freelance journalist.



Photos: Emmanuel Drewery

Photos: Fr Peter Woodruff

Children are encouraged to play.

Let the children play

TONY CONEY

St Bernadette's Children's Centres allows deprived children to enjoy being children.

The principal idea behind the St Bernadette's Children's Centres in Lima is to provide a safe environment for children to play and enjoy their childhood.

In the St Bernadette's Children's Centres we provide an environment that celebrates all that is good in childhood through making sure that the children feel valued and cared for.

There is an unbreakable link between Christianity and human nature which can be seen in action whenever the good in every child is allowed to emerge and be valued in an environment of respect, freedom and

tolerance. We try to promote justice, equality and the human rights of children, leaving no doubt in anyone's mind that the inspiration behind all that we do is Christian.

Through listening to them, individually and in group meetings, we try to discern their needs and respond accordingly. We also believe that if the children are treated as valuable human beings they in turn will learn to appreciate their own value. We accept them in whatever condition they arrive without asking them to change, and when we receive very troubled children who require special help, they usually

responded to positive treatment.

This will give them the space and the opportunities to discover and develop their talents. The basis of our approach is "freedom with responsibility," the child being free to do what s/he wants, while valuing and respecting the freedom of others. To this end the children are free to participate in any activity, so that through trial and error, they may realise where their strengths and interests lie.

In many situations involving children, whether in school or in the home, the adults generally decide what is best for

PERU

them and what they should be doing, with little reference to the desires of the children themselves. So, we organize meetings of the children in different age groups, where they can set their own norms and rules for acceptable behaviour and also express how they feel the project is progressing.

We, as the adults and staff, are there to guide, encourage and help, but ultimately we want the children to decide and take decisions through listening and dialoguing with us and each other.

The official education system is quite militaristic, especially around the time of Independence Day when the children parade in the streets, singing the national anthem and saluting the national flag. We decided to celebrate this day with a different mindset, highlighting the cultures and customs of Peru through dance, drama and song, and only with those who want to participate, therefore giving these celebrations a different focus.



Children are supervised but left alone to play.

We don't want the children to feel that we are attempting to impose specific values, as we prefer them to experience a freedom that may not be available to them in other spaces of their lives. We don't want them to remember their time with us as one more experience of being shaped or formed by their elders.

Rather we hope that they will have happy memories of freely playing, mutual respect and genuine fun with their friends as they go about being children and beginning to put their own shape on their lives.

I do not think that our approach is the only way of working with children but

I do maintain that it is a valid way. The children may or may not grow up as Catholics but they will surely remember their time with us with gratitude. They will remember that we treated them with respect, offered them freedom in ways that they may not have experienced elsewhere but, at the same time, that we demanded a certain discipline based on mutual respect and responsibility.

I believe that this is a valid approach to Christian mission.

Fr Tony Coney first went to Peru in 1995.



When you trust people you can sleep anywhere.



Photos: Fr. Peter Woodruff

The next generation of sisters are free from persecution.

Steady Comeback

SHEN AI YUN AND ZHANG JINPING

Chinese Sisters Shen Ai Yun and Zhang Jinping have a vision for the future.

*I*n the late 1940s, as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) advanced towards Wuhan, located on the Yangtze River, 500kms inland from Shanghai, Columban Bishop Edward Galvin met with the sisters of a religious community he had founded. There were tears all round as he released them from their vows and asked them to return to their families. 30 years later, after China's Cultural Revolution was over, some decided to get back together.

Two are still alive, Sr. Li Fen Fang, aged 92 years and Sr. Zhou We Bin, 97 years of age and against all the odds a new beginning was made. The sisters began to invite young women to join them. The young sisters, now in

leadership roles, have dreams and plans for the future.

The sisters began to invite young women to join them. The young sisters, now in leadership roles, have dreams and plans for the future.

'First, we dream of a bigger community; we need to grow in order to do what needs to be done here in Hanyang. We want to do mission work in the Hanyang Diocese. We would like to help improve the spirituality of Catholics and attract others to the Church. We would help

Catholics deepen their spirituality through courses about our faith and the bible, and by inviting them to come to church more regularly. Then, in order to interest others in our faith we would begin by visiting them, especially in their time of need.'

'Showing compassion and friendship is important in Chinese culture regardless of religious belief. We would encourage Catholics to invite their friends to church. Some Catholics might ask us to go to homes or the work place of friends to talk about our faith. Many people in China are searching for a deeper meaning in their lives; this is so especially among the youth.'



Sr Zhang Jinping was featured in *The Far East* previously.

'In order to tackle these tasks we would need preparation and there are courses in theology and bible for sisters in three cities in China - Taiyuan, Beijing and Shijiazhuang. Some of our sisters have already done the two year course in Taiyuan and a three year course will soon be available in Beijing, for which the entry standard will be quite high.'

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, told us that our faith in Jesus Christ urges us to respond in three ways: first, to preach the message of Jesus; second, to live a religious life, by the practice of prayer and the celebration of the sacraments; third, serve those who are in need. Being religious sisters we should care about those whom society does not care about (and their number is increasing).



The sisters dream of converting this derelict building into an Old People's home.

Maybe we should not say that society does not care at all, but what we can say is that it does not care enough. For example, younger family members may give money to help the elderly of their family, but then do not live with them, accompany them in their illness or loneliness. There is so often a lack of personal care rather than a lack of money.

To help do even more of this outreach work we have formed a lay group

which has 17 members. We know we cannot solve other people's problems but they like us to visit them in their homes. We find this is so with both Catholics and non-Catholics. We have also seen that this kind of outreach has a big impact on people.

Sisters Shen Ai Yun and Zhang Jinping are the present leaders in the Congregation.



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 bring 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?

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Mission World

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

Difficulties for Believers By Father John Flynn, LC

Rome (ZENIT) - In the three-year period up to mid-2009, there was a significant increase in restrictions on religion in many countries. This is the finding of a recent report published by the Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion and Public Life.

The study examined the situation in 198 countries and rated them according to their performance in 33 measures. A variety of information sources, from

reports by U.S. agencies, private research centres, and human rights organizations was used in compiling the results.

Between mid-2006 and mid-2009 restrictions increased in 23 countries. There was a decrease in 12 countries, and in the rest there was little change.

The findings were worse than a first glance as the data would suggest, as some of the countries with increasing restrictions have large populations. In fact, nearly a third of the world's population, more than 2.2 billion

people, live in countries that experienced either greater government restrictions or more intense social hostility regarding religion.

The 25 most populous countries make up about three-quarters of the world's population. In this group, restrictions increased substantially in eight countries, according to the report, and none of the 25 saw any substantial decrease.

In six of the eight - China, Nigeria, Russia, Thailand, the United Kingdom and Vietnam - the worsening situation was mainly accounted for as a result of higher levels of social hostility. While in Egypt and France, it was principally the consequence of government action.

Dividing up the world in regions results in the Middle East-North Africa area as having the largest proportion of countries where government restrictions escalated. According to the report, six of the 14 countries where government restrictions rose substantially were in the Middle East-North Africa region: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Qatar, Syria and Yemen.

The Pew Center singled out Egypt as a notable offender, both for the governmental action and social hostility. The other country that also scored high results in both categories was Indonesia.



Photo: Courtesy Catholic Mission

A Christian man injured by a bomb blast

Mission Intention for October

That the celebration of World Mission Sunday may increase in the People of God the passion for evangelisation and the support of missionary activity through prayer and economic aid for the poorest Churches.

Editorial



Who suffers?

The report found that those most affected for their religion were Christians and Muslims. In the three years up to mid-2009, Christians reported problems in 130 countries and Muslims in 117 countries.

Those countries that have laws prohibiting blasphemy, apostasy or defamation of religion are also singled out by the report. While, in theory, they are defended as being a necessary protection for religion, in practice they are often used to repress religious minorities.

On the other hand, the report also noted that sometimes it is religion that is at fault. In the three-year period covered, there were religion-related terrorist groups active in no less than 74 countries.

The importance of protecting religious liberty was emphasized earlier this year by Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, permanent representative of the Holy See to the U.N. offices in Geneva.

Archbishop Tomasi lamented the increase in religious conflict in recent times and cited a report published last year by the private organization Aid to the Church in Need, which revealed that of every 100 people killed out of religious hatred 75 are Christian.

It's about God

I was lying in bed last week saying some prayers before I went to sleep. These prayers I learnt as a child and I have returned to them, I'm not sure why, perhaps my relationship with God is becoming more childlike denoting real progress.

The thought occurred to me that God must be eternally young, but it wasn't quite accurate. Unfortunately I fell asleep before I could find the right description. The following morning having thought about it in my sleep, I said to myself, 'God is neither young nor youthful, God is bursting with energy and life.'

The frequent use of the quote from John's gospel, "*I have come that they may have life and may have it in all its fullness*" (Jn 10:10) indicates how influential the concept of 'life' is for us, and for God too, since Jesus is the author of these words.

I like to think that God's life is bursting with energy, exciting and glorious. Or perhaps spring is a season that gives us some idea of God's energy as the trees are covered in blossoms and then break into leaves and grow taller. Plants thrust up through the soil, their life force full of power and strength.

Michel Quoist, the French writer of popular prayers wrote, "*Only love enables humanity to grow, because love engenders life and it is the only form of energy that lasts forever.*"

Gary Walker

TFE@columban.org.au

Easy to see God

PHILIPPINES

ANTONIO SALAS VILLAGOMEZ

Antonio was a lay missionary in Mindanao, the Philippines.



Photo: Fr. Peter Woodruff

Mothers, children and Antonio take part in a St Vincent de Paul program.

I began working as a Columban lay missionary in Dumalinao, near Pagadian where Fr Mick Sinnott works. Then he was kidnapped and held for ransom. The Columban superior in the Philippines asked me to move to another part of Mindanao where there might be less danger of being kidnapped.

Still, it was a wrench for me to leave what I felt I was just getting into with

the villagers in the Dumalinao area. I was visiting places that were accessible only by foot and all the people I met were welcoming and friendly. Then I began again but this time in Cagayan de Oro, a relatively large city of over one million people.

I was given an opening to enter into the lives of the poor through the local Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society, which supports poor families

via a program of self-help. Their aid program does not simply give food, clothes and medicine to the poor, but rather involves the beneficiaries in a process of improving their own lot.

Before coming to the Philippines as a lay missionary I taught in primary school in Peru and specialised in physical education.

Sometimes I have lots of trouble seeing God in my neighbour but with these people in the St Vincent de Paul program it was so easy.

Those children I worked with were quite small, ranging from three to seven years of age, both boys and girls. I taught them ball handling skills and some karate. They reciprocated with their songs and dances. I could sense that their mothers are grateful.

All are very poor, some are widows or single mothers, but all the families have little income.

I can see that we brought some joy into the lives of the people who participated in the program. They were glad to be with each other and grateful for our support. They did not expect us to solve their problems, but they appreciated our concern and respect.

Their joy and laughter even in the face of adversity challenges me personally to look beyond the relatively minor challenges of my own life. Sometimes I have lots of trouble seeing God in my neighbour but with these people in the St Vincent de Paul program it was so easy. I thank God for the opportunity to have been part of this missionary venture.

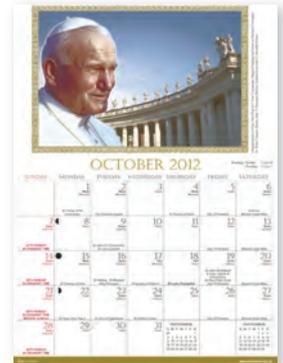
Antonio returned to Peru when he finished his three year contract as a Columban lay missionary.

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Missionaries in thousands

GARY WALKER

People take their Catholic faith with them when they migrate.



Photos: Fr. Gary Walker

The offertory procession is made up of women in national dress.

October is Mission month. *The Far East* magazine this month focuses on Columban priests, sisters, lay missionaries, and a variety of other people engaged in promoting the mission of the Church which comes from Jesus himself.

The obvious group not mentioned above are the Catholic people of the world who have become missionaries by virtue of leaving their homeland and settling in another country. There they continue to live out their Catholic faith; they are essential because they provide the ongoing life of the Church.

From the poverty of Ireland the Irish took their faith with them when they travelled to the New World, to America, Canada, New Zealand,

Argentina and Australia, just to name a few. Some of us are descendants of Irish Catholics who came to Australia as convicts and later as free settlers. They held on to their Catholic faith against strong opposition.

They become a missionary people simply by establishing themselves in a country and practising their Catholic faith.

In our own time Filipinos and more recently Vietnamese peoples have been a new wave of missionaries like the Irish people of former years.

They have taken their faith with them wherever they have travelled looking for work, often with the intention of

sending remittance payments home to their struggling families. They become a missionary people simply by establishing themselves in a country and practising their Catholic faith. An example of their missionary outreach is reflected in the new vibrancy they have brought to the Church in Sweden, new life and new energy.

Australia and New Zealand have Catholic people from many parts of the world. Not so long ago with the decline of colonialism and the proliferation of independent states, the prophets of doom predicted that Catholicism would decline because it had been associated too closely with the colonial masters. But this did not happen, far from being a white

Another forgotten war

MYANMAR

AUTHOR ANONYMOUS

Peace is not in sight in Myanmar but more war.

In July this year Government troops and the Kachin Independence Army started fighting in northern Myanmar, close to the Chinese border and as a result, Christian churches were flooded with thousands of refugees coming from those "black areas." (In 1994, the KIA, had a cease-fire agreement with the State Peace and Development Council which is the former name of the Myanmar Government).

Many of these homeless refugees sheltered in churches but the majority went to the nearest towns and to the Chinese border for protection. One example is the refugee camp set up by the Catholic diocese of Myitkyina in St Joseph's Church in Wai Maw parish, five miles from the town of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State.

Fr Robert, the parish priest who is in charge of the Wai Maw refugee camp, said, "At present there are 560 refugees registered in the camp and refugees are still coming." He added, "We have received support from the Government and we work together to help the refugees."

However, the local Caritas organisation which operates in the diocese has given most financial assistance, but many local donors contributed rice, clothes and other necessities. The resources of the diocese are fully stretched to deal with the influx of people.

There are 11 temporary shelters in the compound and each shelter is only 25

feet in length and 15 feet in width. Sara Seng, a member of the Wai Maw emergency relief team, said, "It's really overcrowded; there are nearly 45 people sleeping in each temporary shelter. With the lack of space and the monsoon rains, the shelters are quite muddy and mosquitoes are everywhere. Lahpai La, 35, from Dabak village near to the China border, said, "It is a problem; many people are sick from malaria and cholera but there are not enough shelters."

Reports mentioned that the Army had been slaughtering livestock in the villages and farms, and looting houses. No one knows what the future holds.

The people left their homes and farms behind because of the unstable situation. They worried about their villages. Reports mentioned that the Army had been slaughtering livestock in the villages and farms, and looting houses. No one knows what the future holds.

Nhkum Roi, 50, a Nam Sang Yang villager, said, "Recently there has been news spreading that fighting will start within this week and we were scared to be left alone in the village so, we decided to leave." While many villagers wanted to stay working the farms they

were afraid of being press-ganged into becoming porters to carry supplies for the Army.

Over 10,000 refugees are sheltering in Myitkyina in camps run also by the Baptist and Anglican Churches. The Wai Maw refugee camp is only one of the Catholic refugee camps. The Catholic Church has organised door-to-door food distributions for those who stay with their relatives in the town.

What is to become of these refugees? Will they be re-settled in areas free from fighting or not? The Government has not asked for international assistance. Many people were upset and frustrated that the Government would not allow any non-government agency to help the refugees.

Peace talks between the Government and the KIA were held in the first week of August but they did not arrive at a solution. According to Jau Lazum, one of the observers who attended the meeting, the KIA did not want to get caught by the government again. He said that if there was no tangible agreement between them, more fighting would take place and there would be more refugees. It is the ordinary people who will suffer most.

The author would prefer to remain anonymous for security reasons.



A blessing priest

Fr Barry Cairns joins little fingers with a child in Church after the traditional blessing for children aged three, five and seven years of age. He uses blessings extensively in his parish pastoral work. Thank you for supporting Columban Mission.



Photo: Fr Barry Cairns

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