



# The Far East

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# The Far East

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**Cover:** Fr Tony Cox, Chaplain at Stella Maris Seafarers' Centre, Melbourne.  
(see pages 4-5)

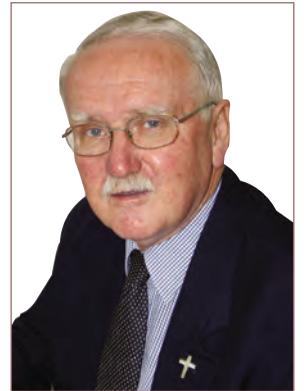
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# From the Director

*Pluralism as a value*



*A*t a time when many in the Church are concerned with uniformity and orthodoxy it is helpful to remember that the foundational book of our faith, the Bible, is a book full of pluralism. There is no one cohesive theology but a series of traditions that don't always fit neatly together. There is a legitimate diversity within a fundamental unity. There are poets, prophets, historians, evangelists and pastors or apostles. All of them have a different understanding of the mystery that is God and Jesus because they were different people, writing with different questions for different audiences with different needs.

*At a time when many in the Church are concerned with uniformity and orthodoxy it is helpful to remember that the foundational book of our faith, the Bible, is a book full of pluralism.*

Even the Gospels present different images of Jesus depending on whether the authors are writing for Jewish or Gentile or mixed Christian communities; for people who have just suffered Roman persecution or who are being driven out of the synagogues by their brother Jews; for people who have lost their first fervour and who need conversion and forgiveness; or for Christians who need encouragement and a sense of identity and mission. Because of the different pastoral needs we have a rich variety of images of Jesus.

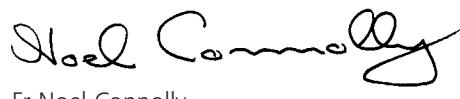
Theology is faith seeking understanding. When confused or searching or in moments of disbelief we turn to Jesus to help us understand, to think in a Christian way and to make Christian choices. Our questions are shaped by our experiences, our culture, our past, our needs and our longings. All these factors colour and filter our understanding of Jesus.

Andrew Walls, an historian of mission, pointed out the consequences of the early Christians' preaching to the Greeks in Antioch and Ephesus. When preaching to the Greeks they referred to Jesus as Kyrios or Lord rather than Messiah

because Messiah was not a meaningful term to the Greeks. And the title "Lord" brought new theological questions about how Jesus related to the Father. Are there two "Lords"? And these questions lead to the Greek enrichment of Christianity through doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, hypostatic union and so forth. Greek questions expanded our understanding of Christ and the Trinity. It was in the Scriptures but it would never have been seen by Jewish minds that were much more capable of living with the ambiguity of two "Lords".

If Greek minds asking Greek questions could lead to such powerful new insights, we can only wonder at the richness we will gain when Asian, African and Aboriginal minds ask their questions and share their answers. They have questions for which Western theology has no relevant experience to understand or appreciate. And their questions will reveal much that till now lies hidden from our eyes.

One of my favourite scripture passages is from Ephesians 3: 17-19 where Paul prays that we will have "the power to comprehend... what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge". I wonder at the millions of people through the last two millennia who have loved, questioned and written about Jesus and never exhausted him or his message. Christ is the fullness of revelation but no human has completely understood the full dimensions of his revelation. That will only emerge as people of every culture in every age seek in Jesus and the scriptures the answers to their questions and needs. That will be a healthy and exciting diversity or pluralism.

  
Fr Noel Connolly  
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# Home away from home

TONY COX

*Stella Maris Seafarers' Centres around the world provide a home away from home.*



Fr Tony Cox, Chaplain at Stella Maris Seafarer's Centre, Melbourne, with one of the seafarers'.

"I was a stranger and you made me welcome" (Matt 25:25)

*T*oday shipping is a crucial, but often unseen, component of the global economy, yet most of us don't really think about it. Like it or not, we depend on shipping for a majority of the goods and products we own and/or consume. By extension, we rely on the crews who sail the ships.

*I celebrate Mass on board ship, I have blessed new ships and also spent plenty of time just talking and sharing life. A meal with the Captain and his Crew has also been on the cards...*

These seafaring men and women endure many challenges at sea (piracy and dangerous seas to name a few); they often experience loneliness, isolation and also depression. Above all they are separated from their family and friends for many months at a time.

My association with Stella Maris Seafarers' Centre in Melbourne goes back to the mid 90s when I returned from Japan. Having worked with the Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners before entering the seminary, my fascination with ships and the sea extends back quite a way!

Every week now I visit ships in the Port of Melbourne with Bobbie Grech who has worked for Stella Maris as a Dedicated Ship Visitor for 40 years. In the course of a day we visit six or seven ships and we try to live out the Stella Maris Seafarers' Mission statement by 'providing a home away from home to all the seafarers; ensuring that the spiritual, social,

*physical and material needs are met...regardless of race, colour or creed.'*

I celebrate Mass on board ship, I have blessed new ships and also spent plenty of time just talking and sharing life. A meal with the captain and his crew has also been on the cards... simple meals prepared by one or two members of the ship's crew.

For those who were in Port at Easter this year, the Easter ceremonies were offered. Not only did Catholics participate, some men and women of other creeds joined us in prayer and then celebrated with the volunteer staff who generously give their time to be with and help those who are away from home in a strange land.

Each visit to a ship and each day present new challenges but with the co-operation and the support of the shipping agents and the port staff and security, these are met. Walking up the narrow gangways to the tops of these big ships is a bit daunting but knowing that the Apostleship of the Sea acts for the Church among the peoples of the sea highlights one aspect of mission which we so often forget about... the service of hospitality.

To see the delight on the seafarers faces indicates and highlights the fact that the work of Stella Maris is valued by so many. Last year over 17,500 seafarers visited the Centre in Melbourne. Up to a week or so ago around 8,000 have already visited the Centre this year so it looks like certainly more visitations for the rest of the year.

---

Fr Tony Cox resides at St Columban's, Essendon, Melbourne.



Fr Tony Cox, Bobbie Grech (second from right) and crew members.

*Seafarers' Centre in Melbourne is one of 353 centres worldwide providing pastoral care, services and support for seafaring people.*

*The Stella Maris Centres are part of the Catholic Church's official missionary work for seafarers and they are an important component of the Apostleship of the Sea. This agency is operated globally under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant people in Rome.*

*They welcome volunteers.*



# Last man out

PETER WOODRUFF



Catholic Church, Iligan City, Philippines.

*The Columban involvement is winding down in some parts of the Philippines.*

Lourdes de Guzman, worked for the Columban Fathers at Singalong, the Columban headquarters in the Philippines. She was my guide for the visit to Lingayen in Pangasinan Province, Philippines, because she grew up there. She knew many Columbans who worked in the parish of her hometown. She wanted to put on record some of the

achievements of the Columbans in the province and also parishioners' memories of them.

The last Columbans to work in Lingayen left in 1981 so I did not expect to find many whose memories went back beyond that date.

The Columbans were invited to staff and develop the parish of Lingayen in



Fr Jim Sheehy

Central Luzon, Philippines in 1933. The Columban Sisters followed in 1939 to work in the catechetical apostolate and in education.

The massive adobe church with its imposing bell tower dating from around 1700, was reconstructed after World War II bombs destroyed most of it. It was officially reopened in 1965 and is called the parish of the Epiphany of Our Lord.

*One Columban continues in Labrador, one of the poorer parishes of the province...*

*Fr Jim Sheehy, despite being now in his 81st year, continues to lead a busy parish.*

We drove into the church courtyard and the first person Lourdes met was Salud Puzon, now 88 years of age, who has been active in the parish since 1939. She told me how she was first introduced to the Sodality of Our Lady by the Columban Sisters when she was in high school. The Sisters also asked her to teach catechism to the primary school children. In 1943 the parish priest brought the Legion of Mary to Lingayen, the first presidium in the Philippines outside Manila.

The Legion flourished for many years, with numerous groups of adults and youth. Now there is only one group of elderly members. However, Salud is undaunted. She told me that the basic ecclesial communities now do much the same as what the Legion used to do. For her, the bases continue to be covered despite all the changes she has seen.

She and her friends told me about parish social outreach initiatives. In 1947 the parish primary and secondary school were established and in 1960 college level was added. It is now called St Columban's Academy.

The Lingayen Catholic Credit Cooperative was founded in 1964 and was declared the most outstanding cooperative (nationwide) in 2001 by the Cooperative Development Authority. It now has assets of around \$A5 million and has over 8,000 members.

Natividad Crisostomo told me of her work as a teacher at St Columban's Academy where she met her husband, Fernando. She showed me her house built of local hardwood over 100 years ago, long before the days of air conditioning; her pride and joy is a shrine to the Sacred Heart in the sitting room of her home.

Fernando died 17 years ago and was also active in the parish community.

He donated land to the Columban Bishop, Harry Byrne, for a building to be used for the apostolate to the Aetas, the indigenous people who lived in the nearby hills of Zambales Province.

If I could meet two such people coincidentally in the space of an hour I am sure there are many more who might have told me more about how the Columbans of years past helped them form a vibrant parish community that gave witness to the Gospel in a variety of ways.

Nor did I meet the many parishioners of other parishes in Pangasinan that were subsequently staffed by Columbans as Lourdes drove me through six other towns where Columbans worked.

One Columban continues in Labrador, one of the poorer parishes of the province, and we met briefly as I was whisked from place to place. Fr Jim Sheehy, despite being now in his 81st year, continues to lead a busy parish. He had no advance warning of our visit as we did not have his phone number, nor did I know we were heading his way until the morning we arrived in his parish.

Being Palm Sunday, Jim had been busy about many things since 6:30am. Then he had a house blessing and later a family came looking for a baptism, and after that a parish group was getting its act together to go camping, and then Lourdes and I arrived with two friends plus a driver.

Jim insisted we stay for lunch and he ordered in some take-away. He showed us the church, especially the Stations of the Cross that had recently been renewed by a parishioner who had recently returned from a visit to US. They begin with the Last Supper and end with the Resurrection. He talked about the parish cooperative and other projects that are helping neighbours use their talents productively and so improve the family income.

Whatever matters Jim may be involved in these days I know I met a contented and lively missionary priest in the Labrador parish house on Palm Sunday. He is the last Columban to be appointed to Pangasinan Province and will be the last man out.

---

*Fr Peter Woodruff currently resides at St Columban's, Essendon.*



Salud Puzon



Lourdes de Guzman



Natividad Crisostomo

# Celebrating 50 years

GARY WALKER

*A son of Flemington in more ways than one.*

**F**r William (Bill) Moran was born in Flemington, Melbourne on May 14, 1936, the son of Bill and Mollie Moran. He has a younger sister Kay. His birth place may account for his life-long interest in horse racing. He received his primary education at St Brendan's, Flemington and his secondary schooling at St Kieran's, Moonee Ponds and CBC North Melbourne.

*After 24 years, his reason for joining a missionary society was realised when he received an overseas posting to Latin America after his term as rector was completed.*

From 1953-1954 he worked in the Commonwealth Public Service before entering St Columban's seminary in 1955. His first year was spent close to home in North Essendon. Studies in philosophy and theology followed in Sydney at Wahroonga and Turramurra. He was ordained on 23rd July, 1961 by Archbishop Justin D. Simonds in St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne.

After ordination Fr Bill was assigned to study theology at the University of St Thomas (Angelicum) in Rome from which he graduated in 1963.

With a wide range of skills from the academic to the managerial he was required as assistant manager of The Far East Office at North Essendon in 1964. However in 1967, his theological expertise was called on and he joined the teaching staff at St Columban's seminary as a professor of Systematic Theology. He became Rector in 1973 for a term of six years.

As Rector he helped found and develop the Pacific Mission Institute which ran a year-long course for prospective cross-

cultural missionaries. The 'PMI' as it was commonly known was a fine contribution to the Church in Australia and New Zealand. His concern for students (I was one) at the seminary was exemplary.

After 18 years his reason for joining a missionary society was realised when he received an overseas posting to Latin America after his term as Rector was completed. A Spanish course in Cochabamba, Bolivia, was part of his preparation for missionary work in Peru but this assignment was changed to Chile 12 months later.

Given his background in addition to his contribution in parishes, he was made the Regional Bursar of the Columban Society in Chile, and in 1986 took over as manager of the Columban centre house in Santiago.

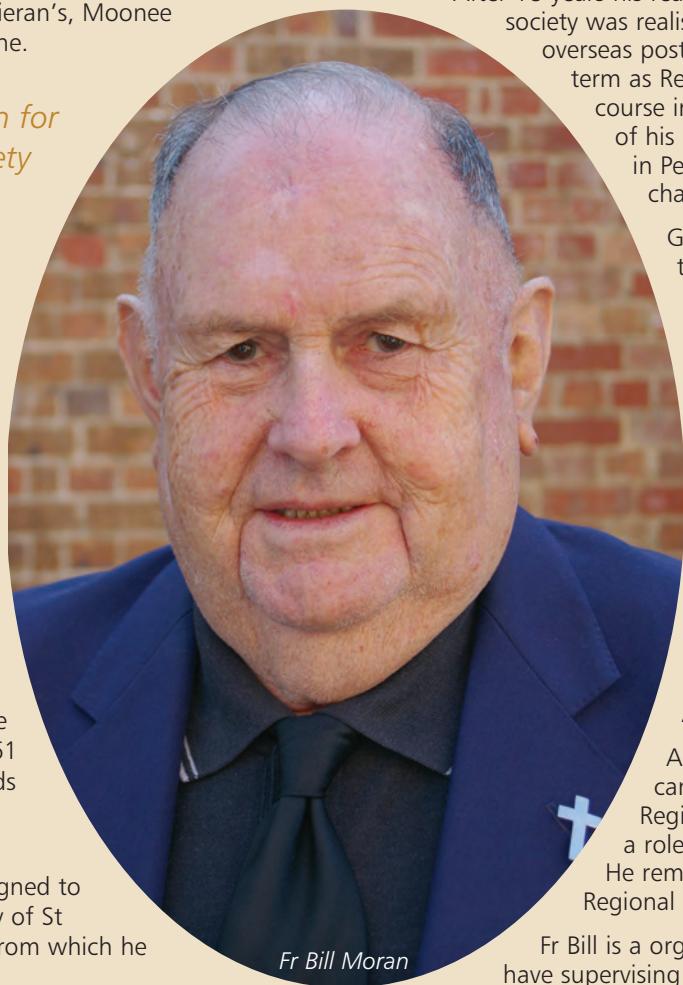
In 1988 Fr Bill returned to the Australia/New Zealand Region where he was appointed to New Zealand in 1989 then as Regional Director in 1990 for four years. At the end of that assignment he was Chile-bound again however health concerns forced his recall to Australia.

Another responsible position came his way when he became the Regional Bursar in Australia in 1995, a role he held until December 2009. He remains an adviser to the present Regional Bursar.

Fr Bill is a organised man, a good priest to have supervising the Columban Society's financial affairs at a Regional level. He is a man of integrity, dependable and thorough in all he does.

He has held key positions of leadership in the Society throughout his life as a Columban missionary priest and has always been willing to do what the Society has asked of him.

We congratulate Fr Bill on his 50 years of priestly service given to the Missionary Society of St Columban and the Church.



Fr Bill Moran

# Darkness that nurtures

SR REDEMPTA TWOMEY

*Darkness and light  
are both important  
in the rhythm  
of our lives.*



*E*very year without fail, in the cold dark days of January in Ireland, or August in Australia/New Zealand, a quiet miracle takes place. In gardens, at the foot of tall trees or in forgotten corners, a small white flower emerges from the hard and often frozen earth. Like a secret long hidden in the dark, the snowdrop emerges without fuss or fanfare; a little white flower whose presence in these wintry days draws an 'Aah' from even the bleakest soul.

Shortly afterwards the crocus comes, then daffodils, narcissi and all the wonderful flowers of spring. But it is the little snowdrop that first breaches the bleakness, that gently and silently hints at something or someone beyond the deepest darkness. 'I shall give you treasures from dark vaults, and hoards from secret places...' (*Isa 45:3*).

Who would have thought so delicate and seemingly frail a flower, with her bowed head on so slender a stem could withstand the cold of January? Who could have imagined that the darkness held so precious a treasure?

*The nurturing power of darkness is a great gift from God. But how hard it is for us to believe this! How difficult to wait with patience, with acceptance, for the creative power of God...*

Life grows in darkness. Hidden in the silent earth, seeds and bulbs are nurtured until the day comes when they emerge into the light. We too need darkness in our soul-making journey through life. There are treasures hidden in our hearts, treasures we ourselves do not know, though we may sometimes get a glimpse of the riches within. More often we bemoan the dark, lash out against our painful and unwanted circumstances, and ignore the little shoots climbing to the light.

The nurturing power of darkness is a great gift from God. But how hard it is for us to believe this! How difficult to wait with patience, with acceptance, for the creative power of God to bring us through. 'On those who lived in a land as dark as death, a light has dawned' (*Isa 9:2*).

Seasons of growth take time. No one becomes fully human in an instant. 'In calm detachment lies your safety, you strength in quiet trust' (*Isa 30:15*). We do not lose hope in the darkness, nor do we give up the struggle. We trust as we reach out to, and work with, our compassionate Creator and Father. We can be certain that, no matter how terrible our lives may seem, He will, in His own time, fill us with light. Then our life, like the snowdrop, will reflect something of His beauty.

---

*Sr Redempta Twomey is assistant editor of the Far East at St Columban's, Navan, Ireland.*

# People between two worlds

FRANK HOARE

*The Banabans were forced by the British Government to leave their original home.*



*Kinoya and Toka dance during the evangelization camp.*

Photos: Fr Frank Hoare

*F*JIAN girls are lucky when they marry Banaban men because they don't have to do any work outside in the hot sun. They do only housework. But when a Banaban girl marries a Fijian man she has to fish, plant crops and gather firewood as well as attending to the housework."

Lucien, a Banaban woman went on to explain, to the surprise of the visiting Fijian teenagers, that in the Banaban culture a man, once married, leaves his family to live in the woman's place. "He is expected to be a good provider, not just for his wife and children, but also for his wife's parents, she said.

This sharing on culture took place on Rabi Island while a team from Labasa parish held an evangelization camp with Catholic Banaban youths during the December holidays.

*The 5,000 inhabitants of Rabi Island are Banabans who were moved there from the phosphate rich Ocean Island by British colonials at the end of 1945.*

Six young Fijians, two Peruvian lay missionaries and myself traveled seven

hours by bus from Labasa to Napuka and then 45 minutes by boat to Rabi. The 5,000 inhabitants of Rabi Island are Banabans who were moved there from the phosphate rich Ocean Island by British colonials at the end of 1945.

## **Welcome**

My experience of a Banaban welcome came as a shock. Because I am a priest a married woman washed my feet in a basin of water and a young unmarried woman wiped my feet dry with her long black hair. One of the ladies then garlanded me with a lei of flowers and placed a wreath of flowers on my head.

Our Banaban hosts looked after us well. A catechist and his wife cooked for us during our five day stay. Fish and root crops were plentiful. Our hosts killed a pig for us on the last day. The lay missionaries and I were lucky to have a bed or mattress at night. Our Fijian youths had no difficulty, however, in curling up on a mat and sleeping soundly.

### **Interaction**

The lay missionaries had prepared the resource materials. Our group of four young women and two young men were familiar with the sessions they were going to facilitate.

They divided into two teams. Each morning our senior team explained the Lumko seven step method of bible sharing to the out-of-school Banaban youths.

They also facilitated sessions to explore personal identity. Our junior team explored creatively the work of God, Jesus and the Spirit, with secondary school students who had recently received the sacrament of confirmation.

Bible study and group sharing were interspersed with songs and ice-breakers which had shouts of laughter resounding around the compound.

We gathered for hymn practice in the mid-afternoon. Then we were free to swim in the sea or explore the island. Each evening I said Mass and facilitated a discussion on culture.

### **Results**

The timing of our camp for the beginning of the summer holidays was not the best. Some Banaban students had gone to Suva to perform their traditional dancing.

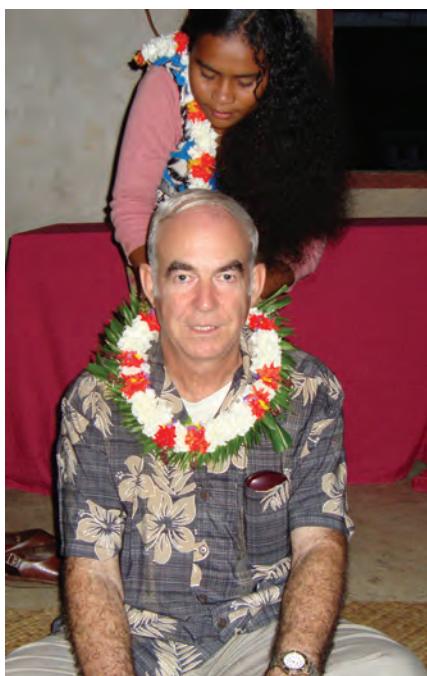
However, the participants' enthusiasm compensated for the disappointing numbers and they received their certificates proudly at the final Mass.

Our team was quiet on the return journey. Some parents and key parishioners welcomed us back to Labasa with yaqona, tea and cake at the presbytery. They listened proudly as their children described the highlights of the camp.

We journeyed to Rabi Island to share the good news of God's love for us. In return we learned a little about the Banaban people, their history and culture. Interest replaced ignorance. When we meet Bababan people in future in Labasa or Suva we will meet and greet them differently.

---

*Columban Fr Frank Hoare first went to Fiji in 1973.*



*Fr Frank is welcomed with a lei by a young Banaban.*

### **A sketch of the history of Banaba (Ocean Island).**

The island of Banaba began as an underwater peak in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Polyps built a coral base on it in shallow sea water. When the island appeared above sea level, bird-droppings over centuries laid down a 40 feet deep guano covering. The guano changed into phosphate when the island went underwater.

Thrust above sea level again, seeds of different trees and plants were dropped on the island by passing birds. Eventually the 1500 acre island between Nauru and the Kilibati group had tons of the purest natural phosphate fertilizer in the world.

Albert Ellis discovered the phosphate in 1900. For almost 80 years the British Phosphate Commission mined the phosphate making enormous profit but destroying the island.

The Japanese occupied the island for three years during the Second World War and used its people as forced labor in other places. After the war the British decided to buy Rabi Island in Fiji with Banaban money from royalties. They resettled most of the Banaban people there on December 15th, 1945.

The Rabi Island Council of Elders took a legal case in 1976 to the British High Court against the Phosphate Company and the British Government. The Judge ordered the company to pay substantial damages and found the British Government morally, though not legally, negligent. Because of an outcry by ordinary British people after viewing a TV program on Ocean Island, the British Government offered an ex gratia payment of \$10,000,000 Australian dollars in mid-1977.

# The battle seems endless

SEAN MARTIN



*Local indigenous people will suffer if mining is allowed in their forest.*

Fr Sean Martin visits the site of the bridge collapse.

We continue to go to Court to answer charges brought against some Subanen tribal people who are committed Christians and protectors of the environment by mining companies.

These include charges against myself and Columban Sr Patty Adonaire, who is a missionary from Peru, simply because we support the local people in affected villages of San Jose Parish in Midsalip, Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. These local people are blocking the operation of drilling equipment for mineral exploration in this sensitive upland landscape.

The Midsalip area is the home of the indigenous Subanen tribe. Mt Pinukis, their sacred mountain is under threat from multinational mining companies who wish to engage in open-cast mining of its minerals. As the price of minerals on the world market has risen, applications to mine this area

A few courageous bishops, sisters, priests, lay leaders, and human rights

lawyers have supported the protests of the Subanen people and prevented mining from taking place. The Working Group on Mining in the Philippines (WGMP) funded a study entitled *Philippines: Mining or Food?* by Robert Goodland\* and Clive Wicks.\*

*Some local politicians also smell wealth and collude with Manila-based, or foreign, financiers. They help themselves to money that should rightly go to citizens of the municipality.*

Regarding the Midsalip area the report concludes, "This is a critical water catchment area. ...mining and irrigated rice and fish farming are conflicting

activities and are incompatible in an area that produces valuable agricultural and marine food supplies... Mining will also affect the significant investment of the international community in reafforestation. It will pollute and cause erosion and siltation of the rivers, exacerbate geohazard and landslide problems...The indigenous community will be particularly impacted if mining proceeds in their lands.

*Their right to Free Prior Informed Consent has been denied...The authors recommend that no mining or exploration proceed in Midsalip."*

The Subanen, or Lumads as indigenous tribal people are termed in Mindanao, regard the forest as their cathedral. It's where they meet God. But outsiders have been coming to fell their trees and take gold and iron ore, plundering the forest and the livelihoods of the people. Logging and mining bring flooding and erosion and often fatal

landslides. There are many problems imported here by those who come in search of riches.

They often have legal rights while the inhabitants are left powerless in the face of their activities. The policy makers always seem to miss seeing the wood for the trees. They say they are protecting the environment but the truth is that they are not. It is the local people who are protecting the environment and they have been doing it for a long time.

Some local politicians also smell wealth and collude with Manila-based, or foreign, financiers. They help themselves to money that should rightly go to citizens of the municipality.

For example, monies received from Central Government are supposed to be allocated to help local government units provide essential services to the people.

When 30 people were injured on January 14, this year there was little help from the local municipal authorities. People from three villages had come together in Palili to repair a hanging wire bridge which they need to cross the Ecuan river, especially when the river is flooded with raging waters after heavy monsoon rains.

When there was a call for dinner they crossed over to the other side; the old cable snapped unexpectedly and all 30 fell more than 10 metres into the river and there were many injuries.

One of the worst injured had to be taken to hospital in Pagadian City - over 60kms away.

People could not remember how old the wire cables were. There were strong cement supports on the banks, but it was down to local people to do any regular maintenance, such as replacing timber boards when they rotted. All this has traditionally been

done through co-operation among villages in the area.

However, others do the right thing even when it costs them. They remain outside the radar of local and national Government. They believe sustainable development is important so they can put food on their tables. Many communities work together to help each other, and not only in times of crisis. They are trying to prevent bigger tragedies.

*\* Clive Wicks is a conservation and development consultant specialising in the impact of extractive Industries on the environment.*

*\* Robert Goodland is a tropical ecologist who worked for the World Bank for 25 years.*

---

*Fr Sean Martin has been a missionary in the Philippines since 1975.*



A local Subanen worker.

# Becoming more missionary

GERRY NEYLON



Fr Gerry Neylon celebrating Mass privately.

Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff

*Witnessing to the Good News is all you are allowed to do.*

*J* feel that in my present role in China I am more missionary now than I have ever been in my 37 years as a Columban priest. We don't have accurate figures of how many Catholics belong to each sector of the Church but it is estimated that there might be about 10 million in each.

In 1973, I was ordained on Easter Sunday and took up an appointment to South Korea. At that time all the Christian Churches were attracting lots of new members because the Churches were standing up for those, in particular the industrial labourers, who were being harassed by the Government.

We were kept busy with programs and plenty of opportunities to be involved with parishioners. The language was difficult but we had every opportunity to practise and plenty of people willing to help us.

After four years in Korea I was asked to go to Taiwan and spent 17 years there, from 1979 to 1996. I found it a totally different scene, where there was little interest in the Church. On weekends we would have only 70 to 80 worshippers at Mass so there was no way we could approach the mission as we had been doing in

Another factor that affected Mass attendance was the work pattern of many parishioners. They did not, quite simply, have time to go to church. They often worked two jobs, one during the day and one at night, and had just two consecutive days.

In these circumstances we had to ask ourselves how we might be relevant to the lives of those around us. After much discussion with parishioners and the local people, another Columban

*My mission obliges me to adopt a low profile. I cannot talk about my Christianity but I can witness to it as I relate to others.*

priest and I opened centres for mentally impaired children in our parishes. Taiwanese society looks down on these children. They feel that they are useless and many are locked up at home because they do not want the neighbours to see them.

Lay missionaries from the US with expertise in special education came to work with us. The centres are still going strong and the children's progress and well-being are wonderful to behold.

However, my missionary journey in Taiwan came to an end when, in 1996, I received a phone call from the Columban leader asking me to go to China. The other Columbans who were in China at the time, primarily taught English in Chinese universities as an effective form to witnessing to Jesus Christ in a country where non-Chinese are not allowed to be involved in religious activities.

The idea of moving to China did not sit well with me. I didn't see the need for it.

After much soul searching and discussion on my particular role I came to China. I arrived a month after the British handed over Hong Kong to the Chinese on 1 July 1997.

My training as a priest and my experience of working with special-needs children could not be used directly in China. Most of the props of my Irish cultural background, my seminary training and my experience as a missionary in Korea and Taiwan were effectively removed in my new situation.

My new mission forced me to put all my emphasis on witnessing to Jesus Christ by the way I live my life as a

Christian. There is no shortage of opportunity to do that in a country that attaches no importance to religion.

My being in China is about forming relationships, interaction with the people here in as deep and intimate way as I can, and letting them see for themselves what a Christian is. My mission obliges me to adopt a low profile. I cannot talk about my Christianity but I can witness to it as I relate to others. I would like to include a short story to illustrate this point.

On May 12, 2008 there was a massive earthquake in Sichuan Province which killed almost 90,000 people. It happened at 2:28p.m. in the middle of a school day. Many local schools collapsed and thousands of children died in the ruins of poorly built school buildings. Because of the one-child policy this meant the end of the line for many couples, which translates into unimaginable desolation for Chinese people.

A woman doctor was working her shift in a local hospital when the earthquake hit. She lived alone with her mother and wondered all afternoon what might have happened to her. She was so busy with the dead and dying arriving at the hospital that she could not contact her mother.

After work she returned home to find her house destroyed and then frantically searched the area for her mother. To her great joy she found her alive but she was pinned under a boulder. They talked for a while and then her mother died suddenly. She was totally distraught and inconsolable. She had no religion of any kind. For her, her mother was dead and that was the end of her.



A few weeks after that, in the course of my work, I was asked to see this woman. I talked to her but, because I am not allowed to be involved in any form of proselytising, I spoke to her about my own belief in the after-life and what it meant to me when my mother died. I was able then to introduce her to the local Chinese priest. She is now taking instruction in the Catholic faith with him.

I am convinced that it is at the level of witness that we can make most impact. I can facilitate but I cannot instruct people in the faith. However, I can show others what my faith means to me and they can decide to take or not to take the next step. In fact, I have come to believe that witness by my life-style is the most effective form of evangelisation.

I take very seriously the advice of St Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel at all times - if necessary use words".

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*Fr Gerry Neylon lives and works in China.*



# 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.*



## Caritas and UNICEF to prepare child plan

Bangladesh (UCAN) - Caritas in association with UNICEF Bangladesh, is formulating a plan for "Child Protection in Emergencies," the first initiative of its kind for a local NGO.

The agency is currently working to develop draft guidelines for various NGOs that work for and with children to ensure their safety and security during an emergency.

The Caritas UNICEF partnership was launched officially at a recent training workshop entitled: National Cluster on Child Protection in Emergencies at the Caritas Development Institute in Dhaka June 1-5.

Some 27 Caritas staff from seven regional offices attended the workshop that was led by Save the Children trainers.

Participants, many of whom have experience of working with vulnerable children at Child Friendly Centres in

disaster-prone areas, said the training will enhance their capacity to serve more efficiently.

"We've been working with street children for a long time. The training will help me create a friendlier environment for them," said Bakul Gomes, 40.

Daud Jibon Das, 32, who has worked with children in southwestern Bangladesh following natural disasters said, "After natural disasters when children lose their parents they are seriously affected psychologically. They need to recover so that they can get on with their lives as normally as possible," he asserted.

Mafuza Huq, 55, a trainer from Save the Children said, "Caritas has been working with children for a long time. We hope what they have to offer will be better from now on with their new techniques in childcare."

## The plight of refugee children

Sydney (FIDES) - 'The Australian Government has decided to send 800 refugees to Malaysia, including children who are alone, in a sort of exchange of refugees. This initiative will not only endanger the lives of the young, but would violate the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, signed also by Australia'.

The warning, is issued in a statement from Fr Jim Carty, Co-ordinator of the Marist Asylum Seekers and Refugee Services in the Archdiocese of Sydney. "The Immigration Minister, Chris Bowen would automatically become the legal guardian of all these immigrant children who arrived in Australia by sea, seeking asylum. Sending them to a country where human rights are insecure and their safety is not guaranteed, is a clear failure of the UN Convention that Australia had assured to fulfil" declared Fr Carty.

In a meeting with representatives of the Australian Refugee Council, Amnesty International, House of Welcome, Jesuit Refugee Service, Red Cross and other groups working in favour of refugees, Fr Carty highlighted his concern regarding the decision of the Minister that would be included in the so-called "Malaysian Solution". "No one can guarantee the safeguard nor the protection of children



## Mission Intention for July

For the religious who work in mission territories, that they may be witnesses of the joy of the Gospel and living signs of the love of Christ.

# Editorial



## Guantanamera

upon arrival in Malaysia," insisted Fr Carty. "They would be subject to Malaysian law which also includes flogging". The priest said he was horrified by this proposal, considering it a matter of government policy that would like to "trade" the 800 refugees in return for 4000 refugees detained in Malaysia.

Fr Carty also stated that government policies on both sides of the political spectrum have fuelled a kind of fear towards boat people. The main concern is for asylum seekers, particularly children, who could face starvation and abuse, failure to attend school and be at risk of being detained for more than four or five years.



*Guantanamera* is a popular song lifted from a poem by Jose Marti, a Cuban national hero. *The Sandpipers* made it an enormous hit in the 1960s (if you remember); it remains an inspiring song.

One of the lines is, "With the poor people of this world I wish to share my fate." It came to mind when I was reading some of the articles for this issue of *The Far East*.

Fr Sean Martin lives close to the ground in Mindanao, Southern Philippines with the Subanen people as other Columbans have before him.

Fr Colin McLean lives in humble circumstances in Salvador, Brazil, and dreams of making the Good News alive through dance and theatre, to assist the people he lives among to realise

Frs Paul McCartin in Japan, Frank Hoare in Fiji, Gerry Neylon in China try to spread the gospel in vastly different cultural contexts. Fr Tony Cox is a chaplain at the Stella Maris Seafarer's Centre in Melbourne; a lot closer to home he is preaching the same message.

It is not just poor people in whom God is interested. God loves the rich also. But God, being God, has a special concern for the fringe dwellers of global society. The Good News of Jesus Christ is the song and we (all of us) are the words by our witness.

TFE@columban.org.au

# Dying villages of Japan

PAUL McCARTIN

*Fr Paul McCartin explains how Japanese are trying to preserve traditional villages.*



Photos: Fr Paul McCartin

*Hamaguchi Takashini and his wife Yoshino.*

**T**raditional Japanese food is now quite popular in the West while the Japanese themselves, are eating more meat and bread and less fish and rice. Japanese life has changed so much that there is a movement to protect traditional culture.

Two people intent on preserving traditional life are Hamaguchi Takashi and his wife Yoshino. I first met them at a conference in Tokyo on eco-villages. They told me about their project to make their small village into a living museum where people can experience rice planting, charcoal-making, animal husbandry, forestry and other facets of the traditional Japanese life.

Takashi and Yoshino, who is Catholic, live in a disused school in a hamlet called Handomari on the island of Fukue in the Goto Islands which are in Nagasaki Prefecture. The Gotos figure

prominently in the history of the Church in Japan, so I decided to visit the Hamaguchis to see their project and learn something about the history of the Church in Japan.

*The Hamaguchi's project is part of a nationwide effort to revive rural villages. There are around 8,000 villages in danger of disappearing from the map.*

Hamaguchi-san was originally from Tokyo and a teacher before working for an agricultural organization for which he visited over 100 farming areas all over the country. He first saw the village where he now lives on one trip and fell in love with it. His wife is from the island and felt she had to 'look after' the church when she first saw it.

Takashi said that the traditional Japanese life is environment-friendly and, of course, goes back a long way, whereas eco-villages are a recent European idea. The peak of traditional Japanese life may have been about 200 years ago, i.e. before the modern era, before the U.S. forced Japan to 'open up'. About 4,000 foods were eaten. (I think I remember reading that a typical American eats fewer than 100).

Takashi and Yoshino intend to build a proper place for visitors to stay or just be welcomed. Already they get some visitors. When I was there, a man from Saitama, just north of Tokyo, was helping to clear a field. He goes down once a month and it must cost him a lot of money in transport. I presume he does the work for free and that he is keen on eco-villages.

The Goto Islands which includes Fukue Island lie south west from Nagasaki. They are a Catholic stronghold where 30% of the population is Catholic (compared with .4% of the population in Japan). The ferry from Nagasaki City to Fukue Island takes four hours.

Many thousands of Catholics fled to the islands to escape persecution on the mainland. Handomari church which does not have a resident priest is only 50 metres from the old school where the Hamaguchis live. All the residents of the hamlet, even the non-Christians, help clean the church.

To avoid persecution many Christians went underground. Even today some of them still practise their faith in secret and have not told the local priest they are Catholic. Takashi told me that you don't know some of the people are Catholic till you go into their homes.



*The Catholic Church is 50 metre from where they live.*

According to Hamaguchi-san, Christian villages are experiencing faster population decline than Buddhist villages. He says this is because Christians do not have strong ties to the land. Many Christians moved to their present land to avoid persecution, i.e. they have not 'always' lived there. And as late arrivals their land may have been second grade.

There are just five households and nine people in the village (average age over 60), which is near the beach of a small picturesque inlet. Two of the households are newcomers. Two of the oldies are fishermen and one a farmer. At its peak there were 18 households.

The Hamaguchi's project is part of a

nationwide effort to revive rural villages. There are around 8,000 villages in danger of disappearing from the map. With the small number of children in Japan, the population is ageing quickly and the population of many rural villages is falling fast. On Fukue Island there are many abandoned houses. Takashi said that the owners are reluctant to sell the land their family has farmed for centuries. They might rent it.

The people in Handomari clean the beach about three times a month. Lots of the rubbish washes up is from Korea. To protect the sea it is necessary to take care of the river that flows into the sea, and to care for the river it is

necessary to care for the forests beside the river.

On Sunday the Hamaguchs took me to 8:00a.m. mass at Uragashira church, about 15 minutes away by car. There were perhaps 200 people there, with most of the women on the right and the men on the left. All the women wore veils. The people were just in socks, no slippers.

To repay their hospitality and support their project, I bought some of the noodles and sauce the Hamaguchs sell to raise funds for the project.

---

*Fr Paul McCartin has been a missionary in Japan since 1979.*



*Fukue island is part of the Goto Islands south west of Nagasaki.*

# A Gospel theatre

COLIN McLEAN

*Fr Colin McLean hopes to build an 80 seat theatre.*



Photos: Fr Colin McLean

*Fr Colin McLean wishes to bring youth into the church.*

*“Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.” (Joel 3:1b) How wise was the prophet Joel! Well, I was once a young man with a vision. Now I am an older man, and the vision has become a dream, a dream that I hope will become realized and not just “what could have been.”*

Since my seminary days I have had the vision of using theatre arts in the service of the Gospel. I have utilized theatre among youth in the Philippines, and now in Brazil, in an effort to create self-esteem in those living in communities on the periphery of society, and to deepen awareness in audiences of social injustices in our society.

In Brazil one such injustice is the racial discrimination towards Afro-Brazilians and indigenous people that is still strong in many areas, despite the government’s much touted image as a multi-racial democracy.

*...and (we) are now in the happy position of preparing plans to get the necessary permit for the construction of a modest theatre that will seat an audience of 80 people.*

More recently I was instrumental in forming and registering a non-government organization (NGO),

*Espaço Cultural Cena Um, (A Cultural Scene)* with encouragement, suggestions, and financial help from friends. The two principal aims of this organization are to strengthen self-esteem and to raise awareness of social injustices.

For almost five years we operated from the second floor of a warehouse that we rented. Eventually, we applied for an international grant to assist us to buy a property on the edge of the city of Salvador, not far from the parish where most of our young participants and I live.

Its location will help us attract more youth from neighboring communities to participate in one of our three

performance companies: (a) Scene One Theatre Company, (b) Dance

Company Levante dos Malês (named after a strong urban slave uprising in Salvador in 1835) and (c) Scene One Acrobatic Quartet. The name "Scene One" refers to the theatre as our medium of expression (Scene) and the first step in raising social awareness – provoking a questioning of our reality (One).

In 2005, two young men from our dance company had the opportunity to travel to Australia, where they participated for two months in classes at the NAISDA Aboriginal and Islander Dance School. People working in justice education with the Columban Fathers in Australia were impressed by their Afro-Brazilian dance performances.

As a result, they organized an invitation for seven members of our dance company to participate in World Youth Day 2008 in Sydney, Australia. Five young men and two women from Brazil participated in the "*Columban Youth Theatre of the Oppressed*," with the group AKBAY (from the Columban founded and run PREDA child abuse center in the Philippines) and youth from St Peter's College in Tuggerah, New South Wales.

After returning to Brazil, we applied for the deed to the property we purchased, endured months of waiting and are now in the happy position of preparing plans to get the necessary permit for the construction of a modest theatre that will seat an audience of 80 people. Hopefully, construction will begin soon

We are not yet certain we have sufficient funds left from the grant to cover the total cost of construction after the property's purchase, but we will jump that hurdle as we come to it.



*Gifts from some young women at the offertory procession.*

We will have to look for funding to cover our monthly overheads until we get enough income from ticket sales and publicity.

We are blessed with a variety of instructors skilled in drama, afro-dance, and more recently, circus arts. Our theatre administrator, Marcelo Batista dos Santos, a married deacon from our parish of Santo Antônio das Malvinas, brings administrative experience to his job. We could certainly use someone with a theatrical background versed in publicity and marketing.

If we can get up and running, I believe we can attract a lot of young people from nearby impoverished communities, help them grow as people, and hopefully, become catalysts for change in our society.

I see the talent in the youth with whom I am in immediate contact, and I believe it is only the tip of the iceberg of talent that lies hidden in these marginalized communities. Our

Scene One Theatre has begun to give them this opportunity.

I was happy to learn that *Cirque d' Soleil* began with a staff of eight and now has 800 working around the world. It is my hope that both the vision and the dream become a reality.

---

*Fr Colin McLean lives and works in Brazil.*



*The parish music ministry keeps the beat.*



Fr Eamon Adams

# Role of dialogue

EAMON ADAMS

*Fr Eamon Adams shares some insights on dialogue and its importance in society.*

**H**s someone who was born in Northern Ireland in 1967, one year before the outbreak of what is referred to as "the troubles," I am all too aware of the heavy toll that can be demanded when dialogue is absent.

Over those years in Northern Ireland, there were too many funerals celebrated for the victims of violence; too many mothers and daughters, sons and fathers, brothers and sisters denied the opportunity to share their lives with family and friends. Too many people had their lives cut too short.

What caused the troubles in Northern Ireland? The causes, both direct and indirect, were so numerous that it is impossible to pinpoint only one. However, if we ask a different question we might cast a little more light on the topic at hand. Why did it take so long to begin the process of resolving the problems of Northern Irish society? The answer to this question is much clearer than the first question we posed. The refusal, at all levels of society, to dialogue both exacerbated and prolonged the body and soul destroying violence of the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s.

When, eventually, dialogue was entered into by a few brave souls, it became the catalyst for overcoming years of bigotry, sectarianism, injustice and violence. In short, dialogue was the answer to the Northern Ireland question.

*Although it is true that inter-religious dialogue can be a complex and demanding task, at its core lies a simple truth - it is good to dialogue.*

The role of dialogue, however, is to be found not solely at the dizzy heights of international disputes and major national conflicts, but also on the more mundane levels of life. There is a role for dialogue in the smaller, but no less important, dramas of our everyday lives such as important family decisions, unforeseen problems that can arise between husband and wife. In short, dialogue provides the firm foundation upon which the glorious cathedral of honest communication is built.

Although dialogue by no means guarantees a solution to our problems, we can be sure that a lack of dialogue will inevitably make things worse. Without dialogue we are destined to fall ever deeper into the abyss of hopelessness that so often leads to physical and emotional violence. Dialogue is always good, while lack of dialogue is, at best, precarious.

Although it is true that inter-religious dialogue can be a complex and demanding task, at its core lies a simple truth - it is good to dialogue. Through inter-religious dialogue we learn not only about our brothers and sisters of other faiths, but also about our own faith. Through dialogue we are led into that sacred space that lies within each of us, and, in turn, we are led to stand together as witnesses to the sacredness of the natural world and to each and every person within our world. Inter-religious dialogue is a quest, a quest for the sacred.

---

*Fr Eamon Adams who lives and works in Seoul, South Korea has studied Buddhism for many years.*



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

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Photo: Fr Frank Hoare

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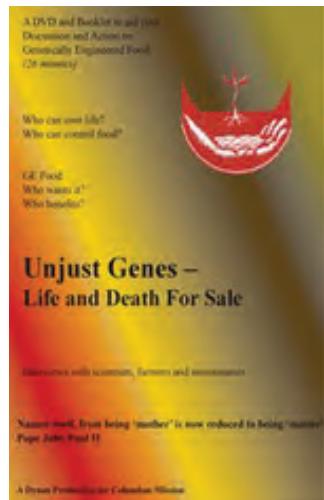
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