



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

# The Far East

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# The Far East

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**Cover:** Climbing out of the cycle of poverty at the Malate parish scout troop (see pages 6-7).

Photo: Peter Woodruff

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# From the Director



*What does being on the side of the poor mean?*

I have learned a great deal about culture and people from single incidents. In 1974 I was living in Fiji, in the Yasawas Islands off the coast of Lautoka and Ba on the western side of Viti Levu island. The trip to the Catholic Mission took about eight hours by village boat which made the journey once a week.

It was school holidays. The Marist Sisters who ran the Catholic school had returned to the mainland for a break. When the village boat arrived one afternoon, I watched it enter Na Somolevu (Big Bay) Bay. From my vantage point I was surprised to see a European woman on the deck. I was not expecting anyone. As the Sisters were gone, who could this be?

*This man may have been out of step with the rest of the people on the island but it gave me pause to reflect. Why would anyone live in a poor manner if they didn't have to do so? The Columbans have a phrase 'option for the poor' meaning we are on the side of the poor. What does that mean?*

It was a Canadian teacher from a school in another part of Fiji who had heard about the beauty of the Yasawas islands and decided to visit during the school holidays. People were supposed to have permission to visit from the Government but no one worried about it. Protocol demanded that she could not stay at the priest's house and the sisters were absent. The chief of the village made the decision that she would stay in the village with one of the teachers from the Catholic school. She stayed a week.

A couple of weeks later when people from the village were discussing 'things' and I was included in the conversation, one of the Fijian men who had a reputation for being outspoken in the sense of coming to the point, asked me this question, "Why did that woman come to the village and

shame us?" Even though I understood the question, I did not understand what he meant. He explained as follows:

"This European woman came to the village and stayed a week. She lived like us and she slept on a mat on the floor like us and she ate our food. Why was she doing this when we know that all Europeans are wealthy? Instead of having a holiday at a tourist resort, she came out here and in living like us, shamed us. We know we are poor here. If we were rich, we would not come and live among poor people and pretend to be poor. She dishonours us."

*She lived like us and she slept on a mat on the floor like us and she ate our food. Why was she doing this when we know that all Europeans are wealthy?*

This is not what she meant to do. I thought about this. I may believe that her intentions were honourable, but her intentions did not make them so. Other people had a negative interpretation. For the most part the disadvantaged party doesn't get a chance to complain.

This man may have been out of step with the rest of the people on the island but it gave me pause to reflect. Why would anyone live in a poor manner if they didn't have to do so? The Columbans have a phrase 'option for the poor' meaning we are on the side of the poor. What does that mean?

Fr Gary Walker  
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# A home not a shelter

FR DAN HARDING

*Life in a shelter for male victims of labour trafficking.*



Photos: Fr Peter Woodruff

*Victims take turns cooking at the shelter.*

Thirty-one Indonesian, four Filipino, three Thai and two Vietnamese men and Columban Fr Peter O'Neill do their best to create a family-friendly atmosphere in their home in the Taiwanese city of Hsinchu. The 40 men are all victims of labour trafficking and their home is a shelter for such victims.

The men are awaiting the outcome of their court cases against the traffickers. Their average age is 25-years-old. Some are single and some are married. Fr Peter runs this shelter and supervises the court cases.

These 40 men, like other men and women migrant workers, are the breadwinners for their families back in their home countries. To escape from poverty, their families had taken out loans of up to AUD\$7000 (NZ\$9100) from banks to be able to pay a labour broker to find them a job in Taiwan's expanding economy that pays better than what they can earn at home. This is a lot of money for poor families.

Once they begin work, money is deducted from their salaries to pay back the loan and the rest is sent as remittances to their struggling families back home. Unfortunately the evil side of human nature often intervenes to try to cheat these poor workers out of an honest living.

Each of these men has his own story. Having arrived in Taiwan as legal migrant workers, they then fell victim of labour trafficking by their different employers. This means that they were locked up in their places of work and were threatened if they left.

They were forced to work long hours for little or no pay and little rest. Later on they were rescued by the police and sent to this Diocesan shelter. Fr Peter calls this modern-day slavery. He founded this shelter in 2009 and has been living there with the victims of labour trafficking ever since. A native of Geelong, Victoria, Fr Peter is a talented sportsman

and musician. His twin brother, Fr Kevin, is a Columban missionary priest in Hong Kong and their sister Kate is a Sister of Our Lady of the Missions in Manila, the Philippines.

When Fr Peter arrived in Taiwan as a Columban missionary priest 21 years ago, he used to take long walks after his daily Chinese language class through the industrial areas around the city of Hsinchu. He noticed large numbers of Indonesian, Filipino, Vietnamese and Thai foreign workers. He started speaking with them about their difficulties at work such as long working hours, accidents and unpaid salaries. Out of these conversations grew his vocation to follow Jesus through standing up for exploited workers.

*Living with 40 men from four different nationalities with distinct languages and religions while communicating through Chinese, a language foreign to them all, is quite a challenge.*

The rescued victims of labour trafficking arrive at the shelter as broken men. They are traumatized and psychologically damaged. While awaiting the outcome of their court cases, the men receive counselling and also work to pay off their debts and send money home to their families.

Fr Peter does everything possible to give the shelter a homely feel. Communication in the shelter is in Chinese. From 8:30am to 5:30pm, he works in the Diocesan Migrant Centre which organizes the court cases against the traffickers. He returns home to the shelter for supper at 6:00pm. He likes to get the men talking about their families back home and jokes a lot with them.

In the evenings, Fr Peter plays pool and ping pong with the men. Being a talented musician, he sometimes organizes sing-a-longs with them. Birthdays are also celebrated. If any of the men are sick, he takes them to the doctors. Computer classes are available in the evenings as well as Chinese and English language classes.

Living with 40 men from four different nationalities with distinct languages and religions while communicating through Chinese, a language foreign to them all, is quite a challenge. As the men do shift work, this means that some are trying to sleep while others are watching TV or speaking with their families by phone. This can be a cause of tension. Nevertheless, Fr Peter says that there is surprisingly little rivalry or problems between nationalities and religions. He says that there is no favouritism and that all are treated equally. Difficulties are discussed and solutions agreed upon at regular house meetings.



Fr O'Neill protests with the migrant workers.



Fr Peter encourages the men to practice their own religion. Catholics are encouraged to go to Mass at the local parish, Muslims to the local mosque and Buddhists to the local temple. The shelter has a special prayer room for Christians and another for Muslims.

Due to their cultural background, some of the men find it difficult to do domestic work, which they regard as women's work. Nevertheless, Fr Peter tells them that the shelter is not a hotel and everyone must be involved in cooking their food and cleaning the building. Everyone must do his share of work.

In summary, Fr Peter says that his life is inspired by the example of Jesus, who did not discriminate against anyone and who stood up for the poor. The victims of labour trafficking are truly poor. They are modern day slaves to the greed of others.

Fr Peter says that it is very humbling to see the trust these 40 men have in him. It is for this reason that the Indonesians call him "Romo Peter" which means "Father Daddy", the Thais call him "Po Peter" which is a term of respect for an elderly father figure and the Vietnamese and Filipinos also use respectful forms to call him father.

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Fr Peter O'Neill has been Chaplain and Director of the Diocesan Migrant Worker Centre since 2006.



Photos: Fr Peter Woodruff

# Climbing out of poverty

SOPHIE CASTILLO & FR JOHN LEYDON

Many families live on the footpaths of the streets around the Columban parish of Our Lady of Remedies, Malate, Manila, the Philippines. These are known as street families. Generations of parents and their children spend their entire lives, cooking, eating, working and sleeping on these footpaths in the tropical climate. Babies and young children grow up living on street footpaths and have very little hope of breaking out of this cycle.

These families are on the bottom rung of society, the poorest of the poor. Their poverty is usually aggravated by a mental health or addiction problem

of one or both of the parents. The street families depend on their children as a source of income through begging, receiving tips for watching over cars or other similar chores.

Our Lady of Remedies parish has prayed about how it can offer a “remedy” to the dire situation of street families. One such way is to offer the children from street families educational coaching to help their children keep up with their studies and continue in school. The parish also offers the children one decent meal a day through its nutrition programme.

Another important remedy to the situation of street families is the setting up of a parish scout troop specifically for their children. Fr Enrique Escobar, a Columban Associate priest from Peru and several full-time workers from the Boy Scouts of the Philippines were instrumental in developing this troop.

Mother of two children, Mrs Sophie Castillo, is the parish scout troop leader. She and her husband are full-time workers for the scouting movement.

According to Sophie, the benefit for these children joining the scout troop is that it helps to break the

psychological restrictions that the children feel regarding their futures. It offers them hope. She tells them that they do not have to live on the street footpaths as their parents and grandparents have lived. She says, "I urge the children to think and dream beyond their present situation. I say to them do not limit your dreams. You do not have to stay living on the street. Work for and follow your dream."

The scout troop meet every Saturday afternoon. Twenty four children joined the first year. Seven of them were completely unmanageable and were asked to leave.

*"I urge the children to think and dream beyond their present situation. I say to them do not limit your dreams. You do not have to stay living on the street. Work for and follow your dream."*

The children who stayed soon lost interest and began to drop out. The scout leaders and the parish social worker had to look for these children on the streets and encourage them to come to the meetings. Sophie says that this difficulty was compounded by the fact that many of the parents did not encourage their children to attend. They were concerned that the scouts were taking their children away from work and the income it gave the family.

Over time however, the children themselves began to love their Saturday afternoon scouting. Even the seven who had been put out for bad behaviour at the beginning were successfully readmitted. Now over 30 children eagerly await every Saturday afternoon for the doors to open and to begin their afternoon of activities.



*Scouts of the Malate parish troop.*

Sophie says that even though the children live in very difficult circumstances, they are close to their families. At times their parents are not good to them, yet they still love them. They want to continue to live with them on the street footpath. This is the only home they know.

The Our Lady of Remedies parish scout troop is part of a scouting movement called, "Ticket to Life Scouts" which is a project for children in very difficult circumstances. It is designed to help children develop a plan for their lives by schooling them in responsibility and fostering personal development.

Sophie shares the stories of two of her scouts. Jerwin is 14, the eldest of six children and lives with his family on the street footpath. He earns \$2 every night driving passengers on a bicycle. When he started in the scout troop, he was a glue sniffer. He dropped out for a year, joined again and then left again. He is now back in the scout troop, back at school and no longer sniffs glue. His mother who is a drug addict has tried to discourage him from participating in the scouts so that he can earn money.

Marlene is also 14 and lives on the street footpath with her family. She has two older brothers and two sisters. She helps her mother who is a

street vendor selling cigarettes, soft drinks and sweets. When her father and two brothers are drunk, Marlene, her mother and two sisters, are bashed by them. Through the scouts and with the support of her mother, she has developed leadership skills and wants to be a teacher.

Columban parish priest at Our Lady of Remedies parish, Fr John Leydon, says that scout leader Sophie truly loves the children. With her help and commitment, real changes are occurring for the better in the lives of the children of street families. They are beginning to dream beyond the directionless poverty stricken routine of street life.

*Article compiled by Sophie Castillo and Columban Fr John Leydon.*



*Sophie Castillo.*

# Golden Jubilee

FR DAN HARDING

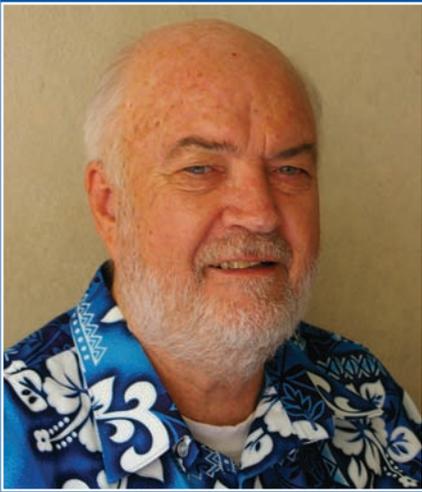


Photo: Fr Gary Walker

Fr David Arms.

David George Arms was born at Lower Hutt, New Zealand on May 10, 1939. He is the middle child of three children born to George and Agnes Arms.

David received his primary education from SS. Peter and Paul's, Lower Hutt and his secondary education from the Marist Brothers at St Bernard's College, Lower Hutt.

Accepting his vocational call to become a Columban missionary priest in 1956, he began his preparation at Sassafras outside Melbourne and finished at Wahroonga and Turramurra in

Sydney. He was ordained a priest at Sacred Heart Basilica, Wellington on June 29, 1962 by Bishop Kavanagh of Dunedin Diocese.

For several years following ordination, Fr David studied Linguistics and the Latin and Spanish languages in Australia, Ireland, Germany and the United States. From 1970-1976, he was assigned to Fiji, where he did research for his thesis on the Fijian language as well as serving as parish priest in several Columban parishes. In September 1976, Fr David received a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Michigan. A month later, he became the Regional Director of the Fijian Region.

A month after this appointment he was elected as the Vicar General of St Columbans's Mission Society at the 1976 General Chapter in Baguio in the Philippines. This meant a move to Ireland for six years. Upon completion of his term as Vicar General, in 1982, Fr David was appointed to Pakistan where he worked on the study of the Parkari language in order to devise a Parkari grammar and dictionary.

In April 1984, Fr David returned to Fiji in the hope of beginning work in Vanuatu. As the awaited visa for Vanuatu never eventuated, he was appointed in 1985 Vice Director of the Fiji Region. Since that time, Fr David has taken on a variety of roles such as the Fijian Regional Justice and Peace Coordinator, work on courses for the Fijian Hindi language and the Subanen tribal language in the Philippines, Vice Director again, assistant priest in parishes and Regional Bursar for Fiji.

Missionary life can be dangerous as well. On one occasion, the parish utility truck rolled three or four times with Fr David aboard and on another occasion, the engine on a small boat he was travelling in failed and it drifted for 12 hours in the open sea.

We congratulate Fr David on 50 years of ordination and the many gifts he has brought to his missionary priesthood.



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- Walk in the footsteps of St Columban
- Become a missionary priest for others
- Work in solidarity with the poor

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# Tongue control

SR REDEMPTA TWOMEY

Photo: Bigstockphoto.com

A woman went to confession to St Philip Neri and said that she had been gossiping about others. For her penance he told her to go out and buy an unplucked fowl in the market.

On her way back she was to pull out the feathers one by one and scatter them along the way. She should then return to him and he would tell her what to do next. Feeling not a little foolish, she did as he asked and came back to him with the plucked bird. St Philip praised her for her obedience but before she could bow out, happy that she had completed her strange penance, he said, "Now you must go back and pick up all the feathers."

"But Father," the woman exclaimed, "You know that is impossible. The wind has blown them all away and I could never hope to capture them now." "You are right," the saint replied. "Neither can you recall the damaging words about your neighbours which by now have passed from mouth to mouth far beyond your reach. Be careful in future, and gossip no more."

How easy it is for any one of us to fall into the way of gossip! Over a cup of

coffee or a beer in the pub we hint at the failings of a neighbour or pass on the unsavoury story we heard about the new teacher or the curate or the wife of the chemist. In no time a fire is started, a reputation ruined, a life wrecked. And, careless, even oblivious, of the pain we cause, we lap up yet another tit-bit to pass on.

Society itself encourages us to indulge in this kind of destruction. A whole industry is built around lewd gossip; magazines specialize in broadcasting the sins not just of celebrities but of ordinary people, authors rush to publish books full of scandals, television programmes and films keep our appetites whetted with ever more lurid accounts of the misdemeanours of others.

With the arrival of Facebook and Twitter the cruelty reaches new heights. "I spend hours on Facebook," one teenage girl confessed, "looking to see if negative comments are made about me." Some of her age group, boys and girls, feel suicidal and sadly, we know of people so distraught by the malicious gossip about them they have taken their lives.

"Consider how a small fire can set a huge forest ablaze. The tongue is also a fire" (*Jas 3:6*). All too often the tiny spark that we drop into conversation blazes out of control and we are powerless to stop it. Our words, as St Paul tells us, should be for the encouragement, the building up of others, not their destruction (*see 1 Thess 5:11*).

What a difference it would make if we were more careful of our words, if we used them to speak well of others and steadfastly refused to join in the current gossip, or to spread the latest scandals.

Not only will the other be unharmed but we will find our own hearts made strong as we, with courage and discipline, try always to speak good and not evil. Better than chasing after feathers, is it not?

"O Lord, set a watch before my mouth, a guard at the door of my lips" (*Ps 141:3*).

---

*Sr Redempta Twomey is the Assistant Editor of the Far East magazine in Ireland.*



# World Youth Day Invitation

*The Regional Director of St Columban's Mission Society in Australia and New Zealand, Fr Gary Walker, recently sent a letter to the Catholic Bishops of Australia inviting the pilgrims for World Youth Day 2013 from their dioceses to participate in a four-day parish-based mission experience in Santiago, Chile on route to Rio de Janeiro. This is a copy of the letter.*

24 July 2012

*Dear Bishop .....*

In July 2013, World Youth Day (WYD) will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. As many of the youth pilgrims attending WYD Rio from Australia will be passing through Santiago, Chile on route to Rio de Janeiro, St Columban's Mission Society is inviting these pilgrims to encounter parish life and mission in some of the poorest parts in Chile.

The pilgrims will experience first-hand the mission of the church *Ad Gentes*. We expect to create awareness of the importance of the New Evangelization, of overseas and cross cultural mission and to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

There will be many young people in Chile who will not be able to attend WYD Rio. We see this experience as a mini World Youth Day for all participants. Chilean youth from our parishes in poor areas will have an encounter in faith with the young Australian pilgrims.

The Columban Fathers have worked in Chile since 1952 in over 30 parishes in poor areas. We have a very good name within the local church and society. At the moment, we have several Columban parishes as well as neighbouring diocesan parishes who would like to host pilgrims from Australia. A timetable of activities will be developed by the teams in the Chilean parishes organizing the visit of the WYD pilgrims and coordinated with the Australian Diocesan WYD organizing committee.

Columban Fr Dan Harding with 21 years of mission experience in Chile and Mrs Janette Mentha, Director of Mission Programmes at Columban Mission Centre in Melbourne will help coordinate between Australia and the parishes in Chile. They will make several trips to Chile beforehand.

This has already happened in the case of the WYD pilgrims from the diocese of Christchurch, New Zealand. In July, the Director of Youth & Young Adults Ministry, Christchurch, Mr Chris Lysaght accepted an invitation for a Columban parish-based mission

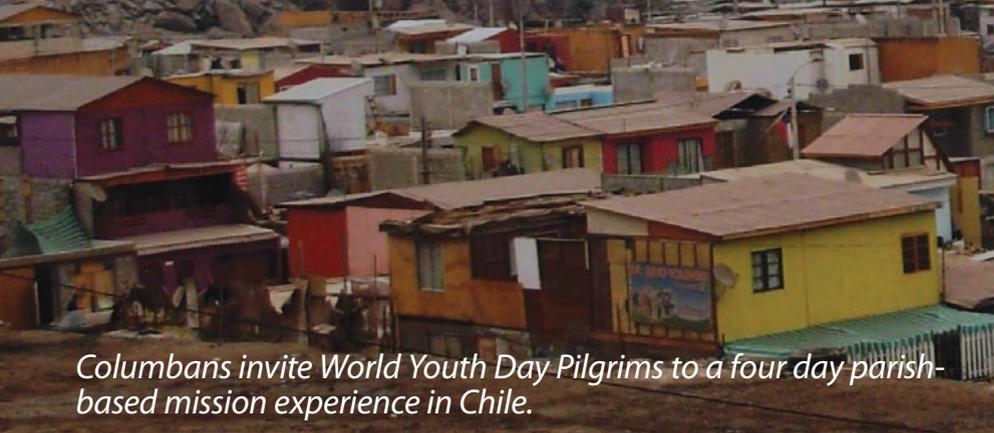
experience in the parish of "Jesus de Nazaret", Lo Espejo, Santiago, Chile (Fr Dan's previous parish). Chris travelled to Chile and met with Fr Dan, Janette, the parish priest, parish council and parish youth of Lo Espejo.

There was a lot of enthusiasm from the Chilean adults and youth who are looking forward to getting to know the Christchurch pilgrims through a WYD Facebook site. Plans are now underway for the mission experience.

If your diocese is interested in this parish-based experience, we invite members of the Diocesan Organizing Committee to meet with Fr Dan and Janette and discuss the details of the visit to Chile.

As a part of the coordination between Australia and the parishes in Chile, we invite some members of the Diocesan WYD Organizing Committee to travel to Chile to meet up with Fr Dan and Janette.

It will be an opportunity to visit the parish where their pilgrims would be assigned as the Christchurch



*Columbans invite World Youth Day Pilgrims to a four day parish-based mission experience in Chile.*



For more information about WYD 2013 - see [www.rio2013.com](http://www.rio2013.com)

diocesan WYD committee did. The Columbans in Santiago would provide accommodation during these visits.

We recognize that there will be some difficulties of communication due to language differences, (English and Spanish). Nevertheless, we will provide opportunities for translations when necessary and other forms of communication. We do not see this as a serious problem.

The parish-based mission experience programme that we propose would involve the following:

- Accommodation with local families from the parish. Lunch can be served for all in the parish centre.
- Opportunities for faith sharing through the daily Eucharist, liturgies, bible studies involving the Australian pilgrims and the Chilean parish youth and families.
- Catechetical Workshops on the New Evangelization, including the "Continental Mission" which the Latin American Church is actioning as a result of the 2007 CELAM Conference in Aparecida, Brazil.

Pilgrims will be able to witness and participate with the Parish Mission Teams in the task of evangelization.

- Opportunities to partake in pastoral action through visits to the sick and elderly, shantytowns, rehabilitation centres for substance abuse,

homework centres for children and youth, ecology programmes.

- Pilgrimages to the Shrines of local Chilean saints such as St Albert Hurtado SJ and Carmelite St Teresa of the Andes.
- Involvement in a particular project with the local parish youth group such as painting a mural, painting run down parish youth centres, planting gardens, clearing up areas.

The details will be worked out and coordinated into a timetable well before the pilgrims leave Australia. Cost will be kept to a minimum and will include a Visa into Chile, bus travel to parishes and some living costs.

Fr Dan Harding and Janette Mentha will be in Santiago in July 2013 prior to WYD to facilitate the arrival of the pilgrims and their parish experience.

They will also prepare workshop material for the pilgrims to use before leaving Australia and for use whilst they are in Chile.

We hope you will consider this opportunity and look forward to hearing from you.

*Yours in Christ,*

*Fr Gary Walker  
Regional Director  
Australia and New Zealand Region*



*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.*



*Mrs Janette Mentha and Fr Dan Harding will coordinate the mission exposure.*

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**ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY**

# New bus blessed

FR CHRIS BAKER



*In the November/December 2011 issue of The Far East, we asked our benefactors for help in buying a new bus for children and adults with disabilities in two important Columban projects in Lima, Peru. Now the new bus is ready and has been blessed.*

*Columban Fr Chris Baker blesses the new bus with the Director of Manuel Duato, Alicio Dominguez.*



Beginning work on the chassis.



Families at the blessing of the bus.



Fr Ed O'Connell & Chris Baker bless the elevator section of new bus.

Having a physical or mental disability in a poor country like Peru is a cruel fate. As poor families do not have the means to help the family member with a disability, it can mean spending much of one's life sitting in the corner of a room or lying still unable to move.

For the 60 years that the Columban Fathers have worked in the poverty stricken areas of Peru, they have been concerned about the fate of people with disabilities. This concern has led to the Columbans setting up two important projects.

Firstly, the Columbans set up the *Manuel Duato School* for children with disabilities aged from birth to 18 years. Today over 200 children with severe disabilities attend this school.

Secondly, the Columbans set up the Centre called *Association of People with Special Abilities (ASPHAD)* for those over 18 years of age. While both projects function as autonomous organizations, they still have a strong Columban involvement.

These two projects have helped people with disabilities from poor areas. Parents can have their babies checked for developmental problems by experts at *Manuel Duato*. Many young children who suffer cerebral paralysis can now receive the necessary stimulation they need to be able to improve their quality of life at the school. The *Manuel Duato School* has over 60 teachers.

Likewise 40 adults with disabilities attend the *ASPHAD Centre* every

afternoon. They participate in various workshops where they learn new abilities such as sewing, cooking and craft work. There are some participants who are in their 40s and 50s who have spent their lives confined to their homes, unable to enter into conversation. Now through the work of the Centre, they learn to speak confidently to one another or communicate in other ways and have a place to go to every afternoon.

Over time it became evident that one of the most serious problems for both places was a lack of specialized transport for those that required it. At *Manuel Duato* the families of the 27 children confined to wheelchairs find the cost of specialized wheelchair transport prohibitive as do many of the adults enrolled at the *ASPHAD Centre*.

To solve this problem, a special bus was needed to transport those who require it from either place. This bus would have to have an elevator for the wheelchairs and a space to store them when folded. The cost of such a bus would be well beyond the reach of both organizations.

Aware of this great need, Columban Fr Chris Baker set about raising AUD\$90,000 (NZ\$117,000) to buy such a bus. It would be used by both projects, the *Manuel Duato School* in the morning and the *ASPHAD Centre* in the afternoons.

About two thirds of the funds for the bus were raised in Australia and New Zealand. Other funds came from

Ireland, Britain and the United States. *The Far East* magazine campaign as well as personal friends of Fr Baker and other Columbans played an important role in raising this money.

On Monday, June 25, 2012, the new bus was formally blessed by Columban Frs Ed O'Connell and Chris Baker. According to Fr Chris, many of the disabled students, their parents and their teachers were present in the large auditorium as the ceremony began. The shiny new bus had its place of honour outside the main door.

The principal of the *Manuel Duato School*, Mr Alicio Dominguez, publicly thanked all the wonderful benefactors from other countries who had contributed to the buying of this special bus for so many disabled children and adults in Peru.

After the blessing of the bus, the traditional bottle of champagne was broken by one of the mothers and her young daughter in a wheelchair.

For Fr Chris and the *Manuel Duato School* and *ASPHAD Centre*, the next important project will be the construction of a garage to house the new bus. This is necessary to protect the bus from the elements and also to lessen the temptation to thieves well experienced in removing all or parts of any vehicle. The construction of this garage will be the new fundraising campaign.

*Fr Chris Baker has been a missionary in Peru since 1977.*

# Columbans lament Subanen murders

## *Denouncing land grabbing and terror*

Some of the poorest and most disadvantaged people in countries where Columban missionaries work are indigenous peoples. So often these peoples are the natural caretakers of the land, the sea and all their biodiversity.

In the mountains of the Zamboanga Peninsula on the southern Filipino island of Mindanao live the Subanen indigenous people. The mountains, rivers and forests are all sacred to the Subanens. They live an environmentally sustainable lifestyle, planting their food crops and raising livestock for a certain period of time before moving onto another location allowing the mountain forest to recover.

The present day reality of the Subanens is a tragic one. According to Columban missionaries with years of experience among the Subanens such as Justice, Peace and Environmental activist, Fr Frank Nally, and Midsalip parish priest, Fr Sean Martin, the majority of Subanens live in constant fear of being brutally killed. The last remaining tracts of land used by the Subanens are wanted by land grabbers for so called "development" projects such as large scale plantations of rubber trees, Jatropha trees for bio-fuels or for mining tenements. Armed groups create an atmosphere of violence to intimidate the Subanens to give up their land.

On July 5, 2012, a Subanen "Timuay" or tribal leader, Barlie Balives and his son Gerry, were horribly mutilated and killed in their mountain home four hours hike from Midsalip. According to Fr Nally, these mutilations and killings were meant to terrorize the local population into leaving their land so that outsiders seeking iron ore and gold may take their land.

As parish priest of Midsalip, Fr Sean Martin knew Barlie Balives well, particularly in the last few years. He had been one of the Subanen tribal leaders with the courage to sign "The Writ of Kalikasan." This had been issued by the Supreme Court of the Philippines in August 2011 giving protection to the environment of the Zamboanga Peninsula and along with it, the hope of protection for the Subanens of their sacred places, mountains and tropical forests.



"Timuay" Barlie Balives (second from right) and his son Gerry (third from left) were killed for protecting Subanen land from land grabbers.

Fr Sean Martin had previously been on the four-hour hike into the mountains to visit this courageous "Timuay" Barlie Balives. He says that the view from Barlie's thatched house of sacred Mt Pinukis and the surrounding forest and clear cold mountain streams took his breath away.

According to Fr Sean, in the last 20 years mining companies have come with a view to rob the mountains of their mineral wealth. Barlie had been steadfast along with other "Timuays" in protecting the land, because without the land, the Subanen indigenous peoples will be wiped out.

Fr Frank Nally having previously worked in Midsalip is now a member of the London based, "Working Group on Mining in the Philippines." He says, "The Columbans have condemned the Subanen murders and human rights violations in the Midsalip area. We lament the negative impact that extractive industries have had on indigenous peoples' lands and resources. It is clear that the escalation in violence by Government and private security forces, especially against indigenous leaders, is a consequence of mining operations in indigenous territories."

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*Original article by Columban Fr Frank Nally and edited by The Far East.*

*The Subanen Crafts project initiated by Columban Fr Vincent Busch is an endeavour to support the Subanens. Subanen Christmas Cards made by the Subanen crafters are now available (order form next page or on our website).*



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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.*

## *The Catholic News Agency "Agenzia Fides" reports from the city of Santarem on the Amazon River, Brazil.*

*The voice of the Bishops against an economic model that does not consider the native population.*

*"Even today, the Amazon is considered as a colony" says the Bishops of the Amazon region.*

"One of the problems currently faced by the peoples of the Amazon is that of the major economic projects which, besides having a huge impact on the environment, generate profits for some and cause numerous negative social impacts for cities in which they are carried out."

This was the main theme of the press conference held on July 3 by the Workshop, "St Pius X," as part of the 10th

Meeting of the Bishops of the Amazon region, which took place in Santarém, Brazil.

The speakers at the press conference were the Bishops of the Amazon Region - Bishop Berdonces of the Prelature of Cameta, Bishop Pontelo of Cruzeiro do Sul, Bishop Paloschi of Roraima and Bishop Possidonio, the Pastoral Coordinator of the Archdiocese of Belem.

Bishop Berdonces emphasized that the Amazon region is still considered today a colony where people can come, take raw material, get richer and then leave.

"This is a capitalist economic model, adopted by the government in the region of the Amazon, which does not take into account the people who live there. To them, people are just a detail that hinders development," reads a message sent by the Episcopal Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) to Fides news agency.

This message goes on to say that there is another model recommended by the Church, whose goal is the people who are in the Amazon: "The Church supports the promotion of family farming, argues that the profits of



*A village of Amazon people in Brazil.*

## **Mission Intention for September**

That Christian communities may have a growing willingness to send missionaries, priests, and lay people, along with concrete resources, to the poorest countries.

# From the Editor



## *We offer inspiration*

One of the aims of *The Far East* magazine is to offer our readers inspirational stories from the ministry of Columban missionaries at work all over the globe. We want to get these good news stories out there, to let people know what is happening and also how they can play a part in supporting these efforts.

This issue of *The Far East* has many good news stories to inspire us. There is the story of the 50 years of missionary life as a Columban priest of Fr David Arms, spent mainly in Fiji. The courage of a Subanen tribal leader, Barlie Balives and his son Gerry, who were murdered defending their land is an inspiring story.

We have the story of the special new bus for people with disabilities in Lima, Peru, that was bought with the help of Columban benefactors. Then there is the story of the children of families that live on footpaths in Manila being offered a way out of poverty through the parish scout troop.

Columban Fr Peter O'Neill lives in a shelter for 40 male victims of labour trafficking in Taiwan. Along with helping these men get justice in the courts, he tries to turn their shelter into a home.

Women who live with their children in Hyderabad prison in Pakistan are offered help to make some money through a bag making scheme set up by Columban Sr Rebecca Conlon.

Columban Fr Patrick McInerney finds some common values with Buddhists at the World Assembly of Buddhists in Bangkok, Thailand, in May this year. Then we have the story of a brave Justice and Peace worker, Tomas, in Badin parish, Hyderabad diocese, Pakistan, told by Columban Fr Dan O'Connor.

Columbans have invited World Youth Day pilgrims from Australia and New Zealand to have an experience of mission for several days in July 2013, in our parishes in Santiago, Chile while they are on route to Rio de Janeiro. This will be an inspiring event.

Let us pray that good news stories such as these in this issue of *The Far East* offer you inspiration in your everyday lives. Please pray for all Columban missionaries as they go about their ministries across the globe.

---

wealth (both mining and agriculture) should remain in Amazon, and that people should be involved."

Bishop Paloschi stressed the importance of knowing who exactly is benefitting from the profits of these large projects, which as well as having the blessing of the government, are funded with public money. He stated that people do not have guarantees over their lands which can be taken from them for some arbitrarily "agribusiness" and by economic groups that arrive in the area.

Bishop Pontelo stated that the problems of the Amazon region are the responsibility of the Bishops, who as Church leaders in this area, must intervene and act, speak out and denounce. He also said that the current meeting of Santarém marks the way to follow in the next five years.

The 10th Meeting of Bishops of the Amazon region prepared a document as a final conclusion to the meeting. They also prepared three letters: one addressed to the rulers of the States of the Amazon region, one to the People of God, the Catholic faithful and one to the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI.

---

*Dan Harding*

Fr Dan Harding  
TFE@columban.org.au



# A brave battler

FR DAN O'CONNOR

Fr Dan O'Connor tells the story of Pakistani "Justice and Peace" worker, Tomas, the son of Bhemo and Meru.

Photo: Fr Dan O'Connor

Fr Dan O'Connor plants rice with Tomas (left) and his wife and children.

*Many years ago I made a visit to the Columban parish of Badin, in Hyderabad Diocese, Pakistan. While I was there, I met Tomas and asked him what he did in the parish. He responded with confidence in English, "Justice and Peace work". I could see he was a man of character and he looked as though he had been through the wars. This is his story.*

*"My father and mother, Bhemo and Meru, worked in the fields of a local landlord as farm labourers. I had four brothers and eight sisters. One day my dad attended a Catholic celebration in Badin City. Something touched him deeply and he decided to become a Christian. My father received catechism lessons for one year and was baptised. Later my mother and the rest of the family were baptised.*

*Dad's brothers were angry that he had become a Christian. He was forbidden to visit them and he could not smoke the Hookah pipe or drink water with them. Because he had become a Christian, some Hindus made a false case in the courts against dad which dragged on for three years before being cleared. During that time, my sister and I had to flee to a distant village for safety.*

*In 1983 the Columbans came to Badin parish. While six of us were trained in the Justice and Peace apostolate, only two of us remain. This can be a dangerous mission. There is much oppression, injustice and discrimination against our Parkari Kholi tribal people who work as farm labourers on the land of*

*the landlords. When there is a problem I am called to go and investigate the situation and see what can be done to solve it.*

*On one occasion, there was a dispute between a landlord and the Haris (farm workers) who had been working on 40 acres of cotton fields. For two months they had not been paid. I was called to investigate. The overseer wondered who I was and where I came from. After two days negotiations, the workers share of the crop was given.*

*In another case, the landlord in the village of Magiou had not paid the farm labourers their share of the crop. He had also struck a farm labourer called Krishan because the landlord was against the women covering their faces in front of him. I went to the village and told Krishan and his family to escape to freedom. I said that I would wait in the village, confront the landlord and tell him to arrest me.*

*When the landlord asked who I was, I told him I was the Justice and Peace officer in Badin parish and had sent the people away because he had beaten them and not shown respect to the women. I told him I would take him to the Hyderabad court. He then replied that he would cooperate and pay the farm labourers their share of the crop.*

*I believe with my full heart and faith that Jesus is God's Son. Jesus did Justice and Peace work. He is my friend and my life. I am Jesus' soldier for Justice and Peace. I work for Muslims, Christians and Hindus and whatever caste they may be."*

Fr Dan O'Connor has been a missionary in Pakistan since 1983.

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# Bearers of good news

*Sr Rebecca Conlon writes about her work with women prisoners in Hyderabad, Pakistan.*

*Sr Rebecca Conlon stores material for the bag making project.*

A beeda, a 28-year-old mother with one small child, has been sentenced to 15 years jail for trafficking marijuana. She was caught in possession of one kilogram of the drug. Her husband, a labourer, was out of work at the time and she needed money to feed her family, as do so many others in a similar situation. She took her child to prison with her.

My friends in the local jail are Muslims and Hindus. They do not seem to be worried about their fate. I often hear them say: "Koe bat nehi. (It doesn't matter)." They also respond to my query about how they are coping with, "Allah's heart is good." It may sound fatalistic to some but it is also faith.

I visit the prison regularly and do what I can to support and share with the women and their children. My main contribution to their material welfare is an income generating scheme. We have a bag making project using traditional Sindhi cloth (Ajorak).

We provide the cloth and sewing materials for the women to make the bags. The long-term benefit for them learning this skill means that after their release from prison, they may be able to work in this area. We sell the bags locally and overseas (25 % of our market). Income from the sales cover the cost of materials and wages.

Abeeda and her companions are able to buy extra food for their children with this income and some who work

hard at the bag making have been able to earn enough to cover the cost of paying their lawyer without whom they would have no hope of being released.

To an outsider this ministry may seem so disheartening but I find it anything but that. We have a great laugh together and we celebrate our religious faith together. We do things the way we want to do them. In a way we are free to do things our own way in the prison.

We also try to support the prisoners' children. Abeeda's child was one of 12 in the jail for whom we bring educational toys to stimulate their learning process. This year a great moment for the children was our

SR REBECCA CONLON

*The long-term benefit for them learning this skill means that after their release from prison, they may be able to work in this area.*

celebration to mark Universal Children's Day. A group of children from the Christian community visited the jail (with special permission) to play games with the children of the inmates.

They began their celebration by ceremonially cutting and sharing a cake. They ate the cake even before they got into the soup. They then shared poems and songs, with the prisoners' children also participating. They played games together. Then, the *coup de grace* was a performance by a magician for whom we also had to obtain special permission from the authorities.

Finally, the children from our Christian community also presented a gift pack of clothes, toys and sweets to each of the children accompanying their mothers in the jail. They were truly bearers of good news as they prompted a moment of laughter and joy for all in the jail.

---

*Columban Sr Rebecca Conlon was assigned to Pakistan in 1990.*



*Sr Rebecca Conlon with women and children at the prison.*

*Sewing bags in the prison grounds.*





Photo: Fr. Patrick McInerney

# Amongst Monks

FR PATRICK McINERNEY

*Fr Patrick McInerney amongst monks at the Enlightenment of the Buddha Convention in May.*

*I* was invited to attend the World Assembly of Buddhists in Bangkok, Thailand in May this year. This was convened by the World Fellowship of Buddhists to celebrate the 2,600 years since the *Enlightenment of the Buddha*. A three-day Interfaith Summit followed on the theme of, *Achieving World Peace through Religious Harmony and Conflict Resolution*.

I am much indebted to my generous hosts, the Venerable Master Chin Kung and the Pure Land Learning College in Toowoomba, for this extraordinary privilege. I have had little experience living among Buddhists - most of my interreligious experience has been living among Muslims in Pakistan - so the five days in Bangkok was a new world for me, though of course it is world of ancient and venerable lineage.

There were about 600 participants in the two consecutive international events. It was wonderful to spend an extended time socially and in conference with interfaith activists from Sydney, Brisbane, Toowoomba and other parts of Australia -

Aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh - strengthening the bonds of friendship among us. This affection was expanded to the interfaith activists from Bangladesh, China, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Singapore, Vietnam and other countries, some of whom we had met previously at the *Parliament of the World's Religions* in Melbourne in 2009, many of whom we were meeting for the first time.

While the formal talks deepened our knowledge of each other's traditions and the cultural presentations heightened our appreciation of each other's cultures and arts, the informal bonding which took place over shared meals and travelling together on the bus to different venues was probably the most invaluable part of the experience.

From the talks and sharing, it's evident that we believers from different religions share many values in common - the dignity of the human person, respect for all creatures, concern for the environment, work for justice, promotion of peace,

*God of the Universe,  
In You we live, move and have our being.  
We come from many lands.  
We speak different languages.  
We follow different ways.  
We call You by different names.  
But You are above all names,  
beyond anything that we can understand,  
yet You dwell in our innermost, most intimate depths,  
and You call all of us to build peace and harmony among us,  
in our communities,  
between our communities,  
and in our world.  
Guide us. Bless us. Transform us.  
Mould us... to follow You, above all,  
in all, through all  
We ask this prayer in your Holy Name.  
Amen.*

building harmony, the primacy of the spiritual, to mention just a few. We need to build on these to promote the common good of all people and all nations even when it is at cost to ourselves. This is the demand of love. But truth also impinges on us and makes its demands. As believers we must not pretend to any arbitrary and artificial common denominators, but be faithful and authentic in following the distinct teachings and practices of our own traditions, open to learn from each other and to enrich each other, but answerable always to the higher call of the One who guides us individually and collectively in the mysterious paths of divine providence to our final destiny.

The Interfaith Summit began with prayers from representatives of the different faith communities. I was asked to represent the Christians. I composed a prayer (above) to which all could say "Amen" that was appreciated by all.

---

*Fr Patrick McInerney is the Director of the Columban Mission Institute and its Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Strathfield, NSW.*

# Helping to generate income

In Hyderabad prison, Pakistan, Columban Sr Rebecca Conlon began a scheme to help women prisoners and their children generate some income by making bags. These bags are sold locally and overseas. The income the women receive allows them to pay for a lawyer without whom they would have no hope of being released.

It is through the support of Columban benefactors that our missionary priests, sisters and lay missionaries can help make a difference to people's lives.



Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff

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