

# MISSION CALLS

## Columban Missionary Priests

Is God calling you to something .....

NEW  
EXCITING  
CHALLENGING  
DIFFERENT



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# The Far East

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# The Far East

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This is the cover of our vocation brochure showing Columban Fr Oliver McCrossan and some local people of a new housing project in the Philippines.

Photo: Fr Oliver McCrossan



# From the Editor

*Bloom where you are planted*

One of the important characteristics of Columban missionary priests, lay missionaries and sisters is to be able to bloom where they have been planted. To whatever culture, nation, continent, social class, environmental situation, religious group, political or economic situation that Columbans are sent as missionaries, they must in time make that situation their own and feel at home there. They have to bloom where they have been planted.

In this vocation issue of *The Far East* we have the stories of several Columbans and lay Catholics blooming in the countries and situations where they have been planted. Fr Donal McIlraith shares with us his commitment to the emerging Church in Fiji as a part of the broader Church in the Pacific from Guam to Tahiti.

On the occasion of his Silver Jubilee of Ordination to Priesthood Fr Patrick McMullan reflects on his missionary journey from his native New Zealand to life and ministry in South Korea.

Fr Cathal Gallagher writes of the experience of life and its challenges in a barrio, a neighbourhood in Lima, Peru, and his work with people living with HIV and AIDS.

*Let us remember all those called to a missionary vocation. Let each of us try to discover our own missionary vocation that God continues to reveal to us in our daily lives and situation.*

Fr Patrick McInerney from Sydney was invited to Rome by Cardinal Tauran to be one of ten delegates at the meeting of the "Islamic-Catholic Liaison Committee". In Rome he has an interesting meeting with Pope Francis.

Eduardo and Rosa Cueto are a Chilean couple who have committed themselves to live a simple lifestyle and dedicate themselves to the most needy around them as well as to the indigenous Pehuenche people of central-south Chile. Theirs is an inspiring vocation story of a married

couple blooming in the reality of their life situation.

Mercy Gawason, an indigenous Subanen woman from the Philippines, is the Operations Manager of *Subanen Crafts* at their workshop in Ozamiz City. She has an Associate Degree in Office Administration. She dedicates herself to helping Subanen women support their families through this project that celebrates God's Creation.

Columban Sr Julietta Choi shares with us her vocation story from her native South Korea to India and then to the Philippines where she is currently assigned.

Let us remember all those called to a missionary vocation. Let each of us try to discover our own missionary vocation that God continues to reveal to us in our daily lives and situation.

*Dan Harding*

Fr Dan Harding  
TFE@columban.org.au



Columban Fr Donal McIlraith in class at the seminary.



Columban Fr Donal McIlraith and former student now on the Marist formation team.

Photos: Fr Donal McIlraith

# Wedded to the Church of the Pacific

FR DONAL MCILRAITH

Recently Columban Fr Donal McIlraith from Ireland was appointed Regional Director for the Region of Fiji. In this special Vocations Issue of The Far East, Fr Donal tells us something about life as a Missionary Priest and how he became wedded to the Church of the Pacific.

## *H*ow did you come to be appointed to Fiji?

Fiji was not my first mission; I was first appointed to Japan but later asked to do post graduate studies in sacred scripture. An Argentinean biblical scholar, Ugo Vanni SJ, had recommended me to do my doctoral studies with him. My thesis was on the marriage imagery in the Book of the Apocalypse.

On completing my doctoral studies in sacred scripture in Rome in 1989 our Columban Superior General, Fr Bernard Cleary, asked me to teach scripture for one year in the Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva, Fiji. That one year has become 25 years and I have been teaching six to nine courses each year since I arrived.

## *Has your mission work over the last 25 years been principally as an academic?*

I am at heart a pastoral priest and, despite the way things have worked out for me, I know that I did not join the Columbans to be an academic.

Every Christmas, Easter and August 15, I have tried to get to the Kandavu islands where I minister to the island communities. They have not had a resident priest for 40 years so their catechists are the backbone of church life.

Even though most of the youth tend to look for a future in Suva or another urban area, the village residents farm their land, fish and take on a full family and communal life.

Over there I stay in Nasalia village and

community members take me by boat to the communities on other islands.

## *Do you ever feel you have to choose between the pastoral and academic parts of your ministry?*

There was a moment 10 years ago when it became very clear to me that it was not a matter of choosing between being pastoral or academic, but rather of feeling that I was committed to the emerging Church in Fiji and, more broadly, the Church in the Pacific from Guam to Tahiti, which is organised under the umbrella of CEPAC (Episcopal Conference of the Pacific), the post Vatican II Bishop's Conference that founded and runs our regional seminary, due to celebrate its 40th anniversary this year with 150 seminarians.

Listen to: Wedded to the Church of the Pacific

*Can you describe what made you feel wedded to the Church of the Pacific?*

Cyclone Amy hit Northern Fiji, damaging or destroying all that was caught in its path. I went with a lorry load of food up to the island home of Columban priest, Fr Taaremon. Taaremon then a seminarian and his brother-in-law met me with a boat to take me and the food to Rabi, their island. We had problems with the engine and the boat drifted for two days, during which I was quite frightened but, at the same time, felt that this experience wedded me to the Pacific.

I was frightened but calm as the two lads seemed unconcerned. They, it later emerged, felt safe because they were travelling with a priest. Also at a very distracted Evening Prayer the night before our engine fell off, the final verse of *Psalm 121* had jumped out at me: *The Lord will bless your going and your coming now and forever.*

It may have not meant much to me before the engine failure but it took on powerful meaning during the time of our drifting.

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*Columban Fr McIlraith has been chaplain to the Banaban and Gilbertese communities in Fiji since 1990 as well as teaching scripture classes in the Pacific Regional Seminary. Recently he was appointed Regional Director for Fiji.*



## **Vocational** **Is God calling you to become a Columban Missionary Priest?**

### **Who are the Columbans?**

The Missionary Society of St Columban was founded in 1918 in Ireland as a Missionary Society of Priests for the evangelization of China. Today over 480 Columban priests and Lay Missionaries work as missionaries in 16 countries: Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Chile, Peru, the United States, Mexico, the Philippines, Myanmar, Pakistan, China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Ireland and Britain.



St Columban, our patron saint, was an Irish monk who preached the Gospel in Continental Europe. After establishing monasteries in what is now France, Germany, Austria and Italy, he died in Bobbio, northern Italy, in 615.

### **Where do Columbans work as Missionary Priests?**

From the high Andean tablelands of Peru, the desert of northern Mexico and the Atacama Desert of northern Chile to the teeming urban barrios of Santiago, Chile and Lima, Peru, Columban missionary priests seek to build God's Kingdom of justice, peace and solidarity.

From the deserts and cities of Pakistan, to the tropical islands of Fiji and the Philippines, Columban missionary priests are crossing boundaries of religion, race, culture, social class and geography to preach the Gospel.

From the great cities of Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan, to the cities of Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, the United States and Britain, Columban missionary priests proclaim the Gospel and work to make the missionary dimension of faith come alive in the local Church.

### **Is God calling you to the life of a Columban Missionary Priest?**

*Are you ready to go into these global fields, where the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few?  
Lk 10:2*

### **What are the stages of Formation for Missionary Priesthood?**

1. Australian and New Zealand Columban students begin their formation by living together in a formation community in the Sydney suburb of Strathfield.
2. This community consists of Columban students and the Columban priests responsible for their formation.
3. Columban students do their academic studies at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, located nearby in Strathfield.
4. At a later stage, they may continue their studies in one of several possible overseas locations with Columban students from other countries.
5. The formation programme includes a "Spiritual Year," a special time of prayer, discernment, reflection and pastoral work done in another country with other Columban students.
6. The formation programme includes two years on mission assignment with Columbans overseas.
7. Ordination to Missionary Priesthood is a wonderful day for the new Columban, his family, friends and parish community.

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# Give thanks in all things

FR PATRICK McMULLAN

Last year New Zealand Columban Fr Patrick McMullan celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination to priesthood. Looking back over those years, he shares with us his missionary journey.



photo: bigstockphoto.com

Twenty five years in any job is a significant portion of time and well worth taking an extra moment to ponder, reflect and savour the richness of the many people and events that fill the memories and to try to discern God's influence over the whole project.

A cliché, I know, but where did the years go? When I look back, I begin to see how naïve enthusiasm has given way to quiet commitment, religious certitude has transformed into humble faith, and, perhaps most important of all, my experience of God's presence continues to be a mystery that not only confuses but also affirms and inspires. What follows are, by necessity, broad strokes of my unfolding journey.

In 1988, not long after ordination I packed my bags and flew to Seoul – no return ticket and no direct flight in those days. I arrived in Seoul and found myself heading to language school while every one else was watching or attending the Olympic Games. For the next two years or so, my life consisted of a daily commute to language school, four hours of class each day, never-ending homework and learning how to pray the sacraments in Korean. While most of my life seemed to be on hold there were a few highlights including the first time going "solo" at Mass (a humiliation

never to be forgotten), a regular "couple of" beers on Friday night and occasional holidays.

The real highlights were, however, making my first steps in the culture, making friends and, as a missionary, having the privilege of being able to pray and share about God in a language so distinct from my own. To add to the confusion, I was living in an impoverished neighbourhood of Seoul when the rest of the city was economically booming.

The years that followed found me moving to the rural south of the peninsula and taking up the role of Parish Priest. My lot included six Sunday Masses every weekend and a parish that was in the throes of standing on its own two feet.

A few years later the parish was divided into three... so I must have done something right! But the one constant remains, the friends I have made and the inspiration of their faith commitment.

In some ways the next few years are lost. The era of missionaries running parishes in Korea was fast coming to an end. We were, in a real sense, victims of the very system we helped, so successfully, to create. Clergy-wise, the local Church was now self sufficient. For me, however, there was a deeper question: "what does it mean to be a missionary in



the modern Korean context?" The sense of call was strong but how to express that call in concrete action? After all, everyone has to do something with their lives.

In 1995, I returned to New Zealand thinking that life would be easier. With relish, I started my Masters studies at Victoria University in Wellington only to find that a change of address had not changed the questions! Spiritual writers talk about the dark night and I can testify to its existence. Looking back I can see how I was being nurtured by the love of family and friends, the beauty of the land, interesting study, the genuine faith of so many people and an ever-faithful, but strangely quiet, God.

*As I appreciate the deeper levels of my journey, I am drawn to see the hand of God in all that has happened and am lead to the only prayer possible: Thank You.*

The missionary that returned to Korea in 2005 was very different to the one who had made his first missionary journey in the early 1980s and was ordained a priest in 1987. While I did know that I would have to do a refresher in language, I really did not have any other concrete plans. Yet, strangely, things began to happen, and not necessarily as I would have planned.

One day, while wandering around downtown Seoul, I ran into a man I had known 20 years previously. (Not bad in a country with a population of 50 million people). He was working in a Catholic welfare centre for adult men with disabilities. I was invited to be chaplain and so began a journey I never expected.

At about the same time, one of the local seminaries – of which there are seven in South Korea – invited me to join the staff. Suddenly, I found myself lecturing on what the Universal Church looks like today and what are some of the major issues in contemporary mission such as the preferential option for the poor and the call to ecological conversion.

Four years ago I was asked by a fellow missionary if I would fill in for her while she went on what she said was to be a "one year" sabbatical! She had founded a programme called English New Testament Studies (ENTs) which is a lecture/reflection model of New Testament studies through the medium of English. About 120 people gather each week to deepen their understanding of Scripture and faith. As is usual, it is me that is the greatest learner.

About three years ago I was asked to take up a chaplaincy for the English-speaking scholars at Seoul National University. Our little community, with representatives from around the world, is part of the growing diversity of people which is Korea today. Whatever else, my Sundays are interesting as I travel between chaplaincies and from one end of the social spectrum to the other. Who ever thought religion was boring?

In 2009, I edited a collection of academic papers written by Columbans from around the world. What emerged was a book called, *Climate Change: the agenda for mission today*. Not a bestseller, but I do believe this book was ground-breaking, in the sense of being a record of a group of religious professionals deliberately reflecting on the theological implications of climate change. In other work in this area, I have co-ordinated the translation into Korean of a couple of Columban multimedia presentations on genetic engineering and the destruction of tropical rain forests.

During 2010, I was asked to translate a book on the history of Catholicism in Korea, *Inside the Catholic Church of Korea*. This book sought to make the history of the local Church available in English to the general reader.

Naturally, there is a lot more that makes up the fabric of my daily life. As I take stock of the last 25 years I am acutely aware of not only how lucky I have been but also how very blessed. As I appreciate the deeper levels of my journey, I am drawn to see the hand of God in all that has happened and am lead to the only prayer possible: Thank You.

*Night scene in Korea - five minutes walk from Fr Pat's apartment.*

Photo: Fr Peter Woodriff



# The power of being powerless

FR CHRIS SAENZ



Photo: bigstockphoto.com

**R**ecently, I was in Tasmania to meet the World Youth Day Pilgrims going to my parish in Chile and to do mission promotion work. A school girl in Saint Patrick's Catholic College of Launceston asked, "What is the hardest thing about working with people in poverty?" The question stumped me a bit and made me think. Generally, it's the youth who ask the deep theological questions. After reflecting for a moment, I answered her, *"the feeling of being powerless to change the situation of the person in poverty."*

In the missionary vocation one has to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Often one has to leap without knowing where to land, and trust it will all work out. One has to leave the "black and white" world of certainty and desire to be in the "grey" world of doubt. One has to discover power in being powerless. Doesn't sound easy, and it's not. So why do it? I do it for people like "Maria".

In my years in Chile, Maria is truly one of the poorest people I met. Maria used to come to the parish to talk to another Columban priest. She was also friendly with the parish secretary and I often would see Maria "hanging about" in the office. I didn't have much to do with her and really didn't pay much attention to her. When the Columban priest left the parish he referred Maria to me. So one day Maria showed up on the doorstep wanting to talk to me. I wasn't reluctant to talk to her but not overly enthused either. I assumed that she wanted money. I knew she was poor but didn't know how poor.

Maria lived in a "*media agua*" or what would be like a shack. There was not



*Maria lived in a "media agua" or what would be like a shack such as these.*

much to her home. Her only means of living, from what I knew, was the selling of small handicrafts she made from old yarn and material. Sometimes Maria would come to the church selling her handicrafts. And out of pity, I must confess, I would buy some from time to time. I figured it was an honest pay for honest work.

***Being powerless - not having all the answers or certainty- but trusting that God is doing what God does best.***

Yet, much to my surprise, she never begged for money. Most often she came to the church to "desahogarse" - a Spanish phrase that means "to let it all out". It was during these "desahogos" I discovered that she was a mother.

Maria was a mother of two children who were taken away from her by social services. Maria suffered from psychological ailments like depression and was unable to care for them. She never mentioned the father of the children and it seemed he was not in the picture. She remarked to me that her only true desire was to regain custody of her children but she was a

single mother, too poor, too sick and had no job to be able to care for them.

Maria struggled to find odd jobs but often could not hold on to them. Listening to Maria's story made me feel powerless to help her. There was nothing I could do for her. She in return never asked for any help. I felt more pity for her. I prayed to God, "*what is the point to all of this!?*"

One day the secretary came to inform me that Maria was waiting to talk to me. I received Maria and noticed she had a big smile on her face. "Father, I came to share my good news with you!" she said. I was curious. Was she miraculously cured of her aliments? Will she get her children back? Is there a sudden monetary fortune? I waited for the surprise. "I'm pregnant", she blurred. I felt my insides crashing. What was she thinking, I thought, so poor and how pregnant. "With twins", she added. It was like a punch to the stomach. I really thought God was playing a cruel joke on the both of us.

Then I looked upon her face. Her smile was radiant. It was the first time I truly saw her happy. "Father, I am so happy," she gleefully continued, "that God considered me worthy to give life again. I am truly blessed!" It was

as if I heard Jesus' mother speaking into my ears. I had thought that Maria wanted me to do something about her situation but in reality she just wanted a compassionate ear to listen to her. She just wanted someone to share her joy. I began to wonder if my pity for Maria was more moved by pity for myself - me being helpless. Yet, being helpless made me powerless with Maria. It was something we both shared together. And that is the power of mission. Two people, worlds apart with nothing in common, find commonality in being powerless. It made us equals.

Some time later, I used to see Maria walking in the street with a man, the father I assumed. They embraced and looked happy as a couple. In time, Maria did regain custody of her two older children. After that I never saw her again. I don't know her fate, where she is or what she does but that is mission.

***Being powerless - not having all the answers or certainty- but trusting that God is doing what God does best.***

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*Columban Fr Chris Saenz is parish priest of Santo Tomas Apostol parish in Chile.*



# The barrio

FR CATHAL GALLAGHER

*R*ecently I had the joy of having my nephew and a friend visit me here in Peru. One of the things that he said to me before he left for home in Ireland was, “*I have often heard you speak of the “shantytown” or the “barrio” and I have seen photos that you have shown us at home, but now I have a different understanding of what these words mean to you*”.

It often takes a new pair of eyes, seeing for the first time what we have become accustomed to looking at day after day, to jolt us back into the harshness of the reality that we share with the people whom we serve.

During their visit I attempted to show Gareth and Margaret, a variety of the different faces of Peru, from the exquisite cuisine, for which Peru is becoming increasingly internationally renowned, the old colonial buildings with their beautiful balconies, and of course, Machu Picchu, the Inca city lost in the mountains, to the five sole (less than \$2) lunch, where I eat most days and then of course, the “barrio”.

This was the place which above all else, left them speechless. The sheer extent of the areas which we visited, thronged with humanity in all its facets, searching, suffering, struggling but also full of hope for a better

future, “a long life, a full life, a life with dignity and a happy life”, as one of the slogans of the project, “*Sí, da Vida*” (Yes, give life) states.

“The barrio” is what keeps me here, to be part of that experience of life; the search for identity and meaning, the wish to learn and to advance, the will to overcome hurdles and celebrate the achievements, to acknowledge the things that we so often take for granted.

Yes, through the project of “*Sí, da Vida*” we bring a message of hope to people who are so often pushed to the fringe, vulnerable and exploitable, they live with a condition that they



The Far East - August 2013





PERU

Photos: Fr Cathal Gallagher

## Vocation Issue

are often forced to hide, from friends, from family, at work and regrettably even within the Christian communities where they seek acceptance.

*Si, da Vida* is a Peruvian-based non-profit association that has been developing activities for people living with HIV/AIDS since 2006, including awareness-raising, prevention and care for the families and those living with HIV and AIDS.

I am constantly challenged by the message of the Gospel and the forceful examples that Jesus used to insist that "the last will be first". He took those who were hired to work at the final hour and paid them first, giving them the same pay as those who had worked all day.

I, who have been called to the vineyard early and now see those who joined later growing in the kingdom values of solidarity and mutual care and their willingness to reach out to others in the task of the prevention of the spread of HIV.

This is what calls me to the ongoing conversion of recognizing all people as sons and daughters of God, all people who are called to the kingdom.

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Columban Fr Cathal Gallagher works with the *Si, da Vida* project in some of the poorest parts of Lima, Peru.

*Si, da Vida* is a Peruvian-based non-profit association that has been developing activities for people living with HIV and AIDS since 2006, including awareness-raising, prevention and care for the families and those living with HIV and AIDS.





Columban Fr Patrick McInerney meets Pope Francis.

## From the ends of the earth

FR PATRICK MCINERNEY

When Cardinal Tauran presented the newly-elected Pope to the world from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica on March 13, 2013, Pope Francis explained his origins as: "You know that the work of the conclave is to give a bishop to Rome. It seems as if my brother cardinals went to find him from the end of the earth."

Just over three months later the same Cardinal Tauran invited me to Rome as one of 10 delegates from the Catholic world to take part in a meeting of the "Islamic-Catholic Liaison Committee" on June 18-19.

After our formal deliberations had concluded, the Liaison Committee members were given the privilege of a private meeting with the Holy Father. Including in his busy schedule a private meeting with the international Catholic and Muslim delegates after the regular Wednesday morning

public audience was a clear sign of the Pope's commitment to and support of inter-religious dialogue.

Minibuses transported us to the private audience hall in the Vatican. On the Pope's arrival, Cardinal Tauran explained to him who we were and what we had been discussing. Then the heads of the respective delegations introduced their members to the Holy Father. Prof Dr Hamid Bin Ahmad Al-Rifaei introduced each of the members of the Muslim delegation, then Cardinal Tauran did the same for the members of the Catholic delegation.

When it came to my turn, Cardinal Tauran introduced me to the Holy Father as a Columban priest from Australia. I said to Pope Francis, "Your Holiness, I too have come to Rome from the end of the earth!" At this, the Pope burst out laughing and said, "Yes, but from the other part!"

*But for me it was also a profound moment, an experience of shared communion, two missionaries, from different ends of the world, meeting in Rome.*

I feel enormously privileged to have shared a joke with the Pope and given him a laugh. Filling the shoes of the fisherman is an awesome responsibility. Hopefully, our very brief, humorous encounter lightened his day.

But for me it was also a profound moment, an experience of shared communion, two missionaries, from different ends of the world, meeting in Rome. Where is the centre of the Church? And where is the periphery? The centre of the Church is not Rome or the Pope. Neither are Latin America or Australia "the ends" of the world.

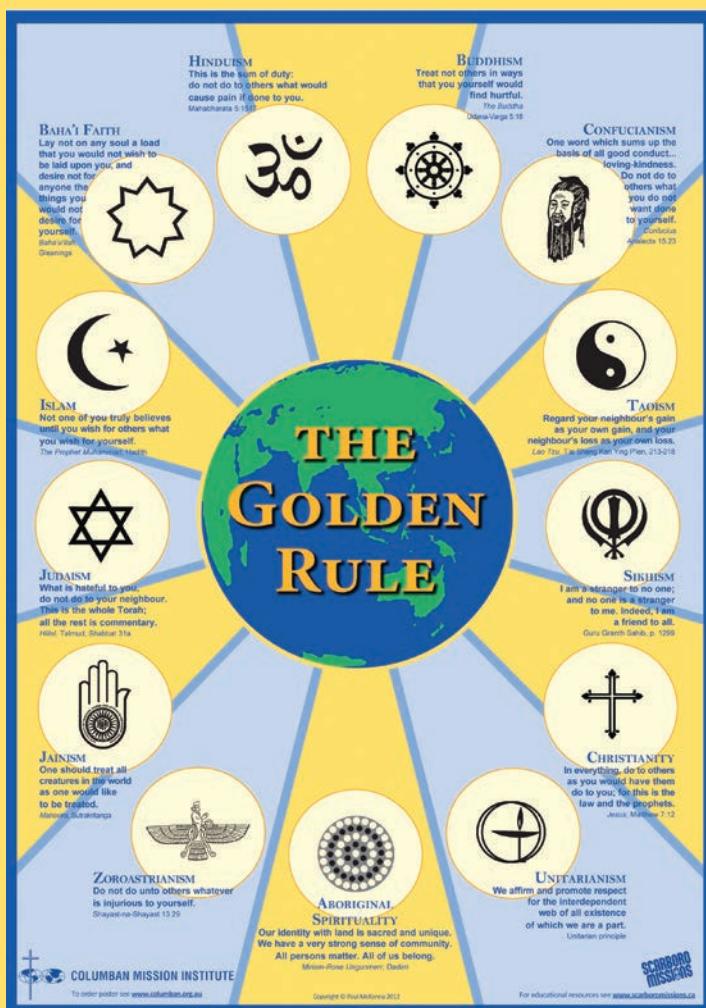
The heart and centre of the church is the people, wherever they are, in Asia, Africa, America or Europe, and our shared task as missionaries is to reach out to them, to accompany them, to be with them.

As has been evident from his first appearance on the balcony of St Peter's, one of the gifts the new Pope brings to the church and to the world is his joy in meeting ordinary people and his taking pleasure in the ordinary things of life.

I am sure this wells up from his deep concern for the poor. Pope Francis is simple, humble, a man of the people, for the people. I have been blessed to meet him and I pray that he will continue to lead the church in the way of the Gospel in the days, months and years ahead.

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*Columban Fr Patrick McInerney is Vocations Director and Director of the Columban Mission Institute in Strathfield, NSW. He is also involved in Inter-religious dialogue.*



The publication of the Australian version of *The Golden Rule Poster* is a project of the Columban Mission Institute's Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations. It can be used in schools, homes, congregations, universities, workplaces, hospitals and prisons for teaching compassion, multicultural and multireligious cooperation and human solidarity.

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**or ph: (03) 9375 9475**

# Eduardo and Rosa's mission

FR DAN HARDING



Rosa with Pehuenche mother and daughter.



Eduardo (right) teaching carpentry.



Children learn about the world.



Araucaria Tree

Pehuén seeds

*Eduardo and Rosa Cueto are a married couple in their 40s. This is the story of their mission to the Pehuenche People, one of Chile's indigenous communities.*

## 1) Eduardo and Rosa

Eduardo and Rosa Cueto live in a poor deprived area of Lo Espejo, a suburb of Santiago, Chile. They have two children, both in their early 20s. They are active lay leaders in their local Catholic Community - The Pastoral Unit of Jesus of Nazareth, a sub-section of the Sacred Heart parish. This parish has a long history of Columban ministry. As a result Rosa and Eduardo have worked alongside many Columban priests and remain good friends with many of them.

Eduardo and Rosa have made a commitment to live the Gospel message through a simple lifestyle. Rosa bakes bread to sell locally and Eduardo works part-time. They work only to earn enough money for their basic needs which leaves them time to bring communion to the sick and elderly, to visit a drug rehabilitation centre and to organize the Christian community. It also leaves them time to support the Pehuenche people. Rosa once said that she hoped that all of her worldly possessions would fit in her coffin when she dies.

## 2) The first visit to the native Pehuenche People.

Several years ago Eduardo and Rosa were part of a parish mission from Santiago to the Pehuenche community near Lonquimay, a valley area in the Andes Mountains 730kms south of Santiago. This mountain valley in the Andes near the Argentinean border has a harsh climate, particularly in winter when it is frequently covered by many metres of snow.

As Chile's capital, Santiago, is the home of Rosa and Eduardo, the Andean mountainous terrain around

Lonquimay was completely new and different from anything they had previously encountered. What was even more extraordinary for them was their first real encounter with the indigenous peoples of their own country, in this case the Pehuenche people. They were struck by the depth, antiquity and beauty of this culture and realized that it had much wisdom to share with the westernized population of Chile.

## 3) The Pehuenche People

The Pehuenches are an indigenous Chilean and Argentinean tribe that lives along the Andes Mountain Ranges between approximately 600-800kms south of Santiago. They are known as the people of the *pehuén*, the seed which they harvest from the cone of the ancient *Araucaria Tree* (*Araucaria Araucana*, often called in English the Monkey Puzzle or Chilean Pine Tree). This is a Chilean and Argentinean native conifer that grows to 40 metres in height in the Andes Mountains in areas over 1000 metres above sea level, being snow covered in winter. It is a close relation of the Australian Araucaria trees.

Like the Pehuenches, the Australian Aborigines of South East Queensland harvest the seeds of the Bunya Pine (*Araucaria Bidwillii*) growing in the Bunya Mountains and eat them at the gathering of the tribes at the Bunya Festival held every few years.

## 4) Eduardo and Rosa's discovery

Several things struck Eduardo and Rosa when they first visited different Pehuenche families. They noticed most families lived at a subsistence level. They lived off the land, harvesting the *pehuén* seeds and breeding sheep. Sometimes they had



*Eduardo and Rosa provide for us an example of how a married couple with few resources of their own have been able to help other families in a very different and difficult situation greatly improve the quality of their lives through simple and feasible means.*

an abundance of food and other times they lacked food and in particular a balanced diet.

Many Pehuenche families from the area had migrated to big cities like Santiago, to look for a better life and escape from poverty. Once in the city these families usually end up in poor neighbourhoods and are in great danger of losing their distinctive culture and language. The globalised western consumer lifestyle of the big cities is a strong attraction, particularly to the young.

### **5) The Goals**

The subsistence lifestyle in the Andes Mountains means that the Pehuenche families have little cash income. The possibility of generating some cash income would allow these families to better participate in the Chilean economy, giving them opportunities for better health care, improved education for their children, a more balanced diet and the enjoyment of some creature comforts and recreational activities.

After considerable reflection on this situation Rosa and Eduardo decided to begin a project that would concretely support the group of Pehuenche families with whom they had become friends and had a good relationship.

#### **This project has three goals:**

a) *To generate income from the sale of small sustainable projects.* This involved creating small wooden souvenirs which could be sold to tourists who frequent the area during summer time and also in Santiago. These wooden souvenirs are cut out of the dead branches of the Araucaria trees. It is illegal to cut down these

trees. In order to make these wooden souvenirs, members of the family had to acquire carpentry and wood-turning skills and equipment. As Eduardo is a carpenter by trade he was able to teach several of the men these skills. Income from the sale of these handicrafts now helps to supplement the family budget.

b) *To improve the diet of the families.* Many of the Pehuenche children suffer problems of undernourishment and lack a balanced diet. Eduardo and Rosa helped the families build small scale Green Houses out of local wood covered in plastic in order to grow a whole range of vegetables that are usually not available to them due to the harsh climate.

c) *To improve the educational opportunities of the Pehuenche children.* The children often live long distances from schools and frequently miss classes especially in winter time. Eduardo and Rosa provided the families with old used computers donated from Santiago and other educational material for the

children. They spend time coaching the children and encouraging them to become fully bilingual, proficient in both their native Pehuenche language and in Spanish, the national language of Chile.

Having both languages enables them to know, respect and preserve their traditional Pehuenche culture and to participate as equals in the larger Chilean society and economy.

#### **Conclusion**

Eduardo and Rosa provide for us an example of how a married couple with few resources of their own have been able to help other families in a very different and difficult situation greatly improve the quality of their lives through simple and feasible means.

God works in small projects, in simple ways through ordinary people to build His Kingdom.

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*Columban Fr Dan Harding is Editor of The Far East and spent over 20 years in Chile.*

*Rosa at the local Catholic chapel.*



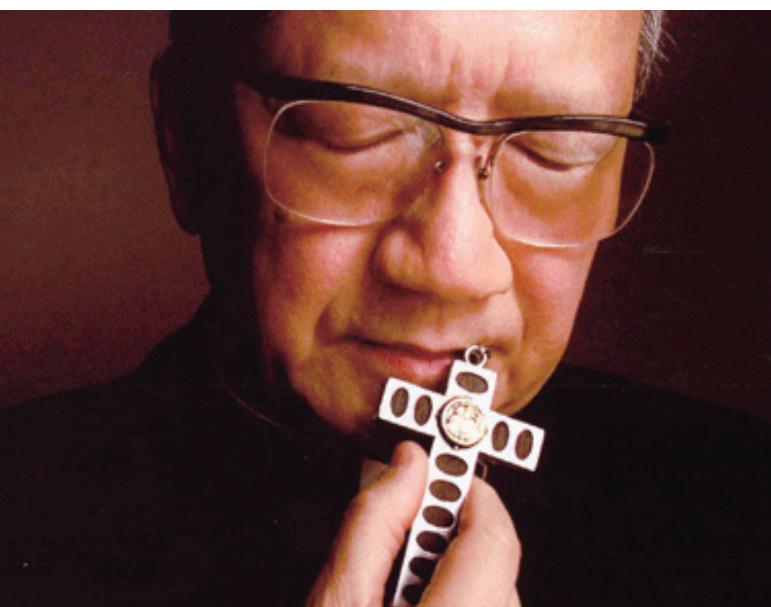
Photo: Fr Dan Harding



# Mission World

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

## Beatification for Vietnamese Cardinal



The late Vietnamese Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan (above) took a major step on the road to sainthood in July with the official closing of the diocesan part of his beatification process. Around 500 Vietnamese – friends, relatives and former colleagues of the cardinal – gathered in Rome for the closing ceremony.

Cardinal Van Thuan spent 13 years in prison, nine of them in solitary confinement in Hanoi, following his appointment as coadjutor archbishop of Saigon just seven days before South Vietnam fell to the Communist North in 1975.

"We already have several reports of alleged miracles," said Waldery Hilgerman, the cause's postulator, during a press conference. "Now we will be more free to work with doctors and experts and check whether these facts are truly unexplainable."

Over 10,000 pages of documentation and never before published writings by Van Thuan have been gathered during the two year-long process. Vatican officials also heard dozen of witnesses who had known the cardinal personally in order to prove that he practiced Christian virtues to a "heroic degree."

The case now goes before the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints where the files will be examined and finally voted on by cardinals and bishops before being submitted to the pope. Once "heroic virtues" have been recognized, beatification can occur if it is proved that a "miracle," such as a scientifically unexplainable healing, happened through the cardinal's intercession.

As part of the process the cardinal's tomb has been moved to the Roman church of Santa Maria della Scala for easier access to pilgrims.

The beatification cause of Cardinal Van Thuan was promoted by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace where the Vietnamese cardinal was president from 1998 until his death in 2002.

The Council's secretary, Archbishop Mario Toso, noted how Cardinal Van Thuan's writings on democracy, citizenship and the role of the Church in the modern world are strikingly similar to what then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio wrote before being elected pope.

Both men stressed the importance of a shared sense of national unity and citizenship as an antidote to the modern world's crisis of leadership and democracy having experienced dictatorship in their native Vietnam and Argentina respectively.

- Source: UCA News

## Mission Intention for August

That the Church in Africa, faithfully proclaiming the Gospel, may promote peace and justice.

# From the Director

*Deep faith is a gift from God*



*P*

ope Francis announced recently that Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II were to be canonised saints of the Catholic Church later on this year. During the year we also were informed that Archbishop Oscar Romero's cause for canonisation had been 'unblocked' and was on track again.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta is on the path to canonisation too but she is not there yet. They are already considered to be saints by popular acclamation, but the powerful 'call' from God to be a saint or to be a 'light of faith' can fall on anyone, of any status in life. The apostles remain as excellent examples of how God can work through ordinary people.

When I was a boy reading the lives of the saints left me with mixed feelings. Many of the stories I thought were woeful and dreadfully pious; they disappointed me because the saints as children did not seem 'normal'. Since I wasn't like them I knew I wasn't saint material. This did not disappoint me because becoming a saint seemed a serious challenge and still does. Generally a saint has to practice 'heroic virtue' and like Mother Mary of the Cross (St Mary MacKillop) saints seemed to have to suffer and put up with a lot.

*People of deep faith don't have much to show for the treasure, God's presence that dwells in them, but they gives us hope because God is almost tangible in them.*

However, I have had to revise that opinion as I grown older; perhaps some of these saintly children were deeply pious because a deep gift of invitation was planted in their hearts by God?

To use a secular simile, I think of them as being like 'big gun' surfers who ride waves that are 40 to 60 feet high. Not everybody wants to ride big waves but there are some

people who do. Some people have a vocation to become like big gun surfers in their relationship with God.

Like the surfers, it will be a demanding way to live, it will take everything they have. There are risks involved, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* calls God a jealous lover.

This type of vocation is not about becoming a priest or a religious unless the Holy Spirit directs their lives in that direction. It belongs to anyone whom God chooses to call into a profound relationship. The Church has need of priests and religious, it also has a need right now for people of profound faith.

I remember the late Fr Tom Boland, a priest of the Brisbane Archdiocese reflecting on the papacy of Blessed John Paul II. The Pope had visited the United States of America where large crowds had turned out to see him.

Fr Boland asked the audience why was that, because many of the people who turned out did not agree with what he said or stood for? Fr Boland's answer was that Pope John Paul II was a man of faith and people sensed it. They were attracted to, or intrigued by him because of his deep Catholic faith. In the western world, not only Europe, which seems to have diminishing faith, he was like a rock of assurance for many people who needed it.

*People of deep faith don't have much to show for the treasure, God's presence that dwells in them, but they gives us hope because God is almost tangible in them.*

*Gary Walker*

Fr Gary Walker  
director@columban.org.au

# Hiking home

Mercy Gawason, a Subanen woman, is the author of this article. Cards sold through The Far East every year help support her family.



Mercy in the ricefield.



Mercy's brother Arnolfo and mother Lita carrying food supplies home.

**M**y name is Mercy Gawason. I grew up in the mountainous Zamboanga peninsula of northwest Mindanao in the Philippines which is the homeland of the Subanen people. My parents are farmers. My older sister Marilyn, and older brother Rolly, are married and are also farmers. My three younger brothers, Arnolfo, Jeyar and Jomar are still in school.

In 2004 I joined the *Subanen Crafts Project*. The Project was started by Columban Fr Vincent Busch to help Subanen women support our families by producing and marketing handcrafted items that celebrate God's Creation. The Project also sponsored my college education. I graduated with an Associate Degree in Office Administration in 2010, and I am now the Operations Manager of Subanen Crafts at our workshop in Ozamiz City.

Recently, the Crafts Project acquired a small point and shoot camera. With this camera in hand I can now take you on a photo journey up the trails and rivers to my mountain home, and then, through my pictures, I can explain how the *Subanen Craft Project* has helped my family and our farm.

My mother, Lita, my brother, Arnolfo, my sister, Marilyn, and her daughter, Crezlen, joined me on the hike to our home which is about 12kms from the nearest town of Midsalip. We carried heavy bags of the food and rice that I bought in Midsalip. May here is what people call "*ting gutum*" (hunger season). "Hunger season" can last five to six months. It begins when a farming family like ours has eaten the last of our harvested rice and corn, and ends with our next harvest. I have



# The Subanens during "hunger season"

*Mercy is the Operations Manager of Subanen Crafts Project in Ozamiz City, Philippines. The Subanens make the Christmas cards every year. She shares with us her story and the importance of the Subanen Craft Project.*

a steady income and so I can keep my family supplied with food during the "hunger season."

While we carried the food little two-year-old Crezlen confidently strode beside us with her walking stick. Even at two years old Subanen children are seasoned hikers. Along the way we had to carefully cross a river over slippery logs. Luckily the river was not in flood; crossing it then would be impossible. After many hours of hiking we finally arrived home in the late afternoon.

The next day was the beginning of the plowing season for corn. I accompanied my brother Jeyar to our cornfield. Jeyar is in second year at high school. When he is not in school he helps my father on the farm. He skillfully guided our *carabao* (water buffalo) and plow around the coconut trees. My father and Jeyar will need to plow and re-plow our cornfield for two weeks before it's fully ready for planting. Our family is lucky to still have a *carabao*.

Many Subanen families, especially during "hunger season," have to sell their farm animals to feed their families or to pay for health

emergencies. A serious infection requires antibiotics that cost the same as a large pig. Two days in hospital cost the same as a *carabao*. Thanks to my work with the *Subanen Craft Project* I have enough income to save for such emergencies.

The following day I joined my father, Robin, in the small rice field that we tend for the owner. My family does all the plowing, planting, weeding, and fertilizing for a share of the harvest.

Last year the harvest was poor. After subtracting our expenses, our share was only four sacks of rice. A sack of rice is 750 pesos (AUD\$18.50). Four months of toil in the rice field netted us only \$74. We hope that this year's harvest will be better.

Before leaving home I asked my sister Marilyn to take a photo of me with my three brothers and my parents. My two youngest brothers, Jomar and Jeyar, are in high school. High School in the Philippines is free but books, supplies, and uniforms plus the many fees for class projects are too costly for most Subanen families. I send money home so my brothers can stay in high school.

My brother Arnolfo is in college studying to be a teacher. I am also helping pay for his tuition and expenses. It is difficult for Subanen youth to stay in school. I am happy to be able to help my brothers' education. Education will give them more options in life. After taking this last photo I said goodbye to my family and hiked back to Midsalip to catch a bus for Ozamiz.

Now I am back in Ozamiz with my co-workers in Subanen Crafts. They too are helping their families survive the "hunger season." We are making Christmas cards. Christmas is four months away but we have to start production early because each card has to be carefully and slowly inlaid with coloured paper.

This year our cards celebrate the coming of Jesus as God's gift to all creation. By crafting these cards I am grateful that I can help my family take care of the little gift of creation that is our farm.

---

*Mercy Gawason is Project Manager at Subanen Crafts in collaboration with Columban Fr Vincent Busch.*

*Mercy (centre) with co-workers making this year's Subanen Christmas Cards.*



*Mercy with her brothers (left to right) - Jomar, Arnolfo and Jeyar, mother Lita holding Crezlen and her father Robin.*





# Poor pay price for our cheap clothing

FR SEAN McDONAGH

*Columban Fr Sean McDonagh writes about the Bangladesh Clothing Industry.*

The collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh where hundreds of people worked in appalling conditions, highlights the cruelties which are at the heart of our

current economic system. When we buy clothes in a department store we seldom reflect on the fact that the only reason we can buy good quality clothes cheaply is that the workers

who make the clothes are often paid only a pittance and work in very unsafe surroundings. There has been a phenomenal growth in the garment industry in

*Pope Francis has made concern for the poor a central focus of his papacy. Serving the poor means, not just giving them help for today, but asking why are they poor?*

Bangladesh in recent years. Successive governments have promoted the industry because it is a major source of foreign exchange even though the wages for workers can be as low as \$38 per month.

Today, Bangladesh is the third largest exporter of clothes in the world after China and Italy. However, the industry has been plagued with building collapses, fires and other accidents, despite promises from the government to improve safety standards. Less than six months ago in November 2012, a fire in a clothes factory, also in a suburb of Dhaka, killed more than 112 workers.

Some of the businesses which were located in the collapsed building included Phantom Apparels Ltd, New Wave Style Ltd, New Wave Bottoms Ltd. All of these brands are part of the New Wave group which sells clothes to retail stores in 27 countries, which include Ireland, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain and the US.

The factories produced clothes for JC Penny, Cato Fashions, Benetton and Primark. On April 27, 2013, a group of protestors gathered outside Primark's shop on Oxford Street in London and demanded that Primark pay compensation to those who died and those who were injured. Murray Worthy from the campaign War on Want said that "if Primark had taken its responsibility seriously, no one would have died."

Sam Maher, a spokesperson for Labour Behind the Label, said: "It's unbelievable that brands still refuse to sign a binding agreement with unions and labour groups to stop

these unsafe working conditions from existing. Tragedy after tragedy shows that corporate-controlled monitoring has failed to protect workers' lives."

The ordinary consumer can also help bring about much needed changes in how goods are produced in economically poor countries. We should always check the brand we are wearing. Find out where it is it being made and support groups such as Labour Behind the Label, who are challenging governments to take responsibility by forcing corporations to pay both decent wages and create safe working conditions for their workers.

Pope Francis has made concern for the poor a central focus of his papacy. Serving the poor means, not just giving them help for today, but asking why are they poor? This tragedy in Dhaka is surely a call to young Catholics to join justice, peace and ecology groups in their parishes and dioceses and educate themselves about the unjust way some clothes makers treat humans and the earth.

It might embolden young Catholics to challenge clothes shops on the High Street to enter into binding agreements with workers in the garment industry in poor countries, to ensure their rights are being protected and we never again see another factory collapsing.

---

*Columban Fr Sean McDonagh is a researcher on justice and peace issues and more recently ecological challenge.*



*In November 2012 a fire killed 112 workers.*



*Many of the poor live on the streets of Bangladesh.*



*Clothing is produced in unsafe working conditions.*

**Average hourly wage for garment workers:**  
**Bangladesh \$0.24**  
**Cambodia \$0.45**  
**Pakistan \$0.52**  
**Vietnam \$0.53**  
**China \$1.26**

# Nothing in vain

Columban Sr Julietta Choi shares her vocation story.

*"God knows what He is about...He does nothing in vain..."*

**O**ne of a family of three girls and one boy, I was born in Seoul and spent all of my life there. My family, on my mother's side, has been Catholic for many generations. After I finished studies I worked as a kindergarten teacher for many years.

From that time I started to think that there might be something that would make me feel constant happiness and inner peace but I didn't know where I could find such treasures...

### **Julietta's Vocation Story**

...but part of the answer came through a childhood memory that I have never forgotten. I was 8 or 9-years-old I was watching TV and saw a Sister riding a bicycle in Africa. The first thing that struck me was that the Sister was wearing a habit and riding a bicycle while carrying a lot of food in the basket. She visited each house to meet the people and distribute food to them. I still remember their happy faces. At the time I whispered to myself, 'I want to live like that.' As time went on I forgot all these beautiful memories.

Some years later, when I was undergoing a very difficult time in my life I chanced upon a website about India. From that moment I felt a mysterious force pulling me to go to that populous country. So, over the following 10 years during my vacation, I visited India three times.

India allowed me, for the first time in my life, to learn and experience with my whole body how wonderful it was to live slowly and without stress. The most important thing for me was that India helped open my eyes and mind that had been closed to God. India made me see how much I am blessed. After that I heard an inner call very deeply and eventually I joined the Columban Sisters.

### **...as Professed Columban Sister**

After I made First Vows I was assigned to Dobongsan Parish in Seoul for a year where I was responsible for the Sunday school teachers and children in the parish church. After that I was assigned to the Philippines. But before going there I spent a few months in our Mother House, Magheramore, Ireland, to get to know our retired Sisters and learn how to grow old gracefully.

I arrived in the Philippines on January 3, 2012. First, I studied Tagalog, the local language; now I am working as a member



KOREA

Columban Sr Julietta Choi.

of a parish pastoral team and have special responsibility for the children and the youth in the parish. Looking back over the first year's experiences I have had here in the Philippines, I can say I have seen God's wisdom at work. God gave me wisdom to overcome my prejudice and stubbornness and enable me to open my heart to see His plans.

Whenever I meet the people in a poor area when teaching, playing, sharing and distributing some food to them, I always remember the Sister whom I saw on TV when I was young even though I don't have a bicycle now! I have experienced that for God nothing is impossible. So now I say - *"Even though the future is unknown, I will follow you..."*

---

*Korean Columban Sr Julietta Choi has been assigned to the Philippines.*



# Committed to emerging Church

Columban Fr Donal McIlraith is the Director of the Columban Region of Fiji. He speaks of his personal relationship with and commitment to the emerging Church in Fiji and throughout the Pacific.

Columbans everywhere are privileged to form such relationships with the people they come to know and serve. They do so with the help and support of all our Columban benefactors and see themselves as their representatives on mission. They are always grateful for the resources that enable them to continue in their commitments to God's people wherever they find them.



Photo: Fr Donal McIlraith

Your **kindness** and **support** make it possible for Columbans to meet and minister to many people. Your "stringless" gift helps us to respond with flexibility to the most **urgent needs** of people.



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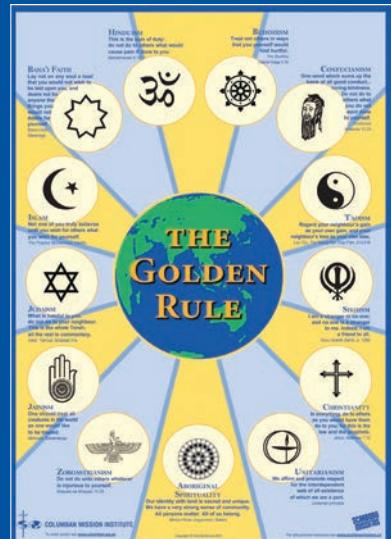
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