

# The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

March 2014



**He stayed with the people**

Tributes for Columban Fr Leo Donnelly

**A programme that works**

People with HIV/AIDS empower their lives

**The survival of orphan Erica**

Columban Fr Shay Cullen finds Typhoon Haiyan's orphans



**ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY**

PRICE \$1.50

# The Far East

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March 2014  
Vol 96, No. 2

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

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$15 per year (AUSTRALIA)

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Saint Columban's Mission Property  
Association A.B.N. 17 686 524 625

Printed by Complete Colour Printing, Melbourne



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*Columban Fr Liam Carey rides around his parish by motorbike in Lima, Peru.*

*Photo: Fr John Boles*



# From the Editor

## *Becoming poor*

In the January/February issue of *The Far East*, we carried the story of Columban Fr John O'Connell who had died recently in Lima, Peru. It was Columban Fr Leo Donnelly who had written to us about his great friend, Fr John, whom he had known for many decades as a great priest and missionary to the people of Peru. Sad to say, now it is Fr Leo himself who has also died in Lima.

Readers of *The Far East* will be familiar with the missionary life and priesthood of Fr Leo Donnelly in Peru. Many of the same qualities that he wrote about his friend, Fr John O'Connell, also apply to him. In this issue of the magazine, we publish a tribute to Fr Leo Donnelly written by Fr Peter Woodruff who worked with him for many years in Peru.

Just before Christmas, Columban Fr John O'Hara died. Fr John also left a great legacy as a priest and as a missionary both in Korea and in Australia. He served the people of Korea for over 30 years. Upon returning to Australia, he served in several parishes around Melbourne up unto a month before his death.

The liturgical season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on March 5th this year. Pope Francis calls on all Christians to find ways so that this season of self-denial and sacrifice may be a time when we reach out to others in need in concrete ways to benefit them. We are called to follow the example of Christ who became poor so that we may become rich.

This Lenten issue of the magazine, carries other stories of Columban missionaries reaching out to those in need in different countries across the globe. From Peru, we have the stories of Columban Fr Liam Carey who uses his motorbike in his parish work in the back blocks of Lima and Columban Fr Cathal Gallagher who works with people living with the stigma of HIV/AIDS.

Columban Fr Brian Gore from the Philippines tells us about his work with the Negros Nine Human Development Foundation in creating awareness amongst farmers on small holdings of sustainable and organic methods of agriculture and cooperative methods to market their produce.

Columban Fr Shay Cullen, also in the Philippines, tells us about his meeting with the survivors of Typhoon Haiyan, particularly with the orphans the typhoon has left.

*This Lenten issue of the magazine, carries other stories of Columban missionaries reaching out to those in need in different countries across the globe.*

Columban Fr Kelvin Barrett sees the hand of God at work in the events of his life leading him to his ministry of seminary formation in Korea.

Columban Fr Neil Magill attends the ordination of five new Kachin priests. One of the newly ordained relates the influence of Columban missionaries on his vocation.

*Dan Harding*

Fr Dan Harding  
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# Motorcycle diaries

FR JOHN BOLES

*Columban Fr Liam Carey finds a motorcycle to be a godsend when working on the urban fringe of Lima, Peru.*



Photos: Fr John Boles

*Columban Fr Liam Carey moves around Jicamarca parish on his motorbike.*

*T*he roar of engines, a plume of dust, a mean machine slicing through the desert sands....

It all sounds like a scene from the 70s cult classic *"Easy Rider."* In fact, it is Columban Missionary Fr Liam Carey, speeding to his next Mass in the parish of Jicamarca on the eastern edge of Lima, Peru.

Liam is a frontiersman. Indeed, most of our work in Lima is conducted on the "frontier" of the urban area. Lima is a typical Third World "mega-city," with thousands of people flooding in from the impoverished countryside every year in search of a better life. As it is surrounded by desert, many of these peasant migrants simply squat in huge shanty towns, erecting flimsy wickerwork huts on the bare hillsides that ring the metropolis.

Life is hard for the newcomers. At first, there are no services of any kind. They must organize themselves and press the government to extend electricity lines and paved roads.

Drinking water is provided by tankers, which every morning weave a path through the morass of makeshift dwellings. Sewage is disposed of in pit latrines. Rubbish is burned in the streets. People must travel long distances each day, either to work, or to hunt for a job.

Schools and clinics are slow to arrive. As for housing, the folk are left to their own devices, slowly improving their homes as and when they are able.

Ever since the Columbans arrived in Lima in 1952 it has been a priority of ours to accompany these people and serve them from the outset. Our parishes grow up like the neighbourhoods – evolving bit by bit.

In Jicamarca, the scale of immigration is astounding. "Twenty years ago this was empty space," recalls Liam, "apart from a few pig farms. Now there are over 100,000 people here, and the government reckons that, when fully occupied, there'll be over half a million."

*... as a true Columban frontiersman, he'll just move on to another fringe area and start all over again. Thus a new chapter will be opened in his "motorcycle diaries."*

Eventually, the area will have to be split into two or three parishes, each with at least two priests.

For the time being, however, there is just Liam.

Similar to the other residents, he first lived in a tiny two-room hut, perched on a steep slope. Over time he has been able to make a few improvements, but conditions are still fairly basic. From here he fans out to the 17 Christian base communities that the Columbans have fostered to date, strapping his Mass kit and other essentials onto the back of his bike. "You see, there are still hardly any paved roads round here," he explains, "and the dirt roads are just that – dirt. A motorbike is ideal for cutting through all that."

Faithful to Columban principles, Liam works with a team of committed local lay people and missionary Sisters (mostly from Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and the United States). The idea is to form Christian communities in all the various

population centres of Jicamarca, then look for land, build rudimentary chapels (funded mainly by the generosity of Columban benefactors) and, when the essentials of a parish are in place, hand the area over to the bishop and the native diocesan clergy. From then on it will be up to them to keep the place going.

And Liam? Well, as a true Columban frontiersman, he'll just move on to another fringe area and start all over again. Thus a new chapter will be opened in his "motorcycle diaries."

*Columban Fr Liam Carey is from the west of Ireland. He worked in Brazil before coming to Peru.*

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*Columban Fr John Boles is an English Columban who has worked in Peru for 20 years.*

*Columban Fr Liam Carey says Mass with some parishioners in Jicamarca parish.*





Fr Leo Donnelly RIP.

# He stayed with the people

*Columban Fr Leo Donnelly passed away in Peru on February 4, 2014.*

*He lived with the people, stayed with the people, and was buried among the people.*

*Fr Peter Woodruff shares his memories of Fr Leo's life.*

*Compiled by Columban Fr Peter Woodruff with the help of Columban and other missionaries who worked in Peru.*

*H*is was a huge life - just like his hands and his heart. Fr Leo served in nine parishes in Peru: in Lima (on the coast), in Huasahuasi (in the Andes Mountains), and in Tamshiyacu (in the Amazon jungle region). Besides being a missionary priest for over 50 years he painted, wrote poetry, gardened and published pastoral/theological articles in *The Furrow*.

This is how Fr Leo saw our shared mission: *"We did not just come to do things for our parishioners and then go home. We came here to share our lives with the Peruvian people, to live close to them and to value them as daughters*

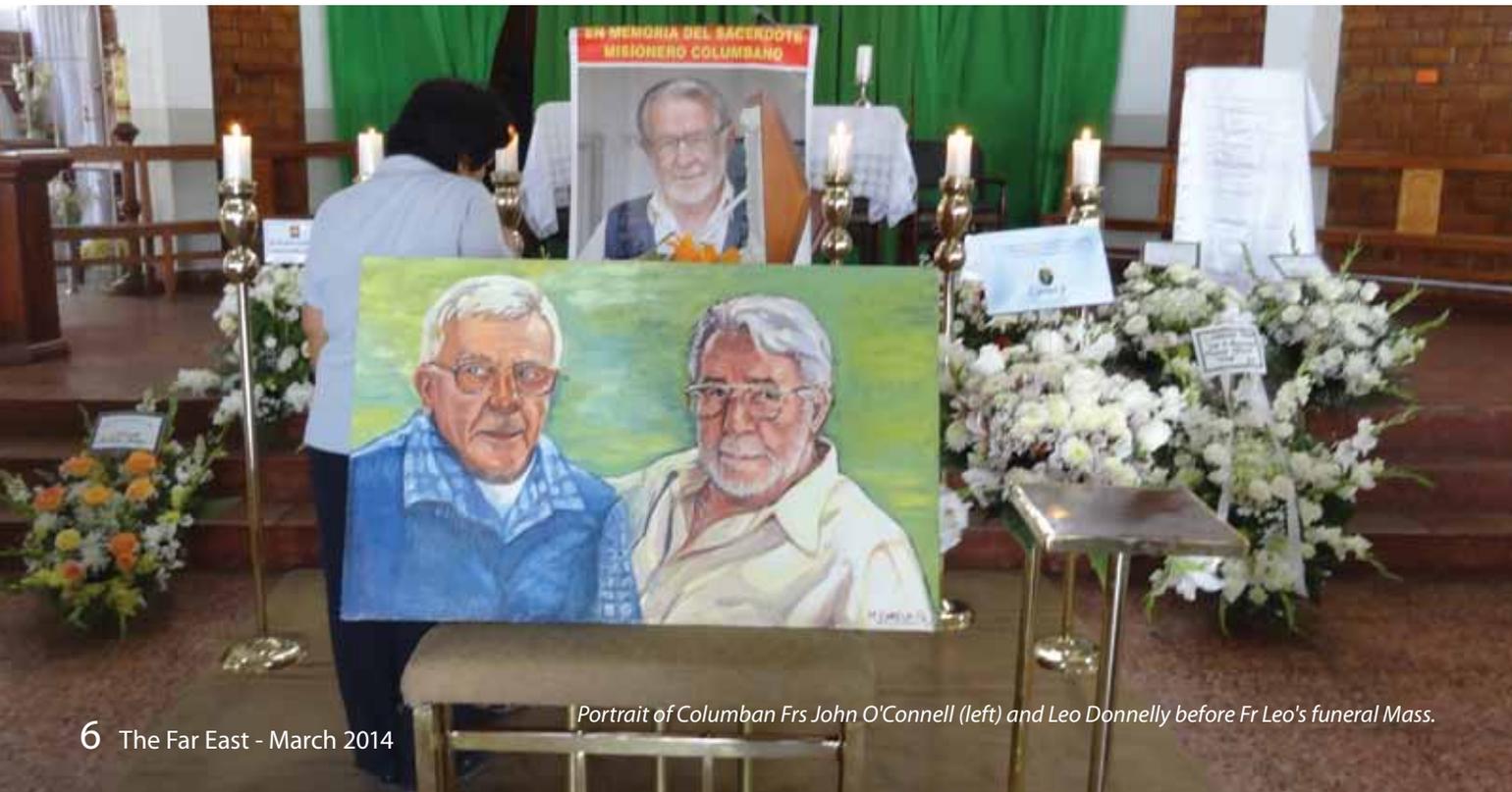
*and sons of God. As missionaries, we could not bring them the faith because they already had strong faith. What we could do is value them as humans."*

Fr Leo began by learning the ropes of working in a parish, where the hardest thing to bear was the poverty and misery of his parishioners, which *"ground away at one's very soul in the constant encounter with families without hope of changing their wretched situation."*

Even so, Fr Leo once wrote on returning to Lima in 1971, *"It doesn't take much to get you out of the doldrums. You are a born optimist or*

*you wouldn't be in this game at all. All it takes is a word of welcome, a smile, a 'good to have you with us again' and you are on your feet and 'God is in His heaven, all is right with the world'."*

Such was the quality that enabled him to push on when there seemed to be little joy in life: *"I arrived back just in time to celebrate my anniversary as a priest. Fourteen years of what? Of frustration and loneliness and pig-headedness and ignorance and misunderstanding? Every step forward seems to have been followed by two backwards. One minute it is problems with personnel and once you sort them out, the work itself or the people start*



*Portrait of Columban Frs John O'Connell (left) and Leo Donnelly before Fr Leo's funeral Mass.*



Huasahuasi delegation at Fr Leo's grave in Lima, Peru.

*creating others and you lay one burden down to pick up another."*

On two occasions that I recall he put his life on the line for justice, once in Lima and later in the rural town of Huasahuasi. Fr John Hegerty spoke of one such life-changing moment at Fr Leo's funeral Mass:

*"Leo was assigned to the parish of St Martin de Porres when a group of workers, who had been unjustly sacked, occupied the church to go on hunger strike. The police arrived with orders to remove them but Leo refused access. Then the workers themselves persuaded him to open the doors. This experience of utter disillusionment with the status quo and the dignified courage of powerless factory workers marked for Leo the beginning of belief in the power and the right of the oppressed – a moment of deep conversion."*

Fr Leo once wrote: *"I have tried to act as a Peruvian priest recommended to a group of young priests who had recently arrived in Peru: 'You have come as empty chalices to my people. Allow*

*them to fill to overflowing that chalice with their Gospel. When they have done so then and only then will you hold something of value for them. You will then articulate for them the Gospel they have given you."*

Fr Leo wrote of his time in Huasahuasi in the Andes Mountains: *"In Huasahuasi, in January and May crosses from all over the hills are brought in to the parish church, blessed at a Mass and then carried back to a hillside overlooking a village. Daily life happens in the shadow of His saving cross. The crosses, scattered over the hills, silently proclaim the faith of the residents of this region: 'We are the people of God; we are one.' The people I've been sent to work among tend to see God not as a strict taskmaster but as God showed himself to us, as 'Abba,' a loving and caring father."*

*"I was deeply moved and renewed in my own faith by the people of Huasahuasi as they relived and made so real Christ's redemptive act. At the Easter Vigil the Paschal Candle was lit as a symbol of hope for everyone in the town that had*

*experienced violence and death but looked to a day when injustice would end. Families kept their faith alive and passed it on to their children through this old and ever new ritual."*

*"In my time in Huasahuasi, I buried 28 people who had been murdered by the Shining Path guerrillas. In the beginning they shot people but later they killed with knives. The ordinary farmers and village people of course suffered from both sides. The military would go into a village and burn it down so that the Shining Path guerrillas could not hide there."*

Sr Irene McCormack, an Australian Sister of St Joseph who worked in Huasahuasi, was murdered on May 21, 1991. Fr Leo went on home leave in mid 1992 and knew that many of his Huasahuasi parishioners doubted he would return. Soon after he returned in early 1993 ten men were killed by Shining Path and, in the midst of the senseless killing, he found himself asking once again, *"Who's next?"* Fr Leo wrote poetry about much of what he experienced with the poor of Peru:

*I believe  
that somewhere in this morass  
He is there in Spirit  
inspiring, encouraging, sustaining  
each and every individual  
who raises his voice in  
protest. (1984)*

Luke and Marion Guthrie of Mildura, former volunteer English teachers in Lima, spoke of Fr Leo with deep gratitude. *"Fr Leo was an inspirational servant of God. He was a humble human being who showed respect for every person he met regardless of their station in life."*

# He became poor so that...

*"He became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich" ( cf. 2 Cor 8: 9).*

*This is the theme Pope Francis has taken for his 2014 Lenten Message. Just as St Paul reminds us that Christ became poor through becoming a human being so that we may become rich, Pope Francis invites us during this Lenten season to show our concern for the poor by making difficult sacrifices in order to help others.*

*Here is a summary of Pope Francis' Lenten Message.*

*What is the poverty that Christ took on?*

*"So what is this poverty by which Christ frees us and enriches us? It is his way of loving us, his way of being our neighbour, just as the Good Samaritan was neighbour to the man left half dead by the side of the road (cf. Lk 10:25ff). What gives us true freedom, true salvation and true happiness is the compassion, tenderness and solidarity of his love. Christ's poverty which enriches us is his taking flesh and bearing our weaknesses and sins as an expression of God's infinite mercy to us. Christ's poverty is the greatest treasure of all."*

*What is Christ's wealth?*

*"Jesus' wealth is that of his boundless confidence in God the Father, his constant trust, his desire always and only to do the Father's will and give glory to him. Jesus is rich in the same way as a child who feels loved and who loves his or her parents, without doubting their love and tenderness for an instant. Jesus' wealth lies in his being 'the Son'; his unique relationship with the Father is the sovereign prerogative of this Messiah who is poor."*

*Our Witness during Lent*

*Following the example of Christ who became poor so that we may become rich, "...we Christians are called to confront the poverty of our brothers and sisters, to touch it, to make it our own and to take practical steps to alleviate it."*

*Reaching out to the destitute*

Christians are challenged during the season of Lent to reach out to, touch and make our own the destitution of others and find ways to alleviate it.

"Destitution is poverty without faith, without support, without hope. There are three types of destitution: material, moral and spiritual."

1. *Material Destitution* is normally called poverty, affecting those who lack basic rights such as food, water, hygiene and work.

*"When power, luxury and money become idols, they take priority over the need for a fair distribution of wealth. Our consciences thus need to be converted to justice, equality, simplicity and sharing.*

2. *Moral Destitution* consists in slavery to sin and vice. Pope Francis asks, *"...how much pain is caused in families because one of their members - often a young person - is in thrall to alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography! How many people no longer see meaning in life or prospects for the future, how many have lost hope!"*

3. *Spiritual Destitution* occurs *"...when we turn away from God and reject his love. If we think we don't need God who reaches out to us through Christ, because we believe we can make do*





Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff

*on our own, we are headed for a fall. God alone can truly save and free us."*

#### *Consoling the broken hearted*

Christians are invited this Lent to go out and spread the Good News, to share the treasure of faith to the broken hearted, offering hope to those experiencing darkness.

*"It means following and imitating Jesus, who sought out the poor and sinners as a shepherd lovingly seeks his lost sheep. In union with Jesus, we can courageously open up new paths of evangelization and human promotion."*

#### *What can I give up?*

*"Lent is a time of self-denial; we would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others by our own poverty. Let us not forget that real poverty hurts: no self-*

*denial is real without this dimension of penance. I distrust a charity that costs nothing and does not hurt."*

#### *Conclusion*

Pope Francis calls on the Holy Spirit, *"to increase our concern and responsibility for human destitution, so that we can become merciful and act with mercy.*

He invites us as Christians to faithfully undertake this Lenten journey.

*"In expressing this hope, I likewise pray that each individual member of the faithful and every Church community will undertake a fruitful Lenten journey."*

*"He became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich" ( cf. 2 Cor 8: 9)*

# A programme that works

FR CATHAL GALLAGHER

*People with HIV/AIDS being empowered to manage their lives positively.*



*Columban Fr Cathal Gallagher with Percy, a HIV/AIDS trainer.*



*The poverty belt surrounding Lima, Peru.*

In 1997 I was parish priest in Villa Maria, one of the poorest suburbs of Lima, when I received a phone call to go to the local barrio clinic run by Sr Mildred McNamara, a Sister of Mercy from Ireland who first arrived in Peru in 1969. Two brothers had died of AIDS in the same week and a third brother was in the throes of an emotional fit as he believed that he would be next to die.

At that stage I knew nothing about HIV/AIDS so I began to ask around and found out that many people were living with HIV and dying from AIDS. It was a “taboo” subject in the shanty town where the people only spoke about it in whispers and my Columban friends and the local clergy alike did not see it as a major pastoral issue.

Even the families of the people living with HIV/AIDS would refer to their relatives’ illness as tuberculosis or leukaemia. It was as if we Columbans were colluding in the generalised denial in the population. It was not that my fellow priests were uncaring towards the plight of these vulnerable people. They would sympathise with the families of the deceased, do whatever religious ceremony was appropriate and leave it at that as they simply did not know what else to do.

I called together a group that I thought might help find a way to respond to a steadily worsening situation. I met with a psychologist, a teacher and a lawyer but we did not know enough to go beyond the basic recommendations of prevention. In 2002, for personal reasons, I left Peru and went to London where I spoke with a friend who was working with people living with HIV/AIDS. He urged me to take time to learn more about

HIV and as the position of Coordinator of the Multidisciplinary HIV/AIDS Team in a hospital in north east London was advertised just at that time, he encouraged me to apply for the position. I did and got the job.

There I learned a lot about living with HIV and was introduced to the Stanford University programme for self-management of chronic conditions, which was implemented by the National Health Service under the title of *'The Expert Patient.'* I eventually got trained to the top level for running the programme.

At the time, there were only three people in the UK trained to that level for work with people living with HIV/AIDS. After three years I decided to bring the programme to Latin America and so returned to Lima in 2005.

The programme's purpose is to educate people living with HIV/AIDS in the self-management of their chronic condition. Through the programme we set out to empower people so that they might discover within themselves the tools and ability to manage their lifestyle while living with HIV/AIDS.

We constantly talk about responsibility, i.e. the ability to respond to new situations in their lives. We further train suitable participants as future trainers in the programme and as promoters of prevention in high risk populations in the metropolitan area of Lima and Callao.

The basic programme consists of seven consecutive weekly two and a half hour sessions, to which we have added two more sessions, an introductory information session and a follow-up meeting one month

after completing the seven sessions. This is to get feedback about how participants are implementing the programme in their lives.

Over 1,600 people have been through this programme over the past seven years, 120 of whom have been trained as instructors of the programme, and 20 of whom are soon to be accredited by Stanford University as Master Trainers of the programme.

Fifty two of these instructors continuously run programmes in more than 20 locations, scattered for the most part around the poverty belts of the cities of Lima, the capital and Callao, the major port city of the country.

*I see HIV/AIDS as largely an illness caused by poverty, poor education and inadequate health facilities.*

*I would like all to feel welcome at the table of the banquet of the Kingdom of God.*

From my experience to date I can see that major issues around HIV infection are lack of information and myths about sexuality, gender inequalities, the lack of good father figures and the stigma and discrimination attached to a HIV diagnosis which cause many to avoid being tested. Correcting these issues will require major changes in Peruvian society, especially as regards the authoritarian, patriarchal mindset of many men.

We have developed a good working relationship with a number of state and local authorities, allowing us to provide awareness raising and prevention workshops with members

of the Armed Forces, the National Police Force, the Metropolitan Police and in some of the National jails.

In our centre we coordinate our work of training and prevention campaigns. We also offer ongoing education for the trainers on topics such as human dignity, human rights, self-esteem and leadership.

We also run a programme called "Yo Soy" or "I am," which is open to all who have been through the basic programme. This project includes a Support Group, a 12-step programme and re-socialization activities like Karaoke, BINGO and a Cine-forum.

This allows us to help many combat depression, shame, social stigma and discrimination. This programme was awarded second place in "The Competition in Best Practices in HIV 2011 – 2013" run by The National Institute for Health and The Ministry for Health.

I see men and women who live with HIV/AIDS as the present day lepers. Our job is to help them move from exclusion to inclusion, as did Jesus of Nazareth when he acted to help the lepers of his day belong once again to society.

I see HIV/AIDS as largely an illness caused by poverty, poor education and inadequate health facilities.

I would like all to feel welcome at the table of the banquet of the Kingdom of God.

---

*Columban Fr Cathal Gallagher lives and works with people with HIV/AIDS in some of the poorest areas of Lima, Peru.*

# An interview with Fr Brian Gore

Fr Brian Gore shares with our readers his work with the "Negros Nine Human Development Foundation" on the Filipino Island of Negros.

*T*ell us a little about yourself?

I am from Perth, Western Australia. I was ordained in 1968 and soon after assigned to the Philippines. When I arrived aboard the ship "Changsa" in Manila Harbour in 1969, I said to myself, "Oh boy, what have I got myself into now!"

I must confess that I never really learnt what it meant to be a priest and a missionary until I was sent to the island of Negros in 1972. I was struck by the conditions of the poor people of Negros so much that I already knew at once that I was on their side. It was during this decade that we began organizing the Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) as a response to the conditions of the poor.

*How did the Negros Nine Human Development Foundation begin?*

It was founded in the year 2000 to continue the work of the BCCs who during the 1970s and early 1980s, were able to organize through non-violent means the protection of small scale holdings of subsistence farmers against the violent encroachments of powerful sugar interests that were trying to seize their lands.

*How were the BCCs able to do this?*

The BCCs were able to muster large numbers of people from several parishes in the area to occupy the land being seized and thus prevent the farmer and his family from being driven off their land. They also organized Marches of thousands of people across the land to protest and draw

attention to the abuse and injustices committed against farmers with small holdings by the powerful.

*So this movement came out of the local church!*

Yes, the people living in poverty at a subsistence level, discovered a new way of being Church. They belonged to a People's Church, that is, a church where one expresses one's faith in God through concern for the life and death social issues of the area.

This meant that the parishes of this area began to organize themselves along the BCC model and unite in the struggle for justice and the transformation of Negros society. There were many martyrs in this struggle for justice and the human rights of the poor subsistence farmers. We work today to commemorate their memory and sacrifice.

*How did you become part of The Negros Nine?*

In 1983, nine of us were arrested on trumped-up murder charges. This included six lay parish organizers and three of us priests: Filipino Diocesan priest Fr Vincent Dangan (died 1993) and two Columbans, Fr Niall O'Brien, (died 2004) and myself. We were imprisoned for 14 months. We were *The Negros Nine*. After the charges were dropped, I returned to Australia for several years.

When I returned to the Philippines in 1989, I worked for many years in the Manila area. It was only in 2008, at the age of 64, that I decided to return to the island of Negros to work with the "Negros Nine Human Development Foundation" and so take up where I had left off.



Photos: Fr. Brian Gore



*What have you done since returning to Negros?*

*I am involved in two commitments.*

*Commitment One:* Previously many Columban priests worked in the Diocese of Kabankalan. I am now the last Columban priest remaining in the Diocese. Fifteen kilometres away in Himamaylan City, our former Columban headquarters has been turned into St Columban's Retreat House, which can accommodate up to 100 people. As it is located close to the sea and a river and is on a peninsula, it offers a beautiful setting for those groups from the Diocese seeking time out for prayer and reflection.

*Yes, the people living in poverty at a subsistence level, discovered a new way of being Church. They belonged to a People's Church, that is, a church where one expresses one's faith in God through concern for the life and death social issues of the area.*

*Commitment Two:* One hour's drive from the coastal Retreat House up into the cooler mountains at 600 metres above sea level in the Bantolinao area, is the "San Columbano de Bantolinao - Negros Nine Demo Farm." This Demo Farm was set up in 2006 in this area where many families had been forced to leave their small holdings and migrate to the large cities in search of a better life, due to soil deterioration and erosion. The Demo Farm was set up on 12 hectares to help the local farmers learn sustainable agricultural methods and organic farming. Later 75 hectares of land above the Demo Farm was bought for a reforestation project. To date, 40,000 native trees have been planted here. Native birds and bats

are now returning to the areas. Local creeks and natural springs are coming back to life.

The "Negros Nine Human Development Foundation" also is strongly committed to fighting the trafficking of people. Due to the poverty this is a problem even with minors in this remote part of the island of Negros.

*What are some of the income generating schemes used?*

We have developed an abaca cloth weaving industry. As there is a great demand for organic products, we are able to sell our produce at the Organic Farmers Cooperative in Kabankalan for restaurants and other markets. We have 10,000 native species in our plant nursery. We also have a talapia fish pond and are growing our own organic coffee, fruit and vegetable. 115 families belong to the Cooperative.

*Any new projects*

There are two. We have now supporting a primary school with 154 students which goes through to Year 5 and will later continue on to and include a Secondary School. We are able to offer a nutritious meal to the children for 200 days of the year. As a result of the school lunch, school attendance is practically 100%

Secondly, we have built a Shrine to all missionary groups who have ever worked in the Diocese of Kabankalan. There is a large stone chapel with a statue of St Columban outside. We are developing this chapel as a pilgrim site. It will also include an organic restaurant, meeting rooms and conduct guided tours of the rainforest.

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*Columban Fr Brian Gore has been a missionary in the Philippines since 1968.*



# Humbled before a gracious God

FR KELVIN BARRETT

*Columban Fr Kelvin Barrett works in the Formation Programme for Columban seminarians in Korea. He shares with us how God led him to this rewarding ministry.*



Photos: Fr Kelvin Barrett

*Columban Frs Thomas Nam (left), Kelvin Barrett (centre) and Donal O'Keeffe with FMA students and families.*

After several years absence, I again find myself with a role in the Formation Programme in Korea for Columban seminarians - albeit temporarily. After some adjustment, I am back into the rhythm of formation life - community prayer three or four times a day with the seminarians and individual accompaniment sessions with them once a fortnight.

These sessions are designed to help the seminarians to integrate the various aspects of their lives - their academic life at the Seoul Catholic University, the pastoral placement where they go once a week, their social life, their life in the formation house community and the challenge of growing into the life of a Columban

missionary priest. Their spiritual growth is handled separately through bi-weekly sessions with their spiritual director.

Overall there are 12 Korean Columban seminarians. However, in our community there only four at present. The remaining eight are engaged in either their first overseas missionary experience or are in Spiritual Year which is a special year of prayer, study and discernment. Three of them are in their first year. Even though the number in the community is small, there is a lot of action.

The dynamism arises as the seminarians deal with their struggle to develop a life of study after a number of years in the workforce, the

dynamics of a group of people living together who are more used to living alone and the challenge of reflecting ever more deeply on their lives. They face these challenges in the context of the charism of being a Columban missionary priest who crosses the boundaries of language and culture, which calls for a mixture of 'stick-at-it-ness' and flexibility. In addition, there is free time for individuals to pursue their own recreational interests and outings together as a group.

Returning to this life after several years takes me back to the origins of my involvement in this ministry some 35 years ago, firstly in Australia and later in Korea. Were the events that led me into this life just the natural

evolution of life or were they signs of God's call to this ministry?

Some 40 years ago, I was assigned to Yeongweol parish in Korea. Yeongweol is situated in the foothills of the Daebaek Mountain Range. It was a cool early autumn night. I had been suffering from quite a severe flu for several days and not feeling well I had gone to bed early with the next day's Sunday Masses in mind. In the early hours of the morning, I woke suddenly with a strong sense that I was moving out of my body.

Gasping for breath I came to and was able to struggle to the phone to call for help. The next morning I managed the main Mass, having cancelled the others, but I kept running out of breath. As it turned out, I was suffering from a case of double pneumonia. After 10 days in hospital I recovered physically.

However, the near death experience was a turning point in my life. During my recovery I never talked about nor understood that experience. In fact, I did not take it as in any way real until years later. To think that I might have had some sort of a 'death experience' was too unrealistic for me to accept.

However, my emotional reaction to this experience was going on regardless. It shook my faith in a protective God. The ensuing emotional turmoil highlighted what I thought was an embarrassingly immature faith and the shallowness of my understanding of my emotional and inner life. I was humbled before God and man but did not want to acknowledge this.

Upon returning to Australia some months later, I sought help. At that time, I also took the job as bursar in the former Columban seminary at Turramurra, in Sydney, while

continuing to work on integrating my reaction to my Yeongweol experience. During that time, I noticed that quite a number of my companions from seminary days were having similar troubles.

Thus I was led to think about the style of our formation programme - itself already undergoing some development. This development was the beginning of the emphasis on inner growth and integration of the emotional and the spiritual.

*However, the near death experience was a turning point in my life. During my recovery I never talked about nor understood that experience. In fact, I did not take it as in any way real until years later.*

From my experience, this seemed to be a very necessary development in the seminary formation programme.

God's call seemed to be there to be a part of this development. The rest is now history. It has been a privilege to accompany many young men, Australian, New Zealanders and Koreans on their journey of the integration of their faith with the many different aspects of their life.

While travelling with them on this road to becoming missionary priests, I have always been inspired by their desire to understand how God is working in their lives and where He is leading them.

Some continued on to be priests and cross-cultural missionaries; others found their call in different paths - all valuable in the eyes of God. In recent years, I have also been no less impressed with the commitment of lay missionaries - Korean, Filipino

and Fijian - whom I have had the opportunity to accompany in a similar way as they have prepared to join and take part in Columban Lay Mission.

Even though many years have now passed on this journey, I am still moved by the endeavour and commitment of these men and women who come to us seeking to follow Jesus as a priest or a lay missionary. I also look back with gratitude to God for my experience in Yeongweol, an experience for which I in no way was grateful at the time.

It was a fortunate event which has shaped my life and led me into a very rewarding ministry as a missionary. Nonetheless, I struggle with being humble before God!

---

*Columban Fr Kelvin Barrett has been a missionary in Korea since 1970.*



*Columban Lay Missionaries Cristina & Maria.*



# 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.*

## Takayama Ukon, Samurai of Christ

The Japanese Church has finished preparing the application for the beatification of Takayama Ukon, a feudal lord or daimyo who, after his conversion, played a pioneering role in the spread of Christianity in Japan in the 16th century. The Bishops hope that Takayama Ukon will be beatified some time in 2015, the 400th anniversary of his death.

Takayama Ukon was born in 1552 in what is now Osaka Prefecture, the son and heir of Takayama Tomoteru, the Lord of Sawa Castle. After his father had converted to Christianity, he was baptised at the age of 12 with the name of Justo.

Both father and son were feudal lords (*daimyos*) who had been appointed by the Imperial Court and were entitled to raise a private army and hire samurai. Before their conversion, the Takayama family would have practiced Bushido, the Japanese warrior code of conduct. After their conversion, they were responsible for promoting Christianity in the area under their influence and for the conversion of many of people.

Japan was ruled at that time by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who had reunified Japan. Fearful of the growing power of foreign influences and of Christianity, Hideyoshi ordered the expulsion of

foreign missionaries in 1587 and the persecution of Japanese who practiced the Christian faith.

While many of the feudal lords chose to renounce their Catholic Faith, Justo and his father chose to continue in their faith even though it meant the loss of land and honours. For the several decades from then on, Justo was protected by aristocratic friends.



In 1614 when Christianity was definitely banned, the former daimyo chose the path of exile and led a group of 300 Christians to the Philippines where they were welcomed by the Spanish Jesuits and local Catholics. They arrived on the 21st of December 1614.

When some of the exiles and the Spanish authorities proposed the overthrow of the Japanese government, Justo refused to support this idea.

On February 4, 1615, 40 days after his arrival in the Philippines, he died from illness and was buried with full military honours in a Catholic ceremony.

Today a statue of him dominates Plaza Dilao in Manila. In this statue, Justo Toyotomi wears warrior robes with his hair tied in a knot. His sword is pointed downward, and upon it hangs a figure of the crucified Christ.

Mgr Leo Jun Ikenaga, Archbishop of Osaka and President of the Japanese Bishops' Conference, said that Takayama Ukon would be the first individual Japanese to be beatified. At the moment, there are 42 Japanese who are canonized and 393 beatified, all of whom were martyred during the three centuries of persecution in Japan.

*"Takayama was never misled by those around him. He persistently lived a life following his own conscience. He led a life appropriate to a saint and continues to encourage many people even today,"* said Fr Kawamura, one of the promoters of his cause for beatification.

*Source: Osaka (AsiaNews)*

## Mission Intention for March

That many young people may accept the Lord's invitation to consecrate their lives to proclaiming the Gospel



# From the Director

*My cup is full*

Columban Fr Leo Donnelly died after a short illness in Lima, Peru, on February 4, 2014, just 13 days short of his 82nd birthday.

He was well-known to readers of *The Far East* magazine through his articles, poems and his support of a young Peruvian artist Martin Varela.

Throughout his priestly life, he was concerned with the dignity of people. His articles in *The Far East* had a constant theme of the damage that poverty does to the self esteem of people who are at the bottom of society's social scale. Fr Leo attacked this attitude during his life and constantly proclaimed, "We all share the same dignity."

He spent over 50 years of his priestly life as a Columban missionary in Peru, working and living with the people. He was a comforting presence even when life was precarious and dangerous.

He volunteered to go to Huasahuasi in the Andes Mountains in 1988 when the Columbans vowed not to abandon the people to the Maoist terrorist organisation, *The Shining Path* which was operating there.

During his time in Huasahuasi, Sr Irene McCormack, an Australian Josephite Sister and five residents were murdered. He held Sr Irene's broken body in his hands and stayed in Huasahuasi for a further seven years, in constant fear but with a deep faith in God and the company of local Catechists.

When his friends in Huasahuasi heard of his death, the church bell tolled to acknowledge his passing and the flags flew at half mast.

He was loyal to his friends. One example is Leonides, a deaf-mute who worked with him in the Amazon jungle at Tiamshiacu. When Leo returned to Lima he brought Leonides with him to Holy Spirit parish and later to the Columban Centre house, where Leonides worked mostly on maintenance until his retirement and his death.

Fr Leo was an artist and recognised talent in a young Peruvian boy, Martin Varela who was denied access to Art School. Fr Leo thought it was because he was poor and his response was to use his pension to send this lad to a private university.

*Throughout his priestly life, he was concerned with the dignity of people. His articles in The Far East had a constant theme of the damage that poverty does to the self esteem of people who are at the bottom of society's social scale. Fr Leo attacked this attitude during his life and constantly proclaimed, "We all share the same dignity."*

On the day Fr Leo died, Columban Fr John Hegerty recounted that Fr Leo removed his oxygen mask and tried to say something that John did not understand at first! Fr Leo thought for a moment and then held up two fingers together and then horizontally, as if asking for a drink. Then he wagged his fingers indicating, No! Next he held up the same fingers vertically and gave the thumbs up, meaning, Yes, his cup was full. It was enough.

Fr Leo had the wish to be buried in Peru. This was his ultimate commitment to the people of Peru.

Rest in peace, Leo.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr Gary Walker  
director@columban.org.au

# The survival of orphan Erica

FR SHAY CULLEN

*Columban Fr Shay Cullen went to Tacloban City on the island of Leyte, in the Philippines, soon after Typhoon Haiyan (Yolando) had destroyed the city and surrounding areas on November 8, 2013. He came with the PREDA team of social workers to prepare the way for a series of training seminars to combat human trafficking and to give group therapy to the many survivors in the squalid evacuation camps. For the children, they organized puppet shows that teach abuse prevention.*

*Fr Shay's first concern however was to find the mission orphans. He tells us the story of Erica, one of them.*



*W*e found Erica in a white canvas tent with her auntie and uncle, about 300 metres from where her parents' house once stood. She was willing to tell us her tragic experience. The home of Erica was half a kilometre from the shore line. On the night of November 7, she, her parents and two brothers slept together in the small room of her parents as the rain was lashing down and the wind was rising. They woke after an hour. *"This is going to be a strong storm, so everyone stay close tonight,"* her father told them.

By 2:00am, the howling wind was tearing at the coconut trees and they could hear coconuts crashing into metal sheet roofs across their village. The family of five huddled together and embraced each other. It was to be their last embrace.

By 5:00am on November 8, a great wave of water, about 7 to 10 metres high reared up from the ocean and driven by a 230km wind, rushed inland across the open land towards the village. It knocked down everything before it. It was unstoppable; mango trees toppled before this wall of water as if a dam had suddenly collapsed.

The great wave of water suddenly burst into their little bungalow house, smashing through the windows, collapsing the door and the water gushed in and quickly filled the

Photo: Fr Shay Cullen



*"I miss seeing my parents and brothers. I don't know where they are, but wherever they are, I pray for them to God. They are in God's hands now."*

house. They cried out for help and were trying to swim to stay above the water. Erica's father shouted to them to cling and climb into the ceiling but it was too late, the water engulfed them so quickly, there was no escape.

Then the roof was torn off like a scrap of paper ripped from a notebook and disappeared in an instant into the dark sky. They were trying to swim and float on the rising water and a tree came rushing by and was held momentarily by the remaining wall of their little house.

*"Grab the branches, hold the branch,"* her father shouted above the deafening noise of the wind. Her father and mother and two brothers caught the branches but Erica could not reach them, she was clinging to the remains of the rafters, the water was up her neck. Her mother saw they were being separated and cried out in the storm, *"Erica, we love you, we care for you, survive, survive."*

Then they were swept away and Erica was also carried off with the surging waters. They disappeared into the darkness and that was the last Erica ever saw of them. She was carried on the wave and bumped into a coconut tree and she grabbed it and wrapped her arms around it and clung on for dear life.

After a long while, the powerful wave began to lose its power and strength and receded. *"I prayed to God to*

*save me, save my family, to please let me live,"* she said. She clung on the tree until the waters fully retreated. Exhausted and trembling in shock, she fell to the ground and survived. Her parents and two brothers were lost.

Two months later, she still has nightmares. *"I cannot sleep so well, I have bad dreams that I am drowning, I miss my family,"* tears welled in her eyes and she grew silent.

Then after a while, we all walked slowly through the widespread destruction and ruins of the entire village to where her little house once stood. It was just a heap of rubble, half of a block wall remained. There was a broken mirror, a hairbrush, a crumbled photo in the ruins.

*Two months later, she still has nightmares. "I cannot sleep so well, I have bad dreams that I am drowning, I miss my family," tears welled in her eyes and she grew silent.*

Outside was a little white passenger van, its front window and roof crushed by a fallen tree. Her father once drove it for a livelihood. The landscape all around was one of utter destruction. Not a house was left standing.

Bodies of the dead were strewn around the day after the great wave,

some covered by debris. It took a week to uncover them for burial. Over 200 people died in that village and more are missing, their bodies never found. Perhaps they were carried out with the receding waters of the great wave.

As I looked around this scene of devastation there were fallen trees everywhere and the remaining coconut trees stripped of their palms stood starkly silhouetted against a gray wet sky.

Back in the tent that is now her home, Erica said that she is thankful to be alive and she had relatives who are caring for her.

*"I miss seeing my parents and brothers. I don't know where they are, but wherever they are, I pray for them to God. They are in God's hands now."*

Asked about her future she said; *"I have a hope to study and become a teacher. Thank you for listening to my story."* She seemed a little happier than when we first arrived. Erica and other homeless children of Tacloban are being helped by the PREDA Foundation.

---

*Columban Fr Shay Cullen is one of the founders of the PREDA Foundation in the Philippines which works against human trafficking and to assist sexually exploited and abused women and children. He first went to the Philippines in 1969.*



Photo: Fr Neil Magill

# Ordinations in Myanmar

FR NEIL MAGILL

*Columban Fr Neil Magill shares with us his participation in the ordination of five new Kachin priests in Myanmar.*

The Kachin people are a large ethnic group inhabiting the Kachin State in Myanmar. A large portion of the Kachins support independence from Myanmar and are engaged in a war against the Myanmar Military for independence.

Against the background of this war and the displacement of thousands who have become refugees, I recently travelled to Myitkyina, the Kachin capital, for the ordination of five Kachin deacons to the priesthood. Columbans worked with the Kachin people from the 1930s up until the late 1970s, when the last Columban was expelled.

Participating in the ordination ceremonies was the experience of a lifetime. It was wonderful to be in a

faith-filled atmosphere with at least 5,000 people for the three days of seminars, choir practice, catering and the ordinations.

Many of those participating at the ordinations were the poor, who had come from refugee camps. It was an opportunity for these refugees to celebrate even though they have been traumatized by this conflict and their dislocation from their homes.

Hundreds of women have been gang raped by the military. Innocent people, including many children have been killed; homes burned, villages destroyed and more than 10,000 people displaced from their homes and villages. They now have no homes, no money and no influence, but they do have a strong faith and a

hope that they will see justice for their children.

I decided to ask one of the newly ordained priests about his vocation story and the role that Columbans had played in it. Fr Bosco N-lam Hkun Seng told me his story.

*"In 1952, my grandparents were converted to Catholicism through the work of Columban Father Owen Rodgers. In 1956, my father was also baptised by him.*

*"My grandfather was a man of great dignity, which gained him the respect of all. For about eight years during the war years, priests could not visit his village. So he was the one who organized the faithful. The last parish priest in our village was Fr Owen O'Leary who left the village in 1967.*



*Joy does not lie in material things, but in us. I believe that a life of commitment, simplicity and honesty gives us joy.*

*"My father hadn't been highly educated. He studied only up to grade eight in a Columban mission school in Myitkyina under Fr Thomas Walsh. He died in 1945 at the age of 34 from malaria after being interned by the Japanese during the war. My father also studied under Frs Thomas Dowling, John O'Sullivan and Owen O'Leary.*

*"When the war broke out, my grandfather called him back to our village and he could not continue his studies.*

*In 1967 he began working as a catechist and attended the catechetical course in St Luke's Catechist School under the*

*guidance of Fr Bernard Way. My father is still a catechist.*

*"Since my father was a catechist, priests came to our home every now and then. So, priests were no strangers to me since my boyhood. From then on, I observed the way they spoke, the way they dressed and what they did. They were my heroes.*

*After I joined the seminary, however, I came to see the very human side of priests and how some could lose their vocation. On the other hand, I also saw some good and holy priests.*

*"In my seminary life, I liked reading mission magazines such as The Far*

*East. I got much wisdom from those magazines.*

*"Regarding my vocation, I have learned one thing - that a priest should be seen and be approachable. Joy does not lie in material things, but in us. I believe that a life of commitment, simplicity and honesty gives us joy.*

*I truly want to die without being old, if being old means no longer being useful to others."*

*Columban Fr Neil Magill has worked in Korea, on the General Council in Ireland and now works in Myanmar.*



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# Obituary - Fr John O'Hara

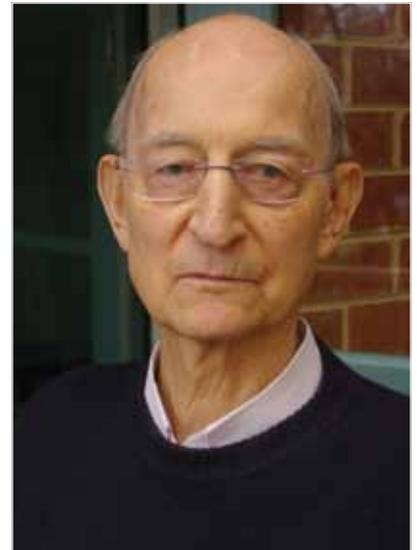
**Fr John O'Hara (1930-2013)**

Columban Fr John O'Hara died on Friday evening at 10:30pm in St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne after a short illness. He was 83-years-old. Only one month before his death Fr John was doing a supply in a nearby Church and declared that he was retiring from them. The following Thursday he was ill and went by ambulance to St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne. He was diagnosed with liver cancer and knew the prognosis was terminal. He was quite relaxed talking about his impending death with his usual trademark humour.

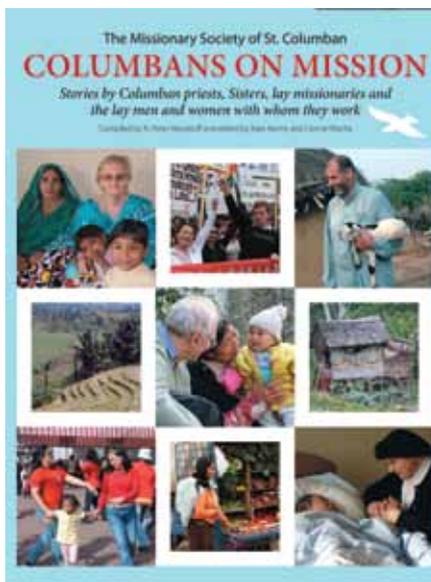
John had been a harbour master in South Australia before he went to the seminary at the ripe old age of 27 years. Hence the name 'Pop' by which he was commonly known. He spent 30 years in Korea in two blocks of time 1964-1974 and 1976-1995. On his return to Australia he worked in several parishes in the Melbourne Archdiocese and later was in demand for supply work. He took his priestly identity seriously and provided a great deal of back up to priests in local parishes; he believed in being of service to people.

The Vicar General of the Melbourne Archdiocese described him as a kind mentor and supporter of many priests. A Requiem Mass was held in St Vincent de Paul Church, Strathmore at 10:00am on Christmas Eve. A large crowd turned out despite it being Christmas Eve; a large contingent of Koreans came to pay their last respects to him. Their rendition of 'Amazing Grace' was superb. Bishops Vincent Long and Hilton Deakin and Vicar General of the Melbourne Archdiocese Fr Greg Bennett and a large number of priests attended the funeral.

Fr John was buried in the Columban plot at the Melbourne General Cemetery, Carlton. May he rest in peace.



*Fr John O'Hara RIP*



## **COLUMBANS ON MISSION**

Since 1918, the Missionary Society of St Columban has been sharing the Gospel in solidarity with the poor throughout the world. Today, Columbans including priests, Sisters and lay missionaries work in 16 countries around the globe in conjunction with lay men and women within the local communities. Columban Fr Peter Woodruff spent several years travelling around the Columban world and interviewing the men and women engaged in mission work.

The stories collected here provide a rare look at a moment in time in the continuing mission work and the ongoing Columban story. Each story is unique and different, but all of them share in furthering the work of mission today. Explore their first-hand accounts of what it means to be a missionary in today's ever changing world.

Fr Peter Woodruff, Australian by birth, is a member of the Missionary Society of St. Columban and was ordained in 1967. He worked as a missionary priest in parishes located on the northern periphery of Lima, Peru, where much of his prior vision of life was challenged and reshaped by a radically different social reality where the quest for social change and an emerging liberation theology provoked a lengthy and rather chaotic review of many aspects of life and Christian faith.

Since leaving Peru in 2009, Peter has travelled to countries where Columban missionaries work, interviewing priests, Sisters, lay missionaries and those with whom they work. He has written and ghost written many stories that serve as raw material for the three English language mission magazines of the Columbans in Australia and New Zealand, U.S., Ireland and Britain. Fr Peter currently lives at St Columbans, Essendon, Australia.

*The book can be purchased from [www.bookdepository.com](http://www.bookdepository.com)*





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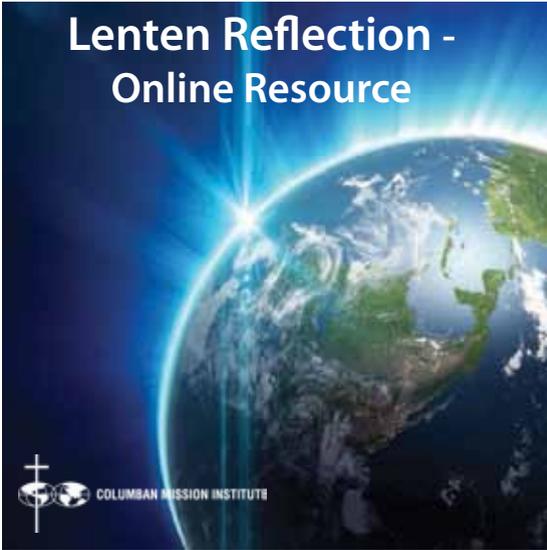
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