

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

April 2014



Who will judge you?

Remembering Columban Fr Leo Donnelly

The arsonist of the heart

The resurrection of Christ - Easter Sunday

A Church open to the world

An interview with Columban Fr Peter Hughes



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The Far East

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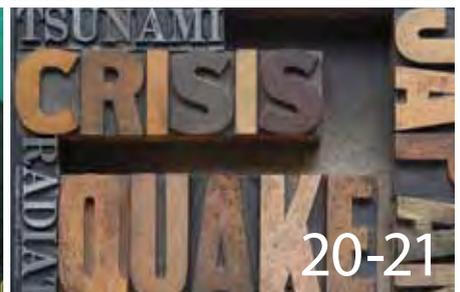
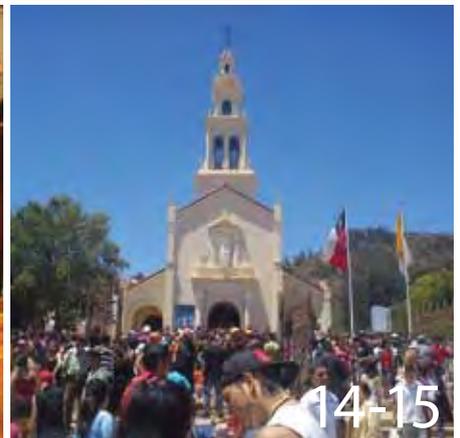
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The youth pilgrimage to Santa Teresita de Los Andes, Chile.



From the Editor

Passing over and exodus out of

At Easter we celebrate the beginning of the "passover" from and the "exodus" out of a world alienated from God, loss in sin, selfishness, slavery and darkness. Now, through the Easter events of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection, if we choose, we can now be born anew, reconciled to God and freed from death. We now are able to participate in God's Kingdom here on Earth and fully in the next life. This "Hope" arising from Christ's resurrection is the core of our faith. We are all invited to bring the light of the Risen Christ and the hope it gives into our world.

In this April issue of *The Far East* magazine there are many stories demonstrating how Columban missionaries participate in the passing over from and exodus out of concrete situations of darkness, slavery and sin into the light and hope arising from Christ's resurrection. They participate alongside the local peoples and the local Church in the countries where they work, often learning from them, sometimes acting as agents of changes, other times being pro-active with them in developing projects to answer concrete needs.

Columban Fr Leo Donnelly RIP was always there for those in Peru in need, offering hope and light in situations of

darkness and despair. Young people from troubled families where in most cases alcohol and drug addiction is prevalent, are offered the means to pass over and out of this situation into the loving, nurturing and empowering home, "Balay San Columbano," which was set up by Columban Fr Donald Kill in the Philippines.

Columban Fr Chris Saenz in Chile writes how young people who love to participate in pilgrimages are drawn through the Sacrament of Reconciliation to exodus out of sin and selfishness towards living the values of God's Kingdom.

This Easter exodus from self-centredness and self-absorption towards a life centred on God and care and concern for others, especially those in need, is symbolized in the ceremony of the washing of the feet during the Holy Thursday Liturgy. Columban Fr Barry Cairns shares with us the reflection of Mrs Tanaka, one of his parishioners in Japan on ways that we can symbolically wash other people's feet.

Columban seminarian Kurt Pala has recently returned from a two year mission experience in Fiji, which is a part of his seminary training. He gives a very good description of the process missionaries go through as they begin to engage with different cultures and

thus become a part of their Easter story.

Columban Fr Peter Hughes is the executive secretary of the Department of Justice and Solidarity of CELAM (the Latin American Bishops' Conference) based in Bogotá, Colombia. In an interview, he shows how the Church can be a voice that denounces situations of sin, exploitation and oppression. This voice can then lead an exodus towards bringing about God's Kingdom and its values in our world.

Columban Frs Barry Cairns and Sean McDonagh share with us the different ways that darkness threatens Japan. They also share with us different ways and concrete examples that the hope and light emanating from the Risen Lord can pass over from this darkness. Easter is a time for passing over and exodus out of situations of sin and oppression towards a participating in God and His Kingdom of love, justice, peace, solidarity, freedom, care and concern for all.

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Who will judge you?

FR PETER WOODRUFF

Francisco and Cecilia found in Columban Leo Donnelly the support they needed.

Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff



Francisco and Cecilia.

*F*rancisco and Cecilia are pillars of a small parish community in a new and dusty suburb on the outskirts of Lima. They live in a small house located on an unmade street where the government authorities, after about 20 years since families first came to live in the area, have recently begun to put in water and sewerage pipes. They are welcoming, diligent and loving with their three children and are hard workers. They help their neighbours in need in so far as they can and coordinate the activities of the local church community.

Francisco has worked as a diesel-engine mechanic in the navy for many years and just two years ago, soon before he turned 50 years of age, he retired. He and his wife had done all they could to bring up their children in a healthy and loving way but, all of a sudden, their world fell apart. Their eldest son had become a marijuana addict. They did not know to whom they could turn. They felt that other family members would be judgemental. Cecilia's parents were dead. Francisco's father is also dead. He did not want to worry his elderly mother.

Distraught and confused he went in search of Padre Leo Donnelly who had been parish priest in the early days of

their parish. He found Leo in the Columban headquarters house and when Leo hugged him, Francisco just sobbed aloud for ten minutes. He could not understand why all this had happened to them. Cecilia came along too and poured her heart out to Padre Leo. He was like a father to them, firm, gentle and compassionate. With an understanding word and strong hug they were confident that they would always find in him acceptance and compassion. *"Who on earth will judge you?"* he said. *"Don't be getting upset. Just let the Father act in freedom. Things will work out."* They felt that they could have drowned in despair and Fr Leo was like a life-saver. He stopped them from despairing and they knew they had found someone in whom they could trust.

They gradually began to get on with tackling the issue as a family but did not involve the two younger children. Things have moved on but they know that such matters are never definitively solved or free from further family trauma. Francisco remarked to me, *"I now know that no one is immune from anything. Anything can happen to anyone. One can do everything correctly, so to speak, and still disaster can strike"*. Then he continued, *"The only response that will work in the face of this kind of thing is love"*.

A huge part of their concern was the wherewithal to cover needed medical assistance. Recovery meant weekly meetings with psychologists and social welfare people and if they went ahead it also meant they had to accompany their son at each session, a requirement the hospital authorities demanded. They already knew that this could go on for months. Fares, and medicines had to be included and their relief was patent when Leo assured them he had Columban benefactors who would help and that he was merely a channel for such aid.

Leo was like a father to them, firm, gentle and compassionate. With an understanding word and strong hug they were confident that they would always find in him acceptance and compassion. "Who on earth will judge you?"

Both told me that they already knew all this from their experience of standing by others in their need but the experience of having to deal with it in their own lives radically changed their way of knowing. Their experience of standing by their own son, still fragile and still struggling to find his way, lets them feel the depth of pain that others might be enduring as they face their own family problems. Francisco also said in the course of our conversation, *"It's so important not to judge anyone. I was down and Padre Leo lifted me up. If he had judged me in some way he could have pushed me further into despair and confusion"*.

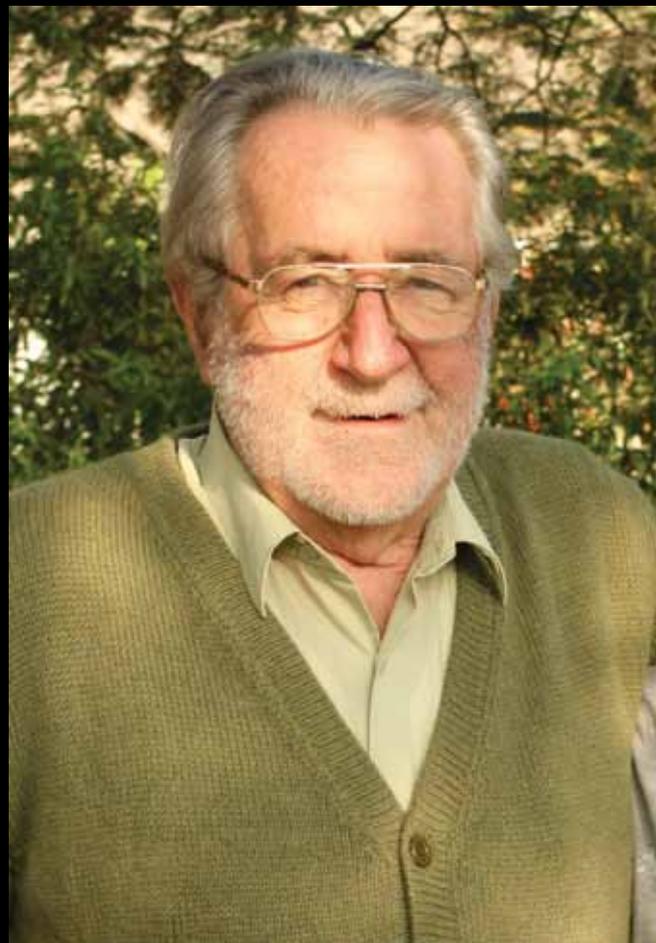
Cecilia commented, *"There were times when we used to wonder with our friends in the parish community, 'what is God preparing us for?' We never expected this"*. They told me that Padre Leo had told the gate keepers at the Columban Centre House, where he lived in retirement, that they should wake him if he was asleep when either Francisco or Cecilia came to see him.

Francisco was happy when Padre Leo turned up at their home for Francisco's 50th birthday. Here he enjoyed two special dishes* that people from Chiclayo (Francisco's home city in on the north coast of Peru) delight in.

* **Espejado** - Mix and grind maize, coriander and kaiwa: (*Chenopodium pallidicaule* – native Andean vegetable), cook in a pot and serve as a puré, and place a piece of boiled beef on top.

* **Ceviche de caballa** - (Marinated caballa - a dark fleshed fish from the waters of the Pacific Ocean near Chiclayo): Dice the fish and marinate in lime juice; add peppers and spices according to taste.

Columban Fr Peter Woodruff lives at St Columban's, Essendon.



He was like a father to them, firm, gentle and compassionate. With an understanding word and strong hug they were confident that they would always find in him acceptance and compassion.

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

May he rest in peace.



Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff

A real home

Listen to: A real home

FR DONALD KILL

Balay San Columbano which means "The House of St Columban" was set up by Columban Fr Donald (Don) Kill in Ozamiz City, the Philippines, to provide a home for 27 young people from troubled families. In many cases, one or both parents suffer from addictions to alcohol or drugs. The home offers the children food to eat, clothes to wear, a roof over their heads and an education to improve their lot in life. Fr Don introduces us to some of the young people in the care of Balay San Columbano.

*R*ene Boy Eramis is severely disabled due to fetal alcohol syndrome. He recently turned 32 years old and is unable to learn but is functional as a helper in our home. He helps to clean the house and prepares meals for the others living with us. Rene Boy was often severely beaten by his alcoholic father which added to

his psychological problems. He was not only deformed, he was unlovable and something to be beaten for no reason. Thank God he escaped from his family and became part of our family.

Rene Boy is currently suffering from a severe infection in his left knee. I had to bring him to Cebu to see the

good doctors here who do not charge for the treatment. The tests and medicines, however, are costly. We are fortunate to be able to stay in the house of my Chinese friends from the hardware store in Ozamiz. We have been friends for all the years I have lived in the Philippines and they built a visitors room for me and



Columban Fr Donald Kill with some of the children of Balay San Columbano.

others. This saves me about P2500 (AUD\$60) per day.

John Philip Gabutero is the second oldest person living with us. "Jan Jan" as he is known, is studying to be an architect. He is now in his third year of college and doing quite well in his studies. His cousin Eddie Clamonte is an engineer and his father is a carpenter. A carpenter's daily wage is less than AUD\$10 per day. That is why Jan Jan's father cannot afford to send him to college.

Edward Macabio

The next oldest boy living with us is Edward Macabio. Edward is now

Despite the sad background of the residents of Balay San Columbano, it nevertheless has offered them a real home, a caring family and hope for the future.

21-years-old and is president of his Sixth Grade Class. He is like an older brother for the younger kids in his class who are now only 12 or 13 years old. Edward does well in his studies in spite of having a slight case of cerebral palsy. Edward is also a son of alcoholic parents and grandparents. He and his brother and sisters were abandoned by their parents and left with the alcoholic grandparents. Edward is a blessing to all of us. He is kind and works hard at what he is able to do.

Odel Quiroro

Next in age is Odel, a deaf mute. He is the son of an alcoholic father who died suddenly last May when he fell and hit his head while in a drunken stupor. Odel is a slow learner and sticks to his own brand of sign language which keeps him from understanding the lessons being taught by his teachers.

Odel is now 19-years-old but only in Grade Two in the special school for the deaf run by the La Salle Brothers here in Ozamiz. He is a very industrious young man and works hard whenever there are manual tasks to be done. He will probably never go beyond primary education, but he will at least have that to give him a better start in life.

Ruben Enocian

Ruben is 14-years-old and the youngest boy living with us. He is the son of an alcoholic father who spends most of their meagre funds on drink and gambling. Ruben has had some behavioural problems in the past even when living with us. This, of

course, is common among the sons of alcoholics.

He had to leave the house for several months until he began to behave better. Thank God, Ruben is now doing well and is getting good grades in school. He is at the same grade level as Edward but in a different class. Ruben "drives" Edward to school each morning and back home in the evening using a bicycle that has a side car built on to it!

Algen and Jesseryl

We have other students in Ozamiz who do not live in the house with us. One of these is Algen Langiras who now lives in a boarding house. We only have to pay for her room. She has a working scholarship from Jollibee Corporation – a hamburger chain. On top of her tuition, Algen gets free food at the restaurant. Algen should graduate in March 2014. She has worked hard to get her education and is one of the few who were able to get this scholarship.

The other young lady lives with her aunt. Her name is Jesseryl Gabutero. She is known as "Jek Jek" and is in her third year of studies for a Bachelor of Science in Financial Management.

Conclusion

Despite the sad background of the residents of *Balay San Columbano*, it nevertheless has offered them a real home, a caring family and hope for the future.

Columban Fr Donald Kill has been a missionary in the Philippines since 1972.

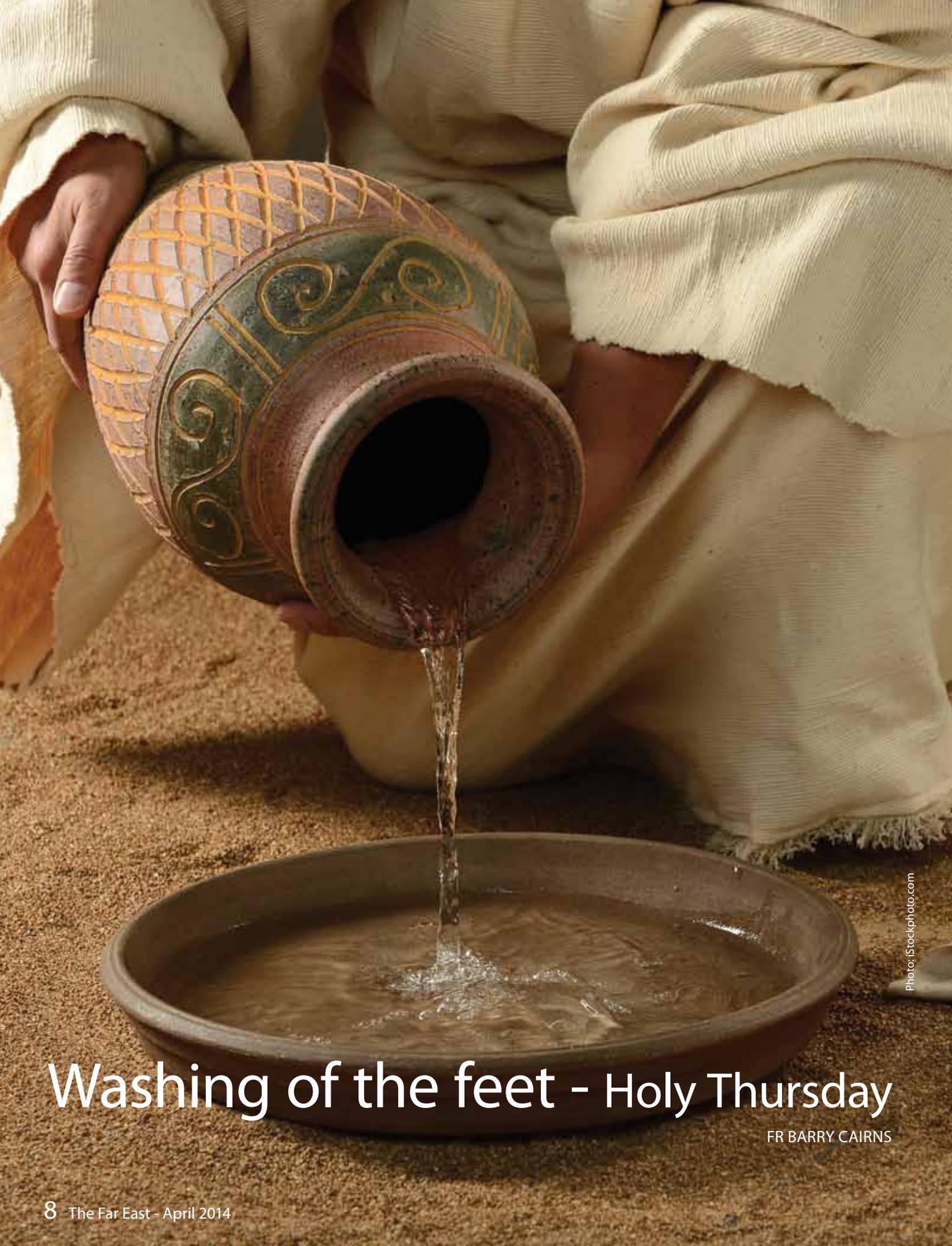


Photo: iStockphoto.com

Washing of the feet - Holy Thursday

FR BARRY CAIRNS



HOLY THURSDAY REFLECTION

*I*t was the week after Easter and the first day of the new term at our Sunday School in Katase, Yokohama diocese. Mrs Tanaka and I were team teaching. This is what she told the children:

"I want to share with you my experience last year (2013) on Holy Thursday night. Columban Fr Barry Cairns had asked me as a Sunday School leader to be one of the 12 at the foot-washing ceremony. My first reaction was a very definite 'No.' I thought that I would be too embarrassed with a priest washing my feet. But after discussing it with my family I said 'Yes' even though I was still somewhat unwilling. Father gave me a printed sheet with the Gospel foot-washing scene and instructions for what to do.

I was still nervous when I lined up on Holy Thursday night. Then the Holy Spirit hit me. Father was actually pouring water over my foot when he came to me: 'This is exactly what Jesus did to his disciples 2000 years ago, and he is doing it to me now.' This made Jesus very close to me and his message very alive. I realised that Jesus was down on my human level, and that this was where he wishes to be. Then I went back to my seat and the words of Jesus echoed in my heart. "I have washed your feet, now you should wash one another's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you."

I realised that a foot-washing heart is very much part of being a true follower of Christ. So I went home and talked things over with my husband and children. How, in concrete ways could we wash other people's feet?

We decided that this attitude starts in our home. For example, we accept and welcome Dad when he comes home

Then the Holy Spirit hit me. Father was actually pouring water over my foot when he came to me: 'This is exactly what Jesus did to his disciples 2000 years ago, and he is doing it to me now.'



Photo: Fr Barry Cairns

Columban Fr Barry Cairns with children at Holy Thursday Mass in Japan.

from work after overtime, all tired and stressed. (Dad actually blushed and said he would try to be less grumpy). The children said they would support those in their classes who were the object of jokes, teasing and bullying. The children also said that they would be especially kind and gentle to the physically and mentally disadvantaged children who come to our Sunday School.

And finally we agreed that we all have wounds in our hearts caused by others who have hurt us. It is very hard to forgive those people, but forgiving

others is very much part of having a Christ-like foot-washing heart.

So you see the foot-washing by Jesus 2000 years ago makes very much sense today.

So ended the vivid testimony of Mrs Tanaka. I was due to talk next but was struck dumb in admiration. All I said was: "You have made Jesus and his message alive and relevant for us today. Thank you Mrs Tanaka."

Columban Fr Barry Cairns first went to Japan in 1956.

The arsonist of the heart

FR RON ROLHEISER

The resurrection of Christ challenges us to new life – to believe, precisely, that there are surprises hidden at the heart of death: that every scream, tear and cry is redeemed, and that God’s laughter is stronger than death. Ultimately, belief in the resurrection asks us to believe

that, despite a strong experience to the contrary, reality is gracious, light does triumph over darkness, love over self-interest, justice over oppression, peace over chaos, fulfilment over hunger. Faith in the resurrection is the trust that, in the end, everything is good.

But it is hard, almost impossible, to believe that. Why? Because experience constantly belies it. At least, so it seems. Despair comes easier than faith. Too often self-interest, loneliness, oppression, greed, bitterness and darkness triumph in our world. It seems naive not

What brought resurrection faith was the in-the-flesh appearance of the resurrected Christ. Slowly, gently, through these appearances, Christ built up their faith until they no longer needed these appearances...

to believe that they represent our Omega, our final unresurrected, non-redeemed destiny. The disciples of Jesus, themselves, experienced a lot of doubt, even on the original Easter Sunday. They, like us, were mourning crucified dreams.

What reversed this?
What moved them from despair to new hope?

It was not just the fact of the resurrection that changed them, for they doubted, huddled in fear, locked doors, despaired and tried to go back to their old ways of life even after they had seen the empty tomb.

What brought resurrection faith was the in-the-flesh appearance of the resurrected Christ. Slowly, gently, through these appearances, Christ built up their faith until they no longer needed these appearances. We are built up in faith through appearances of Christ in the flesh. Where does the resurrected Christ have flesh in our world?

The resurrected Christ appears to us in the flesh in those persons who are arsonists of the heart, who truly make our hearts burn within us. What kind of persons burn messianic holes within us? Those who speak of mustard

seeds, who tell us about the value of what's hidden, small and insignificant; those who tell us that pain can bring deep meaning and redemption; those who tell us that, despite all, reality is gracious and we can trust and love. They are those who tell us that we



Easter Sunday Procession in the Andes Mountains in Peru being led by Korean Columban Associate priest Michael Hwang Ju Won.

should be less afraid, that paranoia is an illness, metanoia is salvation; who tell us that bitterness is not noble, it's hell, that cynicism and stoicism are forms of despair, that life is not tragic, that tears are redemptive, that the Christian call is to celebration.

They are those who tell us that it is not too late for us, that there is still plenty of time to live anew, to become what we were meant to be, beyond self-interest. They are those who tell us to

make merry and dance, for all is well. These kinds of words stir what's best within us, burn holes in us, stir faith, roll stones back from tombs, show us the resurrected Christ in the flesh.

And that flesh always looks ordinary.

The arsonist of the heart invariably looks like someone we know, an ordinary somebody, like the resurrected Christ in his appearances – a gardener, a cook, a stranger. It is interesting to speculate as to why the disciples so often didn't recognize Christ after the resurrection.

After all, he had only been dead for a day and a half when he first appeared. Yet Mary Magdala, who surely knew him well, took him for a gardener. Later, on the road and on the shore, his disciples took him to be a stranger, then a cook. Only in the breaking of the bread

did they recognize him as the Christ.

That is why as we journey together, mourning so many of our crucified dreams, we would do well to be attentive to what causes arson in the heart. We should learn to look more closely at each other's faces during the breaking of the bread.

Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI is a public speaker, columnist and author.

Back from Mission

Kurt Zion Pala is a Columban seminarian from the Philippines. He recently returned home after participating for two years in Fiji as part of his First Mission Assignment (FMA). He speaks with The Far East.

*W*hat happens now after your FMA in Fiji?

Before going to Fiji as a seminarian, I had studied philosophy and some theology and had passed through our year of Spiritual Formation. I had had various exposure experiences and had participated in a lot of pastoral work. So when I went to Fiji, I thought I was ready for mission. I can now say that nothing can prepare you for the missionary life.

I will continue my studies in theology for another two years and then I hope to be ordained a deacon and soon after a priest. After living in Fiji, I see my life as a missionary priest. It was in Fiji that my decision was confirmed. It was tough but I was happy. Life on the missions is full of challenges that you will not really experience back in your own country.

What was it like starting off new in another country?

Everything was strange when I first arrived in Fiji. I was like an infant. It was back to zero. I had to learn everything again: language, food, practices, customs and habits of the people. In order to survive in the mission field you have to be like a child: curious, open to all possibilities. I was able to somehow get over my shyness.

As a 'newbie' you would normally wait for others to initiate the conversation, but in Fiji they're not like that at all. This was especially true in the community where I lived, which was with the Indian community (the Indo-Fijians). They're different from the ethnic Fijians. They're more

conservative and reserved, especially the women. What made it even more difficult for me was the fact that they are not confident with their English so they choose to be quiet and timid. In the villages the women don't have access to higher education.

Was it difficult learning another language?

It was difficult but not impossible. I learned Hindi, the language of the Indo-Fijians. Hindi is more complicated than Fijian and uses a different script and has some different sounds. I was like a grade one student, learning how to write the letters, the sound of each letter and its pronunciation. As a missionary this is where your patience is really tested.

If you are determined in your mission, God will grant you the grace to face whatever challenges you may encounter along the way.

Many people would like to become missionaries but they are afraid of the hardships and the unknown. They wonder whether they will be able to cope. What do you think?

You really have to be adventurous. You shouldn't be afraid to take risks or make mistakes because that's how you'll learn.

Back in Fiji there were times when I found things so difficult and would just find myself asking questions like: "Why am I here?" "What am I doing here?" "Why am I forcing myself into a culture so different from my own?" "Why bother bringing myself into this

situation when I could have done mission in my own country?"

So you reached the stage when you wanted to go home?

Yes, I reached that stage but what encouraged me was the people themselves. One of the hardest times for me was when I got dengue fever. I spent five days in the local hospital. I was there in the ward with no privacy. I could hardly rest and I was lying there alongside Fijian and Indian patients.

But that's when I was able to practice my language. The other patients were surprised that there was a foreigner among them who could speak their language. Indeed it was hard to be sick and alone in a foreign country but that's when I realized I wasn't actually alone.

On my second day at the hospital I was visited by a Korean priest, three religious sisters—one Fijian, one Indo-Fijian and one Tongan and by a lay missionary from Peru. We were like a United Nations forum.

God provided me with people to take care of me. I experienced their genuine concern. They told me they understood what I was going through and assured me, 'Don't worry, even if your family isn't here, you can always consider us your family'. I was just new to their community but that's already how they had accepted me there.

If you are determined in your mission, God will grant you the grace to face whatever challenges you may encounter along the way. That was when my decision to be a missionary priest was really confirmed.



FIJI



PHILIPPINES



Photos: Kurt Pala

Kurt Pala with a Indo-Fijian family (above) and at a visit to a local school (below).



Youth, reconciliation and pilgrimage

FR CHRIS SAENZ



Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, Sanctuary of Lo Vasquez, Chile.

"Father, I am angry that my parents are divorcing." This could be an example of a young person's confession. I am often struck by the honesty and profoundness of what young people share. It highlights for me what the Sacrament of Reconciliation means which is a true desire to seek God's saving grace in a situation that one would like to leave behind.

There is much discussion today about the Sacrament of Reconciliation as the "lost", "under-used" sacrament that the younger generation ignores. As a missionary, I discovered this is not true. I believe it is a frequently used sacrament by the youth, given the proper conditions.

Ministering to people in four different continents, I have come to believe that while many of the older people

utilize this sacrament more frequently, younger people who may go to confession less, frequently understand it better. This is particularly true when it is connected with pilgrimage.

With younger people, there is often a focus on their emotions and feelings about a particular situation. They seek a dialogue with God and forgiveness and compassion to better understand what they are feeling and living. The younger generation keeps the focus on themselves and rarely enters into the sins of the other.

The opening quote reflects this: The focus is the person's anger, not the divorce of the parents. A person seeks guidance on how to handle their anger in a situation that deeply affects the family. For me, that is a true reconciliation moment.

So what compels a young person's desire to seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation? And, when? The traditional style of providing the sacrament one hour a week, in a box in a church does not attract young people today.

That model might have served a previous generation. Young people seek an external expression of the faith linked to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is here that I discovered as a missionary in Chile the power of "pilgrimage".

The early church linked reconciliation to pilgrimage. The penitent, after causing harm to the community, was sent on a pilgrimage away from the community. This physical distance from the problem gave the penitent time to contemplate and

So what compels a young person's desire to seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation?... Young people seek an external expression of the faith linked to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

the community to heal. The physical struggles of the pilgrimage such as the long journey and harsh weather conditions, reflected the inner spiritual struggle. It was not just a spiritual renewal but a physical one as well.

Centuries later, the tradition of "boxed" confessions came in and the physicality was lost. I believe that many young people unconsciously seek a return to the early church's tradition of reconciliation and pilgrimage.

In Chile, the most popular youth pilgrimage is through the foothills of the Andes Mountains to the Sanctuary of Santa Teresita de Los Andes. About 70,000 young people participate each year in this 27km pilgrimage along a dirt mountain track. The surrounding environment is semi-arid. The sun is hot and there is little shade. The mountainous terrain can be rugged.

During the 27km walk there are eight special areas called Stations.

Here social and musical events are organized around the theme of the pilgrimage and conversion. Some stations provide group prayer like the rosary but the most popular stations are the ones providing the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

At these stations, dozens of priests line up alongside the dirt road to offer the sacrament to the pilgrims as they walk by. A priest can spend six hours hearing confessing without a break. Eventually, the pilgrims arrive at the sanctuary in the afternoon feeling physically tired but spiritually renewed. There they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist that closes the event.

The most popular and biggest pilgrimage in Chile, however, is the pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Lo Vasquez on December 8 each year, the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is estimated nearly one million people participate with many of them travelling on foot.

The sanctuary is located 75kms from Santiago on the motorway to the coastal city of Valparaiso. In fact, on that day, most of the motorway between Santiago and Valparaiso has to be closed. Usually the summer sun is extremely hot and the pilgrims walk all day. At the sanctuary the Sacrament of Reconciliation is provided and priests spend the whole day hearing confession. Many young people participate in the pilgrimage. Many confess.

This desire of youth to participate in a pilgrimage and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation demonstrates that this Sacrament is still popular with young people. They seem to prefer an integrated, holistic experience of reconciliation linked to pilgrimage rather than the more traditional form of going to confession.

Columban Fr Chris Saenz was ordained in 2000 and is currently working in Chile.





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.*

Kidnapped nuns in Syria set free

Patriarch Welcomes Their Release as 'Sign of Hope in this Time of Crisis'



*Nuns who were among a group freed after being held hostage by Islamist rebels in Syria, pray during a Mass to celebrate their release at the Church of the Holy Cross in Damascus, on March 10, 2014.
Photo: AAP/TOPSHOTS/AFP PHOTO/LOUAI BESHARA*

*T*welve nuns kidnapped by Jihadists in Syria last December were set free in early March, 2014.

Patriarch Gregorios III, head of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, broke the news to a team from Aid to the Church in Need, who had just arrived in Lebanon to visit projects supporting refugees from Syria.

The Damascus-based Patriarch told members of the Catholic charity that the nuns had not been harmed during

their ordeal and that their release was “a sign of hope in this time of crisis”.

Patriarch Gregorios added that the release had apparently been mediated by the secret services of Qatar and Lebanon.

His comments came as a Lebanese security source was reported as saying that the nuns were being accompanied by the head of a Lebanese security agency and a Qatari intelligence official.

According to media reports, the release of the nuns had been agreed as part of a deal in which the government would free scores of women prisoners.

The Sisters were seized in December from the Greek Orthodox monastery of St Thecla in the predominantly Christian town of Maaloula, about 40 miles north of Damascus.

Later that month (December), the nuns appeared in a video obtained by Al-Jazeera television, saying they were in good health.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group identified the rebels who took the nuns as militants from the Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria.

The Nusra Front invaded Maaloula on September 4, 2013.

In the three days that they held the town, 12 people were killed, including three men who refused to renounce their Christian faith.

The Patriarch described speaking to the nuns’ Mother Superior shortly after the town was taken and being assured by her that all the Sisters were unharmed.

Weeks later, the Islamists struck again and took the nuns.

Source: ZENIT

Mission Intention for April

That the Risen Lord may fill with hope the hearts of those who are being tested by pain and sickness.



From the Director

The unexpectedness of Easter

Last month I attended a meeting of Columban leaders who came from the missionary countries where we Columbans work. As leaders, our common denominator is our Catholic faith with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ at the centre of our faith.

A meeting like this reveals the great richness of the Columban missionary experience in the many countries where we work.

In Asia, the Christian population is about three percent, with the Philippines making up most of that percentage. Nevertheless, at our Columban meeting, it became evident that the Korean Church is the most vibrant Church where we have missionaries. Columbans have helped the Korean Church develop a missionary outlook, making it more missionary.

Pope Francis has unexpectedly taken the world by surprise. Through ups and downs we trust in the unexpectedness of God to bring life, we are open to God's call.

Today, Korea has its own missionary society which Columbans helped set up. Many Korean diocesan priests spend six years in overseas missionary countries like Chile where they work with Columban missionary priests. When they return home to their home diocese, they have had a new experience of Church and a deeper appreciation of the universal Church. Korean Columban sisters work in countries like Myanmar and Peru and lay missionaries have their own authentic place in Columban mission.

A country like Japan has a small Catholic population in a large population so the Columban focus is on primary evangelization. This shapes their approach to Church and missionary activity. Both Peru and Chile have large

populations of nominal Catholics so the Columban focus is towards building Basic Ecclesial and Basic Christian Communities. Some years ago, Columban Lay Missionaries from Fiji made a big impact in parishes in Ireland where they were assigned.

Death came before the Resurrection of Jesus. Similarly, 30 years of Columban missionary effort in China was wiped out when the Communists swept to power in 1948. Today Columban priests and sisters work in China in restricted circumstances, hoping for a better times.

Our Columban vocations in the West have dried up but our new vocations are from the missionary countries like Korea, the Philippines, Fiji, Chile and Peru. We are now a multicultural group of priests, religious sisters and lay missionaries.

Easter is an unexpected act of God bringing new life in the Resurrection of Jesus.

Pope Francis has unexpectedly taken the world by surprise. Through ups and downs we trust in the unexpectedness of God to bring life, we are open to God's call.

Reflecting on my time at the Columban Leader's meeting, I am reminded of how God acts in unexpected ways.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Walker".

Fr Gary Walker
director@columban.org.au



A Church Open to the world

FR PETER HUGHES

Columban Fr Peter Hughes is the executive secretary of the Department of Justice and Solidarity of the Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM) which is based in Bogotá, Colombia. He has worked in Peru since 1966. Recently he was interviewed by his Columban name sake, another Fr Peter Hughes, who had formally worked for two decades in Chile and now works in Britain in the Justice and Peace ministry.

A ***s a Columban missionary, what do you bring to this task?***

I bring my personal experience of the Church in Latin America combined with an independence to issues in an objective manner. Being a Columban with Irish roots and sharing in our worldwide Columban missionary experience, has given me an appreciation for local cultures, people's personal and collective histories and especially the plight of the poor who are rarely valued

by power groups or the dominant culture.

I also bring a sense of the importance of justice, equality and fair play, which allows us, from our personal missionary experience, to speak with some authority and freedom on the major issues relating to different forms of oppression current in the world today.

What is the role of CELAM?

CELAM has played an important leadership role through organizing

the major conferences of the Latin American Church: Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo and Aparecida. These have been milestones that provide reference for the direction of the Church in Latin America such as the Preferential Option for the poor. It has acted as a prophetic voice on the side of the powerless in search of justice and respect for human life.

CELAM seeks to interpret how God's love and the Kingdom, as proclaimed by Jesus, is manifested in the signs of the times in today's world and what



I believe the key influence is the awareness that the Church has to be open to the world. This means the Church has to see what is happening in the world, where the gift of God's life is being threatened or destroyed.

are the challenges that will bring this about.

CELAM also provides leadership, coordination and inspiration for the Church present in the 22 nations of Latin America and the Caribbean.

What are some of the key issues in Latin America that are occupying CELAM?

At the moment, we are dedicated to four important issues:

1. Extreme Poverty

South America is not the poorest continent, but it is the most unequal continent. This is a huge scandal especially when it is a traditionally Christian continent. The two most successful countries also happen to be the two most unequal countries: Chile and Brazil.

The division between rich and poor is not improving. A new class of poor has emerged that is referred to in the CELAM Document for the 2007 Aparecida Conference as the throwaway or the leftover people. These excluded are not simply "exploited" but "surplus" and "disposable". According to the Bishops Meeting at Aparecida in 2007, reaching out in love and service

to these people is an indispensable expression of the very being of the Church, just as the Proclamation of the Word and the Celebration of the Sacraments.

2. Extractive Industries

South America has many natural resources like minerals and forests. We are very concerned about the exploitation of these resources, which are farmed out mainly to huge international corporations. Not only do these industries destroy the health of the local inhabitants and the environment, but further impoverish the people who get practically no financial benefit from what belongs to them.

3. Peace Building

While the South American countries have largely left behind the civil wars and dictatorships of the past, never before has it been such a violent continent. Eight out of 10 of the most violent cities in the world are in South America. Drug-related violence is a major concern for us.

4. Movement of Peoples

This is a tremendous problem. We have to deal with ecological refugees because of floods and drought caused by global warming and also economic

refugees and the human trafficking and exploitation of women and children for sexual purposes.

How important is Latin America for the future of the Catholic Church in all the world?

Very important! The Catholic Church is rapidly becoming a Church whose presence, sphere of influence and vibrancy is more and more located in the southern part of the globe. Latin America is where more than 40% of the world's Catholics live. The renewal of the Latin American Church is important not only for Latin America, but also as a service to the Church in other continents who share the same problems.

What are some of the key influences on the Church in Latin America?

I believe the key influence is the awareness that the Church has to be open to the world. This means the Church has to see what is happening in the world, where the gift of God's life is being threatened or destroyed.

What is actually happening in the real world - job issues, migration, human needs, loneliness, drugs, destruction of the environment - are the issues that should set the agenda for the Church.





Photo: iStockphoto.com

Japan in crisis

FR BARRY CAIRNS

Japan is in crisis! There is the pervading fear of earthquakes, tsunami and resulting nuclear radiation. Some nuclear power stations are said to be built over earthquake fault lines. A recent headline in the newspaper read, "320,000 Could Die in a Nankai Trough Earthquake!" Some predict that even Mount Fuji is due for an eruption. Such news items seep into the heart and create uncertainty and fear.

Added to these heart disturbing factors is the growing friction with China and the sabre rattling statements of politicians. The ruling party wants to change the peace Constitution and have an active army. Older people especially see their future with unease. Those in their 70s have experienced war, nuclear devastation, hunger and poverty. They worry about whether or not their savings and pensions will have value in the future. They worry there

I see malnutrition of the heart rather than the body. We as Columban missionaries in Japan aim to be instruments of Christ's hope and peace. We are passionate about the value of mission to Japan.

will be another war. The big companies are making a profit which boosts the GNP, but the little people feel only the effects of rising prices of food and housing.

As I see it, there is an insidious fog settling over Japanese society today. There is a malaise that seeps deep into the heart. Especially in cities, the traditional religions of Shinto and Buddhism have sadly little influence. What Pope Francis calls "the cult of money" has taken over. I see this cult as an escape mechanism against the above fears.

A Japanese Nobel Prize Laureate, Kenzaburo Oe has said of his own people, "Today we Japanese face a grave crisis: we are a people without hope."

This is when the missionary proclaiming Christ's message comes in. The Japanese people are a people without a shepherd to guide them. To the very depths of His heart, Jesus felt deeply for such people.

Japan is neither a popular mission nor a romantic one! There are comparatively few baptisms and vocations. But it is a nation that has a dire need of Kingdom values, especially hope, peace and joy. It is a mission to the unevangelized. As such, Japan is an important mission for the Church and the Missionary Society of St. Columban.

Are we being selective? Selectivity is not Christ's way. Only God Himself can judge "success."

Here I give you concrete examples of modern mission in Japan. The parish of Hodogaya is in the geographical centre of Yokohama City, a city of three million. We have 975 parishioners on the books and another 204,258 non-Christians in Hodogaya Ward.

Our Bishop has said that, "parishes are evangelizing communities." I give pastoral care to my people, but as a missionary I must also care for the multitudes who have only heard of Christ in a distorted way.

My aim is to imbue the Catholic community to be missionaries in their own homes, schools, workplaces and apartments. They are the ones who sow seeds of hope among a people with no hope. Our aim is to be witnesses to Kingdom values, especially of hope, peace and joy. That is our primary aim. If as a result some will seek Baptism, we have welcoming groups to cater for them.

In my homilies and talks I would constantly repeat Christ's message in some way, namely, "God loves you 100% as you

are, this is the basis of our hope. Go out and share this gift with others." To share God's gifts is the essence of mission.

Some concrete examples of such mission are a group of mothers who staff a drop-in centre for lonely and disturbed youth who come in just to talk and others who care for migrant workers and the homeless. Yokohama is a major port and the men help out in the Apostleship of the Sea; others help out in various A.A. style recovery groups. Some are involved in helping tsunami victims; others are active in L'Arche groups for the disabled.

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And finally, there is a group of five who reach out to the internet multitudes. The parish home page is attractive and kept up to date. They publish my homilies weekly in both Japanese and English. We get about 60 hits a day. This is part of modern mission as well.

I first came to Japan in 1956. It was a poor country, rife with malnutrition and tuberculosis. Now, 57 years later, I see malnutrition of the heart rather than the body. We as Columban missionaries in Japan aim to be instruments of Christ's hope and peace. We are passionate about the value of mission to Japan.

Columban Fr Barry Cairns first went to Japan in 1956.



Fukushima raises nuclear concerns



FR SEAN McDONAGH

*F*ukushima's woes just keep mounting and mounting. On August 2013, *The New Scientist* reported that radioactive water was still leaking into the ocean from the crippled nuclear reactors at the Fukushima nuclear plant.

Japan's official nuclear watchdog, the Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NRA), confirmed that Fukushima's nuclear plant was in a state of "emergency" and that the operator, Tokyo Electric Power Corporation (Tepco) was struggling to contain the leak.

Yet, after the Fukushima accidents they now say that they regret their timidity and call on the Japanese Government to begin phasing out nuclear energy.

In my book, *Fukushima: The Death Knell for Nuclear Energy?* (2012),

I give numerous examples of how Tepco has been widely criticised for its failure to prepare for the 2011 tsunami and earthquake that devastated its Fukushima plant. Tepco was also castigated for its inept response to the reactor meltdown.

On August 20, 2013, *The New York Times* and many newspapers and

media outlets around the world, reported another leak. This one involved 300 tonnes of highly radioactive water from storage tanks which had been built on the site of the ravaged Fukushima power plant. The radioactive release is so serious that the NRA declared that

the contaminated water could enter the ocean, adding to the tonnes of radioactive water already leaked into the ocean since the accident in March 2011.

The latest leak raises serious concerns about the stability and durability of the 1000 massive storage tanks, each

capable of storing a thousand tonnes of water, which Tepco built a mere 500 metres from the ocean. These tanks were created to store the thousands of tonnes of water which have been used to cool the three reactors which were devastated by the earthquake and subsequent tsunami.

At the beginning of the 21st Century, Japan's Catholic Bishops published a message entitled "*Reverence for Life*". In that document, the Japanese bishops, while suggesting that safety was the top priority when dealing with nuclear energy, did not call for its abolition.

Yet, after the Fukushima accidents they now say that they regret their timidity and call on the Japanese Government to begin phasing out nuclear energy.

(Taken from Vocation for Justice, Autumn 2013)



a "radioactive release incident" had occurred.

A spokesperson for the Tepco management said that workers had attempted to place sandbags around the tank in order to stem the flow of this highly radioactive water. However, it conceded that

Providing a real home

Balay San Columbano which means "The House of St Columban" was set up by Columban Fr Donald (Don) Kill in Ozamiz City, the Philippines, to provide a home for 27 young people from troubled families. In many cases, one or both parents suffer from addictions to alcohol or drugs.

With the support of Columban benefactors the home is able to offer the children food, clothes, shelter and a proper education.

By these means they are offered caring family and a better chance at life.

They thank you for your support.



Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff

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