

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

November/December 2014



Christmas in the Andes
Celebrating Christmas in Peru

Reflection - Soon it will be
Christmas
Advent preparations in Chile

**The Jubilee Year of St
Columban begins in Rome**



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

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2015 Columban Calendar:
Madonna and Child, c. 1470-75 (tempera on panel) by Ghirlandaio, Domenico Domenico Bigordi (1449-94); 70.8x48.9cm; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA; Italian/The Bridgeman Art Library

To order your 2015 Columban Art Calendar - see page 15 or www.columban.org.au



From the Editor

The Advent and Christmas Seasons

During the seasons of Advent and Christmas this year, we invite all our readers of *The Far East* mission magazine to take out gift subscriptions for special people in their lives.

Each year *The Far East* carries a variety of stories by Columban Missionaries from around the world. The Columban stories are stories of evangelization, parishes amongst the poor, dialogue and work for social justice.

This Advent and Christmas edition invites us to experience something of the wonderful celebration of Christmas in the Andes Mountains of Peru and Advent in a parish in

Chile. Other stories include the support of a parish in Geelong for a Columban parish in the Philippines, the departure of the Columbans from a parish in Pakistan and the 90th Anniversary of the foundation of the Columban Sisters. We remember Columban Fr John Griffin who died recently in New Zealand.

The Jubilee Year to celebrate the 1400th Anniversary of the death of St Columban began with a three day celebration in Rome during October.

We are organizing a special pilgrimage *In the Footsteps of St Columban* through Europe as a

way to participate in this year-long celebration.

Gifts subscriptions to family and friends are a wonderful way to support the work of Columban missionaries in situations of great need across the world.

Seasons Greetings for Advent and Christmas from everyone at the Columban Mission Centre and *The Far East* magazine.

Fr Daniel Harding

Fr Daniel Harding
TFE@columban.org.au

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Christmas in the



Photo: Fr. Donald Hornsey



Columban Fr Donald Hornsey shares with us how Christmas is celebrated in the Andes Mountains in Peru.

"Where will the Christmas Festival for the communities be held this year?" asked Carolina, the Coordinator of the active Christian community of Chosicani, one of 20 Christian communities that make up the rural parish of Combapata. This parish is located at 3700 metres high up in the Andes Mountains of southern Peru. While Spanish is spoken in the towns, Quechua, one of the indigenous languages of Peru, is the language of the villages and rural areas like Combapata.

"We will decide on Saturday at the Parish Council Meeting," I told her, *"so remind Leonardo and Catarina to come with you."* When Saturday came, we decided that we would hold our Christmas Festival for 2013 in Jayabamba, one of the communities that makes up the parish.

Each year many activities are held to prepare and celebrate Christmas. Novenas are held in houses where a statue of the *"Niño Jesús"*, (the baby Jesus), is carried in a procession with songs from one house to the next and placed overnight in the crib that the family has prepared. Often there are hundreds of statues of animals in and around the crib, a custom begun by St. Francis.

When the awaited day finally arrives, the group from each community assembles in the open space in front of the Church, such as the Jayabamba Church last year. Here the festival begins with the singing of Christmas Carols, a Bible reading and prayers.

But the principal event for years in the parish has been the Communities Christmas Festival. Each year it is held in a different community on a rotation basis, which explains the question of Carolina and our decision to choose Jayabamba for 2013. Every community is invited to participate in this Christmas Festival, even though for some like Carolina's community, Chosicani, which is 16kms from Jayabamba, it means hiring a Combi van to get there.

It is up to each community to decide how they will present the *"Nacimiento"* (Nativity Scene) to the other communities at the Festival. They must also decide who will play the parts of Mary and Joseph, the baby Jesus, Angels, Magi and Shepherds who often come with live sheep.

One year, Joseph obtained a donkey for Mary to ride on, but the solemnity of the occasion was lost when he helped her on with such a strong lift that Mary catapulted over

the donkey and landed on the ground on the other side! Some communities might begin with the story of the Annunciation, so much practice is needed to learn all the dialogue in the Quechua language.

When the details of the *"Nacimiento"* have been worked out, the next task for each community is to choose and practice the *"Villancico"* (Christmas Carol) they will present at the Festival. Usually this is done by the children of the community who enter into the singing with great enthusiasm.

When the awaited day finally arrives, the group from each community assembles in the open space in front of the Church, such as the Jayabamba Church last year. Here the festival begins with the singing of Christmas Carols, a Bible reading and prayers. After this, lots are drawn to decide the order in which each community will present their Nativity Scene and sing their Carol. The visual presentation of the scenes makes a great impact and helps those who do not have the habit of reading to deepen their appreciation of the love God showed in sending his Son to become one of us.

In the first years of the festival, it was held as a competition with prizes for the winning communities, but this often led to rivalry and dissatisfaction. *"We should have won because we were the best"*. To capture the true spirit of Christmas, the competition was eliminated and now everyone wins and receives a prize, generally a bible, altar cloth or container for holy water in the chapel.

Gift giving at Christmas is not part of the tradition. Commercialism and the barrage of *"so many shopping days till Christmas"* has fortunately not reached the rural villages of the Andes, so there is more focus on the true meaning of the birth of the Saviour. I still remember vividly one year when I was invited to a Christmas party for pre-school children. They did receive little presents of dolls and plastic cars, but after looking at them for a minute, they threw them aside and all began playing together with the balloons that decorated the hall. Perhaps they understood better than us the true meaning of Christmas.

Columban Fr Donald Hornsey worked for 40 years in Latin America.



Reaching out in partnership

Paul Eastman, Religious Education Coordinator at Holy Spirit School, Manifold Heights, Geelong tells the story of how his parish developed a partnership with the Columban parish of "Our Lady of Remedies" in Malate, Manila, the Philippines.

*F*r Gerard Keith is the Parish Priest of the Bell Park Parish Cluster in Geelong, Victoria. This is a cluster of three parishes and their three parish primary schools. In 2005 Fr Gerard travelled from Geelong to the Philippines to learn more about the work that Columban Priests in the parish of "Our Lady of Remedies", Manila, were doing to help improve the lives of the 'poorest of the poor'.

When Fr Gerard returned from this trip he discussed with his parishioners and the staff from the three schools the possibility of forming a "Partnership" between themselves and the Filipino parish. They were all enthused by the idea.

The 'partnership' began to take form in 2006 when a group of parishioners and teachers, along with the parish manager Trish Stickland, travelled to the Philippines specifically to see how the micro-finance programme operated in the parish. This programme lends small amounts of money to poor families. They in turn

use it in different ways that helps them generate income for their families and also to pay back the loan. After seeing first-hand the success of this programme, the group returned to Geelong enthusiastic about continuing to support this and many other parish programmes that help the poor.

So began a programme of fundraising and education within the parishes and schools about how the raised money is used in the Philippines. Further immersion tours were conducted in 2007 and 2012.

The most recent trip was conducted in June 2014 and included Fr Gerard and Trish Stickland along with nine teachers from the three parish primary schools. One of the group from the 2014 trip wrote the following account.

"The Manila we experienced on our first morning as we walked from our hotel to the Malate Parish Centre was hot, humid, crowded, noisy and heavily polluted. It all seemed to be tied

together by a tangle of thin black power lines. We walked past scenes of families huddled together with a scrap of cardboard being all that came between them and the often broken and filthy concrete. For the children the street was their playground, although there was little space or opportunity for play. The social and economic problems of the Philippines are incredibly apparent and immense.

Our Lady of Remedies Parish, Manila, was taken over by the Columbans in 1929. It is the oldest parish in Manila and within its boundaries live approximately 27,000 people, with up to 16,000 of those classified as 'urban poor'. At the parish centre we met with Columban Fr John Leydon, the former Parish Priest, who has been instrumental in generating the current service programmes.

We also met the new parish priest, Columban Fr Leo Distor. Here we began to hear about the great needs within the parish. We talked with Frs John and Leo about the efforts that were being made



Photo: Fr. Gerard Keith

Entire families live and sleep on the footpaths of Manila, Philippines.

at home to raise money. It was at this meeting, and not for the first time on the trip, that the sentiment 'we are getting more out of this partnership than we could ever give', was expressed.

Our guide over the following two days was Tet, the head social worker for the parish. With Tet we visited classrooms, the clinic, a class for disabled children and night school classes. She also led us through some of the local communities. In all instances we were again amazed by the cheerful way in which we were greeted and that these people who have very little in the material sense, exhibited such great resilience and generosity of spirit.

Tet told us stories that describe struggles that are beyond imagination. It is extremely challenging to try to comprehend the idea of a parent pimping out their child to a paedophile in order to make ends meet. The realisation that daily life for many Filipinos is struggle beyond struggle was with us throughout the trip. We have brought our understanding of

this reality back with us. It encourages us to stay motivated and to remain committed to motivating others.

One of the particular programmes we witnessed is a feeding programme that is accessed by street children. In order to receive lunch the children were to have attended school that day.

This programme was an example of the prevailing attitude that permeated the parish programmes of 'hand up' not 'hand out'. All efforts are made to ensure that, although in need, the people who access the programmes are encouraged to help themselves. This knowledge forms a crucial point to be highlighted in our attempts to inform and educate back in Geelong.

From darkness to light and from despair to hope, it was a trip of many journeys. We expected to see, and saw, poverty at its extremes. We were humbled by the positivity and generosity that we experienced and we came home with an invigorated sense of hope and resolve and commitment to the 'partnership'.

The Philippines Partnership is alive in our parishes and schools in Geelong. It has especially captured the hearts and imaginations of the children. After viewing photos and hearing stories of both despair and hope, they are inspired to continue to help.

Many students approach their teachers with fundraising ideas and they have loved hearing about how their efforts do make a difference.

The Filipino people are an inspiration to us in so many ways. As a parish cluster our experiences, our faith and the commitment we have made to the Philippines Partnership inspires us to continue sharing their stories. In helping to improve the lives of our Filipino brothers and sisters, through the grace of God, we too have been helped to become better people.

We thank Paul Eastman for this article.

Soon it will be Christmas

FR DAN HARDING

Columban Fr Dan Harding reflects on Advent preparations in a parish in Chile.

Listen to: Reflection: Soon it will be Christmas



"What are we going to do about Advent this year?" asked Amelia. "Soon it will be Christmas and Advent will pass without noticing."

Amelia is the president of the parish liturgy team in the parish of "Jesús de Nazaret", in Lo Espejo, a suburb in a poor area of Santiago, Chile.

"Have you noticed the shops in town are full of toys, coloured lights and Christmas decorations already," replied Maria. "The message on TV is to go into debt to buy all your Christmas needs. My daughter's school has already started writing letters to Santa Claus."

"The Christmas traffic and delays will begin soon," added Jorge, "not

to mention the summer heat over Christmas."

"But what about Advent?" asked Amelia again. "How are we going to celebrate Advent which begins in two weeks time? She then turned to me, "As our parish priest, what do you think, Padre?"

Up until this point, I had remained silent. I could easily hear and understand everyone's frustration about Christmas and how Advent can slip by.

"While coming together and sharing gifts with loved ones is one of the many good things about Christmas, at the same time we have to make a conscious effort to put Christ at the centre of our

celebration." I replied. *"We can do this by committing ourselves to intentionally live the four week season of Advent and its spirituality as a way to prepare us for the coming of Christ."*

For the next one and a half hours we discussed the many ways that we as a parish community could truly live and celebrate the Advent season intentionally. We then came up with the following ideas which we put into practice during Advent.

Firstly, we made sure to prepare well our Advent symbols and decorations in the Church. With the help of children from the parish, we prepared a large Advent Wreath with its three



Adviento Feliz Navidad



CHILE REFLECTION

"It struck me more than ever that our world and our lives truly need the light of Christ, our Saviour. We as a parish desperately need to continue the Kingdom work begun by Christ during His first Advent and keep going until He comes in glory to complete His Kingdom at His second Advent.

"Christmas, the coming of the baby Jesus at Bethlehem, never meant so much to me as it did this year."

violet and one rose candle on it. The violet colour of Advent represents hope, expectation, waiting, yearning, liberation, royalty and the need to be prepared and matches the colour of the violet flowers of the Jacaranda trees in flower at this time all over Santiago. The rose coloured candle for the third Sunday of Advent represents joy, the joyful anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. We made drapes from these two colours and hung them in different parts of the Church.

We placed our Jesse Tree in a prominent part of the church sanctuary. At the beginning of the Sunday Liturgy each week of Advent we placed the corresponding figures and ornaments upon it, representing the journey of faith through history towards the coming of the Messiah in the stable in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

We had members of the youth group draw large images of the important Advent figures from the Bible such as David, Isaiah, Baruch, Nehemiah, Hosea, Micah, John the Baptist, Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, Elizabeth, the Shepherds and the Magi. These images were framed in violet and rose colours and were placed on a Church wall. Every Sunday as people arrived for the Eucharist, they were given a small image of one of these Advent Biblical figures with the

corresponding texts to look up during the following week.

Secondly, we asked each family to celebrate Advent in their homes with their own Advent Wreath and/or Jesse Tree, accompanied by a small prayer service each evening. We made sure Advent Calendars were on sale at the Church for families to use in their homes each day of Advent.

Thirdly, and most importantly, we did everything we could to help our parishioners develop an Advent spirituality, as a way to prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas and in glory at the end of time. We did this through homilies, meetings, an afternoon of reflection and an Advent workshop.

The parishioners were asked to reflect on the theme of waiting, just as the Jewish people in the Old Testament waited with great anticipation for the coming of the Messiah. What does it feel like to wait, to joyfully anticipate the coming of God now into our lives and our world? We asked people caught in Christmas traffic jams, for example, to try to understand the spiritual concept of what waiting, yearning and anticipating God's intervention in history felt like.

Do we feel the need for a Saviour in our own lives and in our world? Was the coming of Jesus in history needed? Was it worth waiting for? Why? How? Where are the areas of

darkness in our world and our lives that await the coming of the light of the Messiah?

When Christmas Day came, I was speaking with a group of parishioners after Mass on Christmas morning. I asked them whether they were able to use the Advent season as a way to help them prepare for a Christmas that was focused on the coming of Christ as Messiah, as Saviour.

A reply from one of the women hit the mark. She said, *"As I walked around the parish, I noticed the despair of the unemployed and the loneliness of the bed ridden sick waiting a friendly visit. I saw an indigenous family being discriminated against and I saw the abandoned aged poor. I saw young drug addicts living at death's door.*

"It struck me more than ever that our world and our lives truly need the light of Christ, our Saviour. We as a parish desperately need to continue the Kingdom work begun by Christ during His first Advent and keep going until He comes in glory to complete His Kingdom at His second Advent.

"Christmas, the coming of the baby Jesus at Bethlehem, never meant so much to me as it did this year."

Columban Fr Dan Harding is the Editor of *The Far East*. He worked for many years in Chile.

Columban Sisters celebrate 90 year



Photo: Sr. Rebecca Conlon

Columban Sisters working in Pakistan.

To mark the 90th Anniversary of the foundation of the Columban Sisters a Thanksgiving Mass was held on September 29, 2014, at their Centre House in Magheramore, County Wicklow, Ireland.

The Congregational Leader of the Columban Sisters, Sr Anne Gray, addressed the congregation at this Mass with the following words:

"Today we are gathered together to remember this day, 90 years ago, the 29th September 1924, when seven young women slowly entered in procession into the chapel in St Brigit's, Cahircon, genuflecting three times as they approached the altar, in memory of St Columban who, in his day, observed this custom. Today we are not only looking back in remembrance, we are also celebrating the faithfulness of God's eternal love towards us as Congregation throughout these past 90 years.

As it was in 1924 today is the feast of St Michael, the great archangel, the one who Pope St Gregory the Great says is

assigned by God whenever a mighty deed is in question, so that by his actions and name it may be made known that no one can do what God can do. And what a mighty deed was in question on this day 90 years ago – nothing less than the foundation of a new Missionary Religious Congregation dedicated to the service of the Chinese people.

We can only imagine the excitement that must have filled St Brigit's where, according to an article in The Far East Magazine of the time, we are told, "For months before that date, the atmosphere of this little Bethlehem of the Congregation was one of patient expectation. 'When would the great day come?' was the question ever present to the mind of each of us." And on the day itself, "What has God in store for the new-born Congregation? What will it accomplish for him in China's vast harvest field?"

Surely wonder and trepidation filled the hearts of those young women as they heard Bishop Fogarty remind them that the lot of the missionary was – to live in exile, to endure manifold

labours and privations, to suffer much distress and tribulation of spirit, to encounter, it may be, the perils of persecution, to sacrifice, even, life itself. And yet they must surely also have been inspired by the Bishop's address in which he recalled the first Sisters of St Columban of ancient times and encouraged this new group of Columban Sisters with the words, "In you they have revived this morning, and full of life go forth once more on St Columban's work, robed in the ancient mantle and carrying well-trimmed the lamp of missionary zeal that burned so vividly in his great era."

This day in 1924 was the fulfilment and realisation of the hopes of Fr John Blowick, our Founder and the confrere of all you Columban Fathers with us today. And today the lamp of missionary zeal burns just as brightly and as strongly in each of us throughout the Congregation as we continue to strive to live the pillars of his spirituality – the spirit of prayer, charity and obedience. Each of us can also exclaim from the bottom of our hearts, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ."

Today, September 29, 2014, we are united with our Sisters throughout the world as we look back with deep gratitude on the profusion of blessings that have been showered on us and on the truly thousands of people who have, through our words and deeds in Christ, come to believe in and experience God's love for them.

Today also, as 90 years ago, we find ourselves asking, "What has God in store for our Congregation? What will it accomplish for him and through him?" The future is unknown but we can be confident that God goes in front of us and is on our side.

Touched and set on fire by God's love which is the source of our Charism, we continue to be called and sent in a spirit of compassion and solidarity to our fast changing world which can be filled with so much pain and suffering. And we are sustained and nourished by the spirituality of Fr Blowick and Frances Maloney our Founders, a spirituality which springs from contemplation and moves us to prophetic action.

Today, as we look to the future, I would ask each one of us – can we hear the voice of all our Sisters who have gone before us, urging us to 'Sing a new song unto the Lord'? Can we hear Fr Blowick encouraging us, 'Have untold courage, infinite trust in God, for he is faithful.' And can we hear St Columban inspire us with his exhortation, 'Let us be Christ's not our own?'

Columban Sisters work around the world



Ireland: Centre House and home for retired Sisters.

China: Training others in rehabilitation work, teaching English and supporting Church personnel.

Chile: Alcohol and drug prevention programmes and prison ministry.

Hong Kong: Pastoral care of the sick, prisoners and faith formation.

Korea: Pastoral care of children with special needs, the underprivileged and the dying (*Columban Sr Nora Wiseman, below*).

Myanmar: Pastoral care of youth, HIV/AIDS sufferers and training health workers (*Columban Sr Mary Dillon above*).

Pakistan: Programmes for literacy, health care, dialogue between religions and pastoral care of women and children, especially women prisoners.

Peru: Pastoral care for families, young people and the elderly.

Philippines: Pastoral care for mentally challenged children, street children, tribal ministry, feeding programmes for children and promoting urban gardens.



Christmas Appeal 2014

In this issue of The Far East we are publishing the material for our Christmas Appeal. As we approach Christmas, I am reminded of how Christ came into our world simply and humbly. His message of hope calls us to continue our mission with those who suffer the social stigma attached to being poor. The message of the Christmas Appeal is: "They are faith filled people, giving the little that they have to those who have a greater need."



PRAYER FOR MISSION



Prayer For Mission

Lord,

May your blessing
be upon us this Christmas
as we place all
our hope in you.

May your blessing
be upon us
as we place all
our faith in you.

May your blessing
be upon us
as we place all our
trust in you.

Amen.



Christ's message of hope
*Giving the little they have to those
who have a greater need*

Dear Far East Subscriber,



Christ's message of hope

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you all the blessings, peace and happiness of the Christ child.

As we approach Christmas, I am reminded of how Christ came into our world simply and humbly. His message of hope calls us to continue our mission with those who suffer the social stigma attached to being poor.

I would like to thank you for helping to build a fairer and more equal world.

There are many examples of Columbans working hard to build up communities and improving the lives of people. Fr Chris Saenz is a parish priest in Chile, who works with parishioners who volunteer their time for many social groups including an Adult Day Facility. The program provides transportation, a cooked lunch and daily activities for the elderly of the parish. Fr Willie Lee, is the parish priest in a nearby suburb, and with the help of parishioners, offers many outreach and pastoral services to the poor. One of these is providing lunches five day per week for parishioners who do not have enough to eat.

There are other examples in *The Far East* magazine of Columbans working with those whose lives have been enriched due to Columban benefactors.

I ask you once again to contribute to the Christmas Appeal so that opportunities can be offered to those who most need your help.

In our missionary work, we are always humbled by the simple lifestyle of those who lack in consumer goods and luxuries, like the parishioners in Chile who are poor themselves. They are faith filled people, giving the little that they have to those who have a greater need.

I thank you once again for your support and wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas.

With every blessing,

Gary Walker

Fr Gary Walker
Regional Director
Australia/New Zealand Region

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ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY
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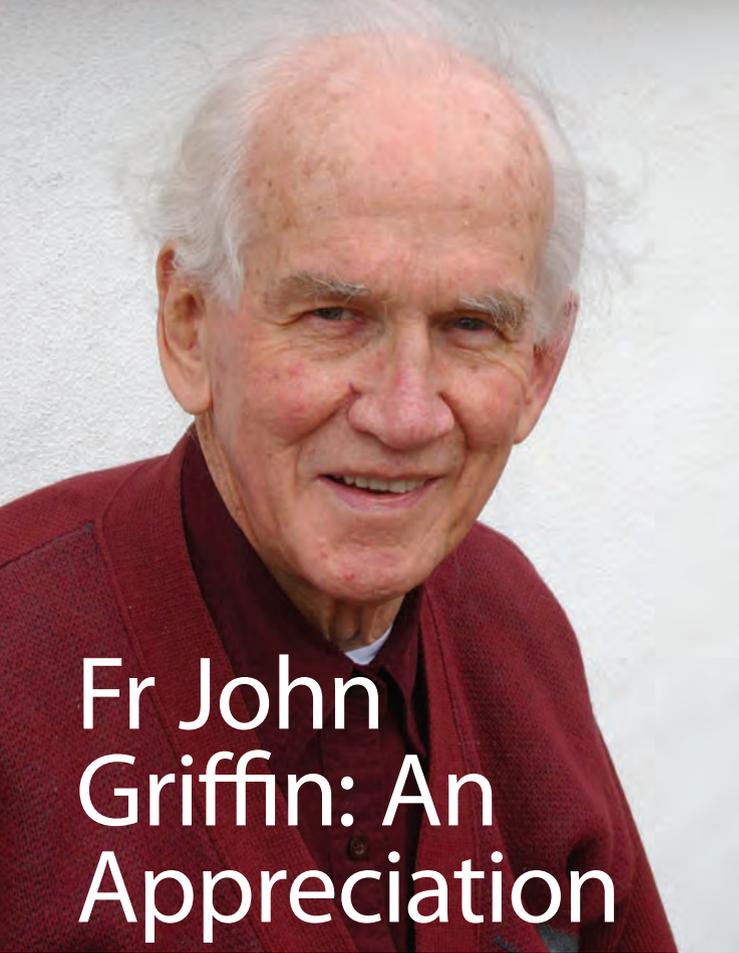
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Fr John Griffin: An Appreciation

This Eulogy was prepared by Columban Michael Gormly.

*F*r John Griffin was a missionary priest blessed with an engaging personality and relentless charm. His friendly, positive and expansive spirit influenced people in many mission situations. Throughout his career blessings emerged from family, friends, names, faces, travel, cultures, languages and music.

His travelling violin played a part too. He was a fiddler on the roof, making music, telling stories, bringing inspiration and hope to others. Faith came wrapped in warm-hearted affability.

Born in Timaru, New Zealand, in 1927, John was early blessed with a loving family and a sound education. After six years study in Australia, he was ordained for the Columban Mission in 1950 and assigned to the Philippines, to the Diocese of Iba in the Province of Zambales. For 20 years he was engaged in pastoral ministry with the Ilokano dialect.

A medical emergency in 1970 brought him back to New Zealand for the amputation of his right leg. The surgeon declared it was his leg or his life. He made adjustments, developed a resilient capacity to cope and retained mobility for four decades.



NEW ZEALAND



CHILE

OBITUARY



PHILIPPINES

In 1975 he was asked to coordinate the education and fundraising effort of the national mission office. His task was to absorb the worldwide mission situation and promote the mission cause across the land. A feature of his tenure was an ability to establish friendships with benefactors, missionaries and church dignitaries. Photo opportunities with the Pope were the occasional bonus.

John was blessed with opportunities to travel, to experience cultures, and to visit mission situations. He derived memories and satisfaction from every assignment. In the mid-80s he volunteered to work for ten years with the Columban Mission in Santiago, Chile. Again, his engaging personality and charm flourished as he provided hospitality and assisted urban church communities.

On his return to New Zealand in 1995, he again preached a message of mission awareness, first in Auckland and later in Wellington. He made a deliberate effort to keep mission alive in the local church. In retirement at St Columban's, Lower Hutt, he was by no means house-bound. Family, friends and colleagues enjoyed his company, visits, phone calls and emails.

Ageing and a loss of mobility led to dedicated healthcare and professional nursing at the Aroha Centre for the Elderly. He spoke of his final blessings in terms of 'aroha' – warm care and attention based on love and respect.

Fr John Griffin died peacefully in Wellington, New Zealand, on September 25, 2014, remembered as a gifted missionary priest with a remarkable interest and concern for people. One tribute says it well: *"He arrived among us bringing short moments of joy and encouragement; he departed leaving long memories of friendship and celebration."*

Fr John's funeral was held on September 30 at the Church of St Martin de Porres, Avalon, New Zealand.

May he rest in peace.



2015 Columban Art Calendar

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Mission World

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

Mexico: Large increase in attacks on Catholic priests



Attacks on Catholic priests in Mexico have increased by 80% over the past two years, according to a new report released by the Mexican Catholic Multimedia Centre (CCM).

CCM reports that six priests have been killed and three others have been the victims of forced disappearances since President Enrique Peña Nieto came into power two years ago. The CCM Investigative Unit called on the Mexican government *"to provide security in areas with a significant presence of organized crime."*

The report was released shortly after the kidnap and murder of Fr José Ascensión Acuña in the State of Guerrero in late September. Parishioners in Acelias, in the state of Guerrero, expressed concern when Fr Ascensión Acuña disappeared on September 21 and failed to reappear to hold Mass. His body was found in the Balsas River near Santa Cruz de Las Tinajas, in the municipality of San Miguel Totolapan, following an anonymous tip.

According to the Vatican, Mexico is now the country with the most attacks on Catholic religious leaders in the world. Christian Solidarity Worldwide's (CSW's) investigations revealed that the situation is similar for Protestant church leaders.

Reasons for the attacks on religious leaders by criminal groups vary. In some cases the criminal groups view religious leaders as opposing their objectives, either through word or action. Some religious leaders have been attacked because of their public denunciations of corruption and criminal activities, while others are targets because of work that impacts the interests of the criminal groups, for example with alcohol and drug addicts, victims of human trafficking or former members of criminal groups seeking to reintegrate into society.

Criminal organizations also often view churches as attractive targets for extortion or money laundering and religious leaders who refuse to cooperate frequently come under threat. In addition, some criminal groups have developed a religious aspect to their identity and seek to impose this in areas under their control. Sources told CSW that they believe at least one Catholic priest murdered in December 2013 was killed after he refused demands by a criminal group to hold a Mass dedicated to Santa Muerte (Saint Death) in the Catholic Church.



For more information on Christian Solidarity Worldwide go to:

www.csw.org.uk/indepth/home.htm

Mission Intention for November

That young seminarians and religious may have wise and well-formed mentors.

Mission Intention for December

That parents may be true evangelisers, passing on to their children the precious gift of faith.



From the Director

Who will pray for me?

Three people left different legacies after their deaths. One was a famous scientist, another a Columban priest and the last, a young woman who died in a hospice in New York. The month of November is traditionally the month to pray for the dead. As Catholics we take praying for the dead for granted but I remember reading about the Great War (1914 -1918) when many young English soldiers came into contact with a Catholic culture for the first time in France and were deeply impressed by the Catholic habit of praying for those who had died in battle.

Alfred Nobel whose name carries the Nobel Peace Prize and other prizes had a life changing experience when the newspapers confused the death of his brother Ludvig with himself; he was able to read an obituary of himself. What would the papers write? He was shocked to read, "*The merchant of death is dead...*" Alfred Nobel was the inventor of dynamite and the obituary dismissed him as a cause of misery. Now the Nobel Peace Prize is his legacy.

An obvious question comes to mind: would anyone give my name to Jesus? Fr John has many people praying for him, I wonder if that poor young woman had anyone to pray for her? I think her memory will remain with many people who read this column and they will say a prayer for her. I do.

Columban Fr John Griffin died on September 25 this year in Wellington, New Zealand. He slipped away quietly perhaps not wanting to cause anyone bother. He had been a missionary in the Philippines, Chile and New Zealand. What did people say about him? He was considerate and a gentleman, he listened to people, he remembered their names, often he would ask them how a family member was years after an initial conversation. (We are impressed when someone remembers our name; even more if they remember a conversation).

A person does not need to be religious to have a deep interest in people. The difference with Fr John's interest in people was his relationship with God; it coloured his life and his relationships with others. Fr John was charming just as God is. Many people will pray for him, especially those who were grateful for his presence in their lives.

Finally, in New York a young woman struggled into a hospice where she was cared for by a doctor who relinquished a promising career in medical research to work in the hospice. His decision disappointed many, obviously it was a remarkable life-changing decision. I remember the story this way:

She was sick, she knew she was very sick, in fact when the doctor came to see her before he went home for the weekend, she said, "*Doctor, I want to thank for your kindness in looking after me, you have done everything for me and I have done nothing for you. I know I am dying and I don't think I will be here when you come back to work. But there is one thing I can do for you - when I meet Jesus I will give him your name.*"

An obvious question comes to mind: would anyone give my name to Jesus? Fr John has many people praying for him, I wonder if that poor young woman had anyone to pray for her? I think her memory will remain with many people who read this column and they will say a prayer for her. I do.

Let us also say a prayer of gratitude to God for Alfred Nobel who became a man of peace and his legacy, the Nobel Peace Prize. May they rest in peace.

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

End of 35 years of Columban Ministry

Columban Fr Liam O'Callaghan shares with us the story of how St Columban's Parish, Lahore, began and how it developed.



Columban Fr Liam O'Callaghan with a parishioner.

Photos: Fr Peter Woodruff

On July 1, 2014 the Columbans handed responsibility for St. Columban's parish, Greentown, back to the Archdiocese of Lahore. This meant an end to 35 years of Columban ministry in the Punjab Province in northern Pakistan with the Archdiocese of Lahore. Columban Missionaries, however, continue to minister in the Hyderabad Diocese located in the Sindh province in southern Pakistan.

St. Columban's parish was established on the 29th of April 2007 when an existing big city parish, St Francis Kot Lakhpat, was divided in order to provide a better service to the people. Frs Tom Hanley, Gabriel Rojas and myself began the new parish after we handed St Paul's Parish, Shadbagh, back to the Archdiocese after 23 years of Columban service.

St. Columban's parish is on the southern perimeter of Lahore city, which is a rapidly expanding area as many people head to the cities in the hope of a better life. In fact, Pakistan has the highest urbanized percentage of the population (37%) in Asia. The area of the parish is quite extensive, stretching 35kms from east to west. The majority of families (approx. 70%) live in the city while the remainder live in villages spread over this wide area.

One of the first tasks undertaken by us was to do a detailed survey of all the families of the new parish. From this survey we discovered there were 1,820 Catholic families. The social and employment details of the survey revealed a rather bleak picture as, apart from a small number of people who are government employees or have a profession, the vast majority



Teachers from local school, with Fr Pat McCaffrey's niece Siobhan (back second left).

try in Lahore, Pakistan



find employment as sanitary workers or as day labourers or factory workers.

For the majority of families life is a struggle and the basic needs such as education and healthcare are often times beyond their means. The education details, likewise, were disappointing, revealing that while growing numbers of young people are achieving higher education, many only have primary level education and unfortunately a large number are illiterate. Christians have the added disadvantage of being a 2% minority in an, as yet, intolerant society. In these circumstances it is very hard for a Christian to progress.

Like Shadbagh this was also a new parish which gave us more freedom to bring in new ideas and develop the parish in new ways. We decided to work on the priorities of building up the Christian community, the formation of lay leaders, Christian-Muslim dialogue and Justice, Peace and Environmental concerns. In the first few months we hired a theologian, Mushtaq Assad, who had worked in various teaching institutions such as the Catechist Training Centre and the Pastoral Centre, Multan. Mushtaq played a significant role in the formation efforts over the years with his Bible classes in many parish areas.

Our main focus in the parish was the building up of local communities. There are now 21 active communities, each with a church/community hall and cared for by one of the nine parish catechists, each of whom has responsibility for two or three of these communities. Eleven of those buildings were built during the past seven years with funding from the

Irish Government through Mísean Cara, Columban funding, the Garda Third World Fund and the McCaffrey family who did substantial fundraising in memory of their brother and uncle, Columban Fr Pat McCaffrey, who is buried in Greentown. Fr Pat's niece, Siobhan McCaffrey, came three times from Ireland to volunteer at St Paul's High school, Greentown, where she worked on the English syllabus with the teachers and students.

For the majority of families, life is a struggle and the basic needs such as education and health care, are often times beyond their means.

Over the last two years we ran a formation programme for about 50 lay leaders, roughly six per catechist area. They received training twice a month for the first year and once a month after that and are now actively working with the catechists visiting families, conducting prayer services and funerals. Their commitment is inspiring.

Another area of focus was the Sunday School Ministry, which is important as the majority of children who go to school do not attend Christian schools and so have no access to religious education. There are now 15 Sunday schools operating in the parish, with regular seminars for 40 plus Sunday school teachers, who give great voluntary service.

Each year there were three big programmes: Christmas, Pentecost and August 14 (Independence Day) when all the schools came together at the parish centre, sometimes

totalling over 300 children. Apart from the above activities, a number of parish groups i.e. youth, women, prayer group and choirs are giving tremendous service.

Building up relations with the Muslim community was also a priority, though often not easy because of the tense situation at various times during the years and especially with the growth and spread of an extremist and intolerant version of so-called Islam. We held an Iftar meal and programme every year during the fasting month of Ramadan for Muslim neighbours and friends and built up other contacts with various Muslim groups.

It was during two particularly difficult times, a blasphemy case and the encroachment of land leading to an attempted closing of the road to the church, school and graveyard, that the benefits of those friendly contacts were seen. It was precisely those contacts and good working relationships that led to the successful outcome of those two issues.

For me, as the time came near to leave, there was a real sense of loss and an emotional wrench. So much had happened in a relatively short period of time but it is the friendships, love and warmth that we all received that I will carry with me most.

Columban Fr Liam O'Callaghan has spent most of his missionary life in Pakistan.

The Jubilee Year of St Columban begins in Rome

October 10, 2014 - November 23, 2015



Photos: Rose Basada

Filipina Columban Lay Missionary Rose Basada (centre) in St Peter's Square, Rome with other Columban pilgrims attending the Angelus Prayer service.

Filipina Columban Lay Missionary Rose Basada shares with us her participation in the three day celebration in Rome marking the opening of the Jubilee Year of St Columban, that runs from October 10, 2014-November 23, 2015.

This year makes the 1400th anniversary of the death of St Columban in the year 615 in the northern Italian town of Bobbio.

It was a blessing and privilege for me to participate in the celebrations to open in Rome the Jubilee Year of St Columban. St Columban is the patron of the Missionary Society of St Columban, to which I belong as a Lay Missionary.

The Jubilee Year began with four major events. They started on October 10 with Ecumenical Vespers at 5:00pm at the Basilica of San Clemente. The church was full of pilgrims from different places in Europe. It was a very moving celebration as people

of many cultures and Christian denominations gathered. I was able to meet pilgrims from various churches – Catholic, Anglican and Methodist. The Parish Priest of Bobbio held relics of St Columban during the procession. They are normally kept at the Museum in Bobbio where Columban died in 615AD.

After the Ecumenical Vespers we walked towards the Basilica of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. There we listened with fellow pilgrims to 'The Priests' in concert to raise money for

St Elizabeth Hospital, Hyderabad, Pakistan, which has strong links with the Missionary Society of St Columban.

On the second day - October 11 - we gathered at the Basilica of St John Lateran where there was a liturgical welcome of the relics of St Columban and a Solemn Eucharistic Celebration presided over by Cardinal Agostino Vallini, Cardinal Vicar of Rome. There were thousands of pilgrims at this event and many priests and bishops. I was very blessed to be able to read

gins in Rome

one of the Prayers of the Faithful at this Mass. It was very important to me to be able to contribute and pray for peace and interreligious dialogue, something I know is so important in my work as a missionary and in the world today.

I was amazed at how devoted so many pilgrims were to St Columban. Many had travelled from Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland and Ireland and from the Italian cities of Bobbio and Florence. Each group carried a banner with the image of St Columban. I'm happy I got the chance to walk and make friends with other pilgrims. I felt humbled and inspired by their patience and perseverance in joining the pilgrimage as I saw many of them walk a long way from one church to another. This trip was very important for me as a Columban Lay Missionary as it helped me deepen my understanding about the patron saint of the Columban missionaries.

On the third day there was a solemn concelebrated Mass of Thanksgiving in honour of St Columban. The main celebrant was Ireland's Cardinal Sean Brady, Archbishop of Armagh, at the Basilica of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. It was the only homily I understood because the celebrant normally spoke



Flags of countries where St Columban evangelised. An altar with St Columban's relics and statue.

Italian but at this Mass there was also an English translation. His homily was very informative and encouraging. It continues to give me inspiration to keep going in my missionary journey. All the more, it gave everyone more information about who St Columban was. Indeed his memory lives on in the life of the parishioners of Bobbio and many parishes in Italy and other places around the world today.

We ended our pilgrimage by attending the Angelus Prayer Service with Pope Francis in St Peter's Square. It felt like a very personal welcome even though we were surrounded by

thousands of people. Pope Francis himself was so welcoming and greeted the Columban Pilgrimage. It was a blessing to see the Pope and be able to pray with him, with other pilgrims, and with my fellow Columbans.

Rose Basada is a Filipino Columban lay missionary based in Birmingham, UK.

**Our Jubilee Year celebrations includes a Pilgrimage -
In the footsteps of St Columban
in August/September 2015.
For more information see page 22.**

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Pilgrimage 2015 1400th anniversary

In the footsteps of St Columban



Photo: bigstockphoto.com

Roman built bridge into Bobbio, Italy, near the resting place of St Columban.

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Pilgrimage leaders and Chaplains

Fr Tommy Murphy was the Superior General of the Missionary Society of St Columban from 2006-2012. He is an acclaimed scholar of the Celtic heritage of Ireland and an expert on St Columban. He is the founder of the Columban Pilgrimage Walk to Croagh Patrick, County Mayo. He has served as a Columban Missionary in Korea, Taiwan and China.

Fr Gary Walker is the Regional Director of the Columban Region of Australia and New Zealand. He has served as a member of the General Council of the Columbans in Ireland from 1994 to 2000. He has a great interest in St Columban and Celtic Spirituality. He served as a Columban Missionary in Fiji, Jamaica and in Australia.

Janette Mentha has worked at the Columban Mission Centre in Melbourne for the past seven years. She is the Head of the Programmes Department. She is responsible for the Columban programmes such as The Far East Magazine, the Columban Calendar, E-News and other activities such as the World Youth Day Chile Experience 2013.

Janette lives in Melbourne with her husband Harry. They have six children. She is a member of St Bede's parish North Balwyn. She has a great interest in learning more about St Columban.

For information:

Contact: Janette Mentha at

info@columban.org.au

Aus: (03) 9375 9475

NZ: 61-3-9375-9475

Columban Fathers in Pakistan

Columban Fr Liam O'Callaghan has worked amongst the poor in Pakistan for many years including sharing Advent and Christmas festivities in Pakistani parishes (see photo).

In Pakistan Columban priests develop parishes, form lay leaders, develop good relations with Muslim neighbours and support people of all faiths in times of need.

With the help of Columban benefactors Columban missionaries will be able to continue this important ministry.

Blessings for Advent and Christmas from all at The Far East office.



Photo: Fr Peter Woodruff

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