

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

May 2015



One mother's story

HIV/AIDS patients in Myanmar

Three new Columban Deacons

Peru, Philippines and Chile

We have the same heart as you

Japan's 'Hidden Christians'



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

PRICE \$1.50

The Far East

May 2015

Vol 97, No. 4

THE FAR EAST is devoted to furthering the missionary apostolate of the church and has been published by the Missionary Society of St Columban since October 15, 1920.

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$15 per year
(AUSTRALIA)

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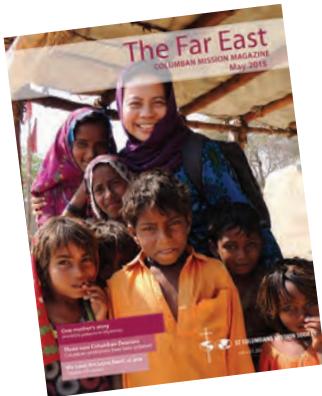
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Columban Lay Missionary, Beth Sabado, on her visit to Pakistan.
(See Beth Sabado's story pages 6-7).

Photo: Beth Sabado



From the Editor

Feeling at home

Where is home? When does one begin to feel at home? Many missionaries would have asked themselves these questions during their missionary careers. Most likely they would have also been asked these questions by others. Columban Lay Missionary Beth Sabado, from the Philippines but currently assigned to Taiwan, reflects on these questions in this issue of *The Far East* magazine.

This issue gives us a glimpse into the lives of Columban missionaries who have made their homes amongst people different from their own. Columban Irish Sr Mary Dillon has made her home in Myanmar, where she dedicates her life to assisting those with HIV/AIDS.

Preparing oneself to feel at home amongst a different people usually means learning to speak another language. American Fr Charles Duster writes about how difficult that can be! A much more powerful than normal hailstorm in the Peruvian Andes is described by New Zealander Fr Paul Prendergast who has lived for decades amongst the indigenous Quechua peoples of the area.

Three Columban seminarians have recently been ordained deacons.

They come from Peru, the Philippines and Chile. They will be ordained priests later this year. As Columban Missionaries, each of these new priests will be called to make a new home for themselves amongst peoples different from their own. Three Columban priests, two New Zealanders and one Australian celebrate the 40th anniversary of their ordination to priesthood this month. During those 40 years, each of these Columbans has been through the missionary process of beginning to feel at home in a different culture.

For almost 60 years New Zealand Columban Fr Barry Cairns has made his home in Japan. In this issue he relates the wonderful story of Japan's 'Hidden Christians'. Pope Francis recently paid a special tribute to them, calling on Japanese Catholics to be encouraged by their courageous example.

Fr Brian Vale writes in this issue that while 'Free Speech' is important for society, it must come with responsibility. It must seek out the common good of society. This is an important issue for society at the moment along with taking action on 'Climate Change'. Ashleigh Green, who

works with the Columban Mission Institute in Sydney, writes about a Multi-faith Prayer Vigil for Climate Action, held in Sydney in December 2014, to coincide with the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Lima, Peru, at that time.

Missionaries begin to feel at home in another place, another culture and with another people when they begin to feel the presence of God there and deep within themselves.

Fr Daniel Harding

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One mother's story....

SR MARY DILLON

Columban Sr Mary Dillon cares for HIV/AIDS patients in Myanmar. This is the story of one of her patients.

Ja Ra, a gentle, vulnerable and very creative woman of 45 years infected with the HIV virus has lived a life time of heartache and survival. She and her two sisters were left alone and penniless when their parents died while they were still teenagers. Life in the mountains of remote Myanmar was very bleak and perilous. There was little hope for the three young girls. Ja Ra moved from the hills down to the small town of Myitkyina and searched out a way to stay alive by selling little bundles of vegetables on the side of the road. She also learned to weave cloth.

In time she married with the dream that life would be kinder to her and she would have someone to share her love. She had two children, a daughter, Khaun Din, and a boy, Kyaw Win. Life was tough and void of any comforts and often the family had to go to bed hungry. It is a searing pain to hear your children cry of hunger. Her husband travelled to the jungle and mining areas to seek manual work. Little did she realise that these areas were flash points for disease and drugs. He returned home sick with no money. Ja Ra looked after him until he died shortly after. Now she was alone again with the added responsibility to provide for her two small children.

One of the most industrious and creative people I have met, Ja Ra lives with courage, surmounting difficulties that would send another into a deep depression. She regularly searches the forest for vegetables and wild animal meat.

Ja Ra and I have developed a mutual semi barter relationship. I provide her with rice and she collects for me greens and berries that are used in Kachin cooking. She feels good that she can support her little family. Thanks to the goodness of our benefactors, we were able to help pay for the schooling of Kyaw Win and his sister, Khaun Din.

But then life dealt this gentle woman an even heavier blow. For some weeks she had felt that her energy was slipping away and that she was losing weight. She had no energy to eat. A neighbour encouraged her to visit a HIV/AIDS clinic where it was discovered that she had the virus and was in urgent need of both TB and anti-retroviral medication. When the news leaked out among the neighbours Ja Ra found herself isolated and discriminated against. Women who used to visit her and spend hours chatting with her all avoided her now. The stigma of this disease and the awful loneliness caused her much inner pain. As the weeks progressed Ja Ra withdrew into herself and began to fear

the world outside her little shack as a dark and threatening environment. Thankfully we Columban Sisters were able to provide some medication and after a number of months her energy returned. Gradually she ventured out and was once more accepted by her neighbours.

Ja Ra's suffering was intensified when in March 2014 her daughter, Khaun Din, now 16 years old, began dropping out of school and roaming the streets of Myitkyina with a friend. One evening while Khaun Din and her friend were walking on the country road near her mother's house, a woman on a motor bike told them that there was work for them in China and that she could help them to get there. Ja Ra knew at once that this was not good news and begged the girls not to get involved with the woman. That very night the two of them left while Ja Ra was asleep. I found out later that around the same time, 30 other young girls also disappeared.

Trafficking of young women into China is well documented and the numbers are in the thousands each year. The Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT) in 2011 said, "*Out of the confirmed trafficking cases, about 90% of the women were forced to be brides in China*". Last year it reported that, "*Decades of civil war and rampant drug and alcohol addiction among men has left many women as the heads of household, creating further burdens for women as the sole breadwinners for their families*".

Ja Ra was distraught and for weeks she walked the streets and roads of the town and surrounding area looking for a glimpse of her precious daughter. We put her in contact with a local women's group that work with families of children who have been trafficked and they in turn contacted the local police. She has never seen her daughter since.

Today Ja Ra continues her search, crying bitterly to have her daughter back by her side. Each time I visit with her, her eyes fill with tears, tears that I know are coming from a mother's broken heart. Trafficking of women and young girls is a global phenomenon. In today's world there are estimated to be over 20 million victims of this horrendous crime, especially from undeveloped countries. This is just one mother's story.

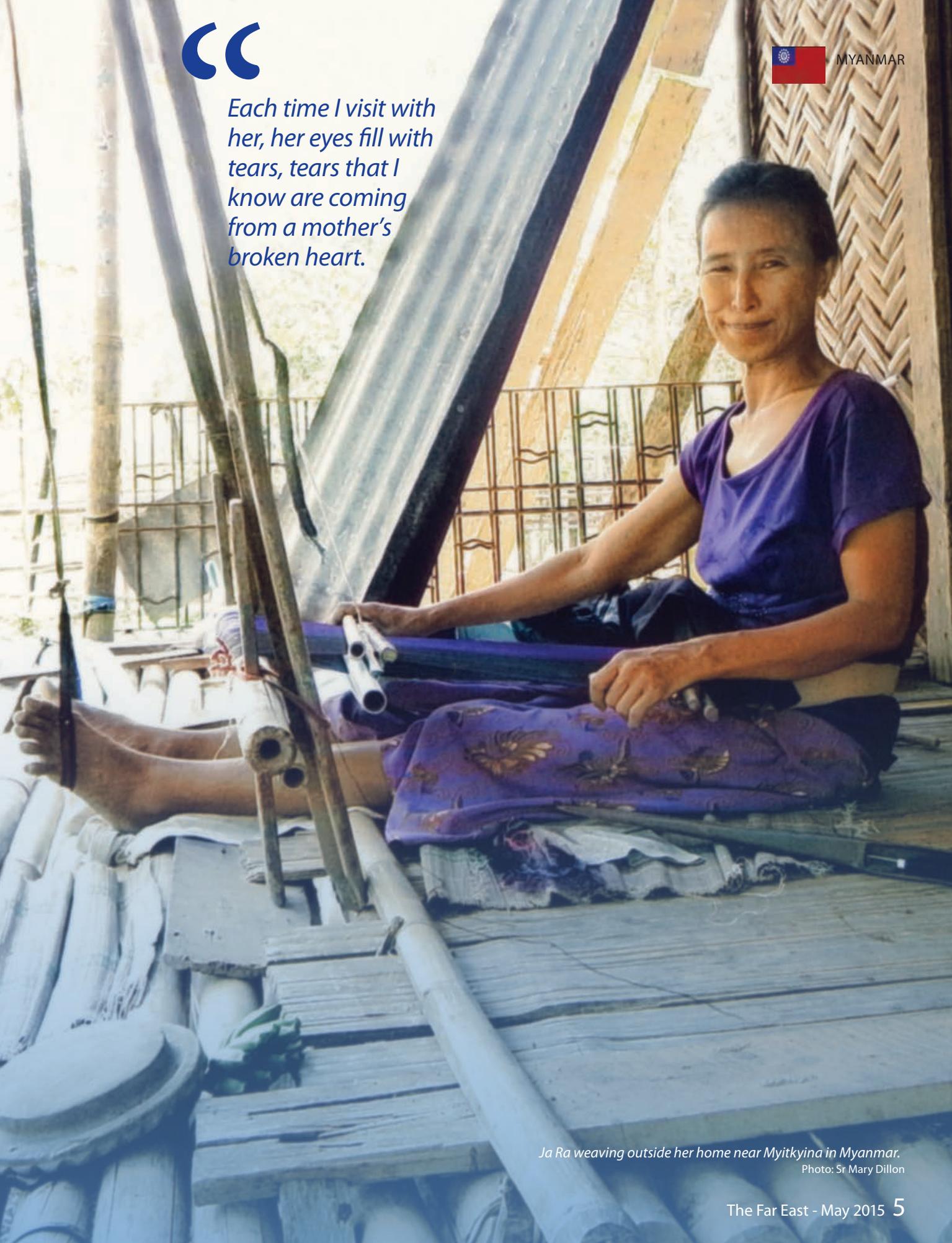
Columban Sr Mary Dillon has worked for many years in Myanmar.

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Each time I visit with her, her eyes fill with tears, tears that I know are coming from a mother's broken heart.



MYANMAR



Ja Ra weaving outside her home near Myitkyina in Myanmar.

Photo: Sr Mary Dillon

Where is home

BETH SABADO

Beth Sabado is a Columban Lay Missionary from the Philippines. She was previously based in Hong Kong as a member of the Lay Mission Central Leadership Team. Upon completing her term, she was assigned to Taiwan where she works today.

I had the chance to watch a stage play in Birmingham Repertory Theatre entitled "Refugee Boy". It was the story of a 14-year-old boy born of an Ethiopian father and Eritrean mother whose father made a heartbreakingly difficult decision to leave him in London because of a violent civil war back home. The boy woke up one morning and his father had gone. As described, "Refugee Boy" is a story about arriving, belonging and finding a home. A home is a place where I can unpack my luggage down to the very bottom. This is how one of the refugees at the play defined a home. Her definition stayed with me.

When my dad passed away in March 2008, I remember consoling myself with the thought that my mum is still around. However on a gloomy afternoon in February 2013, I received that dreaded phone call from my brother telling me, "*Beth, mum is hooked up on an ECG but the traces are flat line*". After only a few minutes, with the convenience of modern technology, I was connected with my two siblings (my sister in the U.S., my brother in the Philippines beside mum) praying the Prayer of Commendation online! Virtual and posh I thought, but mum passed into eternal life with God in whom she believed passionately and wholeheartedly.

I was on a flight the following day and while the pilot announced that we were on our final approach, all of a sudden it dawned on me this

question, where is home for me now? I felt a vacuum of loneliness deep within me. It was so daunting. The thought of going home to an empty house the next time I travel home is mentally debilitating. For more than a year I kept asking myself the same question. Where is home now?

Losing both parents is the same as losing the centre of your home. This loss will somehow redefine that space. That space that used to give comfort; that space where you feel loved; that home where no amount of concealment can ever bring back its original form. I had the chance to return to my parents' house a year after mum passed away, and the emptiness and deafening silence confirmed that big change. Opening the refrigerator gave me a sense that it no longer belonged to the same family; it is no longer the family refrigerator!

I lived out of a suitcase in the beginning of 2014. I was in six countries within three months and the demands of travelling had taken a toll on my health. While on the last leg of my travel, I felt my energy level draining. I managed to return to Hong Kong in one piece and still standing. Then I spent the next two weeks in bed. I realized that as I grow in age my body demands a longer time to recover from travel. When I was younger, taking a long haul flight and reporting back to work on the same day was a common thing. I believe the time has come for me to gently

"surrender the things of the youth" (a line from Desiderata). With those days I spent in bed, I had the time to ponder my own new definition of home. Just like in the play, home is a place where I can unpack my luggage down to the very bottom; however, there is more to that.

Meeting people for the first time and feeling the connection and trust, catching up with friends, family and relatives, visiting colleagues, exploring new places, sharing a meal, a moment of laughter, a time to rest, receiving a phone call from a long lost friend, receiving a smile from a stranger, listening to the sounds of nature, sitting on a favourite chair while reading a book and sipping a cup of coffee, finishing a task, a time for prayer, these are spaces where I feel moments of grace. That space that gives joy, warmth and comfort, is a space of home right at that very moment. The presence of God becomes more tangible in every single act of "unpacking". Indeed, this is my new perspective of home, a space where I live deep within. I am home.

Beth Sabado is a Columban Lay Missionary from the Philippines, based in Taiwan.



HONG KONG



TAIWAN



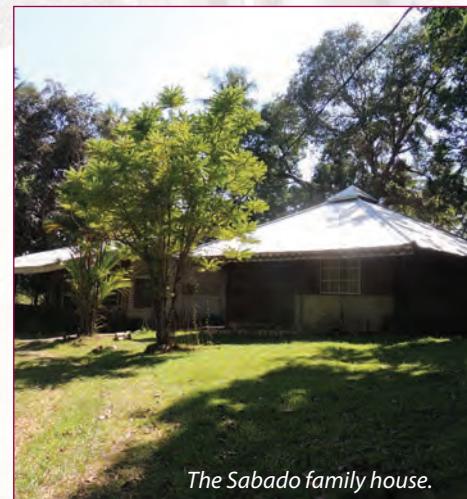
PHILIPPINES

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*Losing both parents is
the same as losing the
centre of your home.*



Beth in Fiji.



The Sabado family house.



Beth with her mum and sister.

Photos: Beth Sabado

Too big to cry

FR CHARLES DUSTER

You would think that two previous appointments to overseas countries as a Columban missionary priest would have toughened me up for the struggles that lay ahead when I arrived in Florence, Italy, to attend language school. The feelings of loneliness and frustration that confronted me on arrival were as raw the third time around. It all began at age 28, when I started Japanese language school in Tokyo as a Columban priest. Then at age 41, it was the Fijian language programme in Suva. And at age 52, now I was on my way to the first day of Italian studies in Florence, Italy. I had been assigned as the Superior of the Columban residence in Rome and Italian was a must.

I had scouted the classroom at the *Istituto Michelangelo* and saw the need to arrive early on the first day. Some seats would be too near the radiator, others in front of a drafty window. Some chairs, quite frankly, looked pretty uncomfortable. I certainly did not want to be late the first day and have the last pick.

The city bus, that first morning, was jammed beyond belief with school kids and adults on their way to work. In Italy you board the bus from the front or the rear doors and exit through the middle doors. I was wedged into a corner and was somewhat unclear about which was the closest stop to alight. When I saw the famous *Cathedral* (or Duomo) disappearing in the far distance through the back window, I knew I was in big trouble because the school was close to it. It took me another two stops to eventually squeeze myself out of the central exit. At this point, I was not too sure of the way back because the bus had made several turns into the narrow streets. I did not want to be late and started to run, but quickly realized that this was not in the best interest of someone who had a cardiac bypass. I really wanted to cry in frustration, but figured that at age 52 I was too big to cry.



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I really wanted to cry in frustration, but figured that at age 52 I was too big to cry.



Photo: www.bigstockphoto.com

I ended up with the last vacant seat in the classroom, right up near the radiator, and it was pretty uncomfortable.

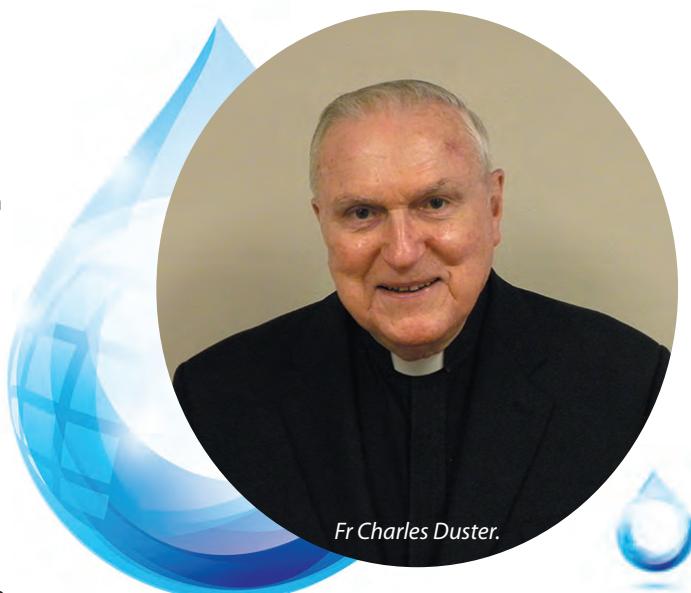
The next crisis occurred three mornings later. I was staying with an Italian couple. The husband ran his plumbing business from the back of his motor scooter. Whilst shaving, I cut my finger rather deeply on the edge of the door of the cabinet. It was bleeding! My plumber host went to his bag of tools, and produced a wad of not very sanitary looking steel wool which he wrapped around the cut. Since I didn't understand one word of what he was saying, I could only assume that he was telling me this is how he handled such situations.

At the morning coffee break, at school, my cut finger began to throb and was turning a strange shade of black. The teacher told me (in English) to head over to the hospital (which was about four blocks away). My Italian at this point consisted of, "This is a desk. This is a book. Where is the toilet?"

When I arrived at the emergency room no one seemed to speak a word of English. The doctor took a look at my finger and exploded in a tirade of Italian. There was one word he kept repeating, as he extracted with tweezers the individual strands of the steel wool from the cut: "Mai, Mai, Mai". He must have repeated it a dozen times. I gathered that the word "Mai" means "Never". I assumed the rest of the

sentence meant "Never do such a stupid thing like this again". This is a bit of medical advice I have had no trouble in following since, and I never will forget the word for "never".

Columban Fr Charles Duster lives and works in St Columbans, Nebraska, United States.



Fr Charles Duster.

Photo: www.bigstockphoto.com

Hailstorm

FR PAUL PRENDERGAST

Columban Fr Paul Prendergast tells us of a recent hailstorm he experienced in the southern Andean mountains, Peru.

Yesterdays we had the worst hailstorm I have ever seen.

I have been working in country towns in the southern Andean region of Peru for 30 years and am now retired in Yanaoca, a town of about 5,000 people, located on a plateau at 4,000 metres above sea level. We enjoy a dry climate from May to November, so most of the work on the land is done during the other months. The altitude does not allow the lush growth common along the river banks in the valleys so we rely on one crop per year for our food.

Following a warm morning, the hail began to pelt down around 3:00pm. Ten minutes before the storm hit, the local "defenders against bad weather", called "arariwas" sent rockets into the threatening clouds but failed to prevent the storm.

The storm hit with the tremendous bang and roar of an earthquake, smashing into the house as if it wanted to pulverize us. The noise was terrifying. We could not hear each other except by shouting into the other person's ear. Even then it was hard to know what was said. I thought it was going to break up our corrugated iron roof, but luckily the house was built only a few years ago so it withstood the storm's onslaught. Yet, fragments of ice found their way between the sheets of roofing and gently fell on us to remind us of our precarious situation.

Hailstorm southern Andean mountains, Peru.

Photos: Fr Paul Prendergast

Very scary lightning flashed and almost instantaneous thunder crashed around and upon us throughout the storm. The lightning was so bright and the thunder so sudden and loud that it seemed to be coming from just above our corrugated iron roof. Normally such storms last five to ten minutes but this time it went on and on for 25 minutes.

The hail was piled up everywhere. On open ground it was 10 centimetres deep and in corners it was heaped up to nearly 20 centimetres. I've never experienced anything like it.

When the hail stopped falling there was an eerie silence. I went outside and noticed immediately that all the plants had disappeared. There was not a flower left in the town. All that was left of the potato, barley, broad bean, quinoa and other plants were like thin sticks poking up through the ice.

Opposite my house is a large flat field that had been planted with potatoes. It had been looking most promising before the storm. We had hoped for a big crop this year, which would have been good news for us because the potato is a major part of the staple diet of the residents of Yanaoca and nearby villages. Now they're going to have to look for other sources of food and income this year.

Many houses in the town were damaged. The hail broke or dislodged roofing tiles (many houses are roofed with terra cotta tiles) and in some cases rooms and sheds were destroyed.

Many residents lost their *cuyes* (guinea pigs) that they were keeping to sell. Rain drowned some in their pens and others caught the 'flu' or something similar, which kills them within a couple of days.

The next morning the town was still largely covered with hailstones. I couldn't get my car out because it was stuck in the mud. Everyone had to get out with a shovel to move the slush off the footpaths and later off the roads. By nightfall most had been removed but there are still heaps of it lying around.

These last two years we've been getting very extreme weather quite frequently such as heavy winds that sometimes come in gusts that could easily lift the roof off a house. We have also experienced heavy frosts, which we are used to, given that Yanaoca is just short of 4,000 metres above sea level.

However, following the heavy frost we usually have a hot afternoon. The day before the storm was like that - really hot. When it rains it nearly always comes with hail that lasts a minute or two, then heavy rain, but this year we've had many days when it has hailed heavily for a few minutes then cleared up without raining at all. Last week it snowed quite heavily leaving snow a couple of inches deep on the ground for a day or two.

I wonder how much of what has been happening here is due to the warming of the atmosphere. Our weather has certainly become very extreme. Hailstorms with bad thunder and lightning are now common but this storm was quite peculiar in that it only hit the town, starting 100 metres south and extending a similar distance north, a recent storm pattern that has occurred a few times. Puzzling!

Things have settled down to normal here following the hailstorm and it certainly was a disaster for some residents but even inside the town some plots were only partially obliterated. Locals compare a hailstorm with a person walking. It grabs things here and there, wherever it wants, but passes some by. For them it is a living thing with a mind of its own.

Columban Fr Paul Prendergast has worked in the southern Andean mountains of Peru for over 30 years



Some of the remaining hail the next day.



Fr Paul Prendergast at home in the Peruvian Andes.



The town of Yanaoca, Peru.

A deeper fulfilment

Deacon Jorge Vargas comes from Peru. He was ordained deacon on January 24th, 2015, at his home parish in Lima, Peru. Here is his vocational story.

Enough the Columbans had been responsible for Jorge's parish in Lima, Peru, for over 30 years, he never dreamt that one day he would end up joining them. It seems, however, that God had a different plan.

It all began when Jorge was in his mid-20s and had been working as a computer programmer for five years. Even though he enjoyed his job, he realized that he was not fulfilled, that his life somehow seemed empty. He sensed that there must be a deeper purpose to which he could dedicate his life.

After a lot of soul searching, Jorge decided to attend a Vocational Discernment meeting, organized by Columban Fr Diego Cabrera, the Columban Vocational Coordinator in Peru at that time. *"That meeting really had a major impact on my life. It was like many of my deepest questions about my life had now been answered. God had given me a new direction"*, says Jorge.

After a period of discernment, Jorge was accepted in 2005 at the age of 27 into the Columban Formation Programme. At first he found adjusting to the formation process quite difficult. Until then he had been leading his life as an independent adult. Now he had to leave his family, his friends, his local parish and his job to start a new life as a Columban seminarian.

Jorge began his studies in Lima, then spent 2 years in Chicago, the USA, to learn English. After Chicago, Jorge

moved to Santiago, Chile, to continue his studies. From Santiago, Jorge moved to the Philippines for a 2 year mission and pastoral experience. After the Philippines, it was back to Santiago, to complete his studies for the priesthood.

"I really loved my time in the Philippines. Many of the people in the parish where I was assigned were very poor. Nevertheless you could see such joy and hope in them. They loved organizing liturgical celebrations such as Christmas with great happiness, wonderful choirs and deep devotion. I learnt so much and was so blessed by the great faith of the Filipino people", says Jorge of his time in the Philippines.

Jorge was ordained deacon on January 24, 2015, in his home parish "San Francisco de Asis" in Lima. He says, ***"It was a wonderful occasion for me and my family, for the parish and Columban communities.***

I realize how far I had come in my search for a deeper meaning in life. God has been kind to me".

As a deacon, Jorge serves in one of the Columban parishes in Santiago. He eagerly awaits his priestly ordination

JORGE VARGAS



which will be in his home parish in Lima, in November this year. As a Columban priest, Jorge hopes to return to missionary work in the Philippines.



Called to be a priest

Deacon Kurt Zion from the Philippines wrote the following reflection in the days leading up to his ordination as a deacon. He was ordained deacon on March 15, 2015.

KURT ZION



PHILIPPINES



Among the mysteries in life for me is God's call for me to be one of His priests. It is something I struggle with because who am I to be called by Him? It is also a gift I am very grateful for, because it has allowed me to participate in the faith

and life journey of persons in ways I could never have done if I did not join the Columbans. My life has truly been enriched by these encounters hoping I too have enriched theirs in some ways.

When I first thought of becoming a priest, I was just a small boy around the age of ten. I was then an altar server. Now more than 20 years later, I am preparing for my ordination to the diaconate, the final step to becoming a priest. For us, it is a long engagement, a total of 10 years which includes studies in philosophy and theology, a year of spiritual discernment and a stint in a mission outside the Philippines, in my case the beautiful happy islands of Fiji.

If you ask me why, why do I want to become a priest, a Columban missionary priest, I only have one

answer – deep in my heart is this overwhelming joy and gratefulness I have for God for loving and accepting me for who I am. It is out of this gratitude that I also want to share this joy with others as a missionary priest in far distant islands like Fiji. I do think this is crazy. It is a life of uncertainty in worldly and human terms, but certainly it has been a life of joy for me. I guess I am crazy, a fool.

If not for my family, friends, and the Columban community I wouldn't have made it this far. If not for God's dream in me, I wouldn't be here. I am grateful to my family for allowing me and supporting me to pursue this dream. I have not always been the perfect son or perfect brother, but I will be there for them and love them. I am especially grateful to my father who I only got to know and understand more in the last few years of his life until he died in a work-related accident. He taught me to always do what makes me happy and pursue my dreams. He never complained and took his responsibility as a father seriously.

As I prepare in the coming days for my ordination to the diaconate, please whisper a prayer for me. I will be keeping you in my prayers, too. I will soon leave the four walls of the Columban House of Studies in Manila. Thank you, too, the seminary formation staff and brothers for bringing out the best of me all through these years. I will forever be a student in my life.

Photo: Kurt Zion

A chance meeting

Deacon Rafael Ramirez comes from Chile. He was ordained deacon in Santiago, Chile, on April 25th, 2015. Here is his story.

Rafael had always been actively involved in his parish community in Temuco, a large city 700 kilometres south of Santiago, Chile's capital. He was a catechist, a scout leader for the parish troop and a volunteer at "Hogar de Cristo", a church run organization supporting the destitute poor.

It was on a special visit for parishioners to the nearly Columban-run parish of Puerto

Saavedra that Rafael first came across Columban missionaries. Here, visiting the island of "Isla Huapi", inhabited by indigenous Mapuche people, Rafael met two Fijian Columban Lay Missionaries-Monica Lewatikana and Lucy Lutua. He relates,

"I was very surprised and impressed how well these foreign missionaries could relate to the Mapuche people. It made such an impression on me that I decided to find out more about the Columbans".

At that time Rafael was working for World Vision in Chile, after he had graduated from university in computer science. When the opportunity came to visit Santiago as a part of his World Vision work, Rafael made contact with the Columbans, whose Mission Centre happened to

be only two doors away from the World Vision office-in a large city of 7 million people!

"I could see the hand of God in this. It was too much of a coincidence. After this I began serious vocational discernment about priesthood as a Columban missionary".

RAFAEL RAMIREZ



Of his time in Korea, he says, *"I spent my first year in Korea learning the Korean language. My second year was devoted to doing pastoral work in hospitals, prisons and amongst foreign immigrant workers. My time in Korea was difficult, especially at first, learning the language, the food and the fast pace of life. In time however, I began to feel at home. I made many good Korean friends and can see the importance of Columban missionary work in Korea".*

Rafael was ordained a deacon on the 25th of April 2015 in the Columban-run parish of Santo Tomas Apostol in Santiago. He will be ordained priest at the end of the year in his home parish in Temuco. After ordination to priesthood Rafael hopes to return to continue his missionary work in Korea. He says,

"As a deacon now and as a priest in the future, I hope to be close to people, sharing in their lives, sharing my life with them. God has truly blessed me in my call to priesthood".

Rafael entered the Columban formation programme in 2005 at the age of 27. He went on to study for the priesthood in Chile and Peru and to study English in Chicago. Rafael was also sent for a 2 year missionary and pastoral experience to Korea.



40th Anniversaries

Congratulations from The Far East on the occasion of their 40th anniversaries.

Fr Paul Finlayson

Fr Paul was ordained to the priesthood on the 17th of May, 1975, at St Thomas More Church, Napier, New Zealand, by Archbishop Reginald Delargey. He was born in Wanganui, one of five children to Jack and Margaret Finlayson.

After completing his secondary education and beginning studies by correspondence at Massey University, Palmerston North, Paul began work as a clerk in the Ministry of Works, Napier. He began his studies for the priesthood at the former Columban seminary, at Turramurra, in Sydney, in 1969.

After ordination, Fr Paul was assigned to the Philippines, where he has spent most of his missionary life ever since. He has worked in several parishes, often in areas of high conflict due to the on-going threat of encroachment on the land of tribal people. In these areas he worked for the protection of tribal land and the development of reforestation projects.



Fr Brian Vale

Fr Brian was ordained priest on the 17th of May, 1975, at St Joseph's Church, New Plymouth, New Zealand, by Bishop Owen Sneddon, the Auxiliary Bishop of Wellington. He studied for the priesthood at Turramurra, Sydney, beginning in 1969.

After ordination Fr Brian was assigned to Japan where he worked until 2003, except for a five year period back home. In Japan Fr Brian worked in a variety of ministries such as parish work, Justice and Peace and the Young Christian Worker (YCW) apostolate.

In 1994 Fr Brian was appointed the Regional Director of the Columbans in Japan. Upon completing his position as Director, he returned to work in the Columban Mission in New Zealand. In 2009 Fr Brian was appointed to the Columban Mission Institute in Sydney to work in Inter-religious Dialogue. He continues to work in this area today as well as being the Rector of Columban Seminary Formation for Australia and New Zealand.



Fr Paul Oxley

Fr Paul comes from Narrandera, New South Wales, the eldest of the seven children of Norman and Margaret Oxley. He was ordained on the 17th of May, 1975, at St Mel's Church, Narrandera, by Bishop Francis Carroll of Wagga Wagga. He began his studies for the priesthood at the former Columban seminary at Turramurra, Sydney, in 1969.

After ordination, Fr Paul was appointed to the Philippines, where he has worked most of his missionary life ever since. During these years, Fr Paul has been involved in a variety of ministries such as Parish work, the Tribal Apostolate, Reforestation and Ecology programmes, Justice and Peace work and Seminary Formation.

Since 2004, Fr Paul has been Bursar, firstly for the Columbans on the island of Mindanao, then in 2008 for the whole of the Philippines. In 2011 he was appointed the Bursar General for the Missionary Society of St Columban. He is based in Hong Kong.





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.*

Papal tribute to Japan's 'Hidden Christians'

Pope Francis paid homage to the 'Hidden Christians' of Japan, who kept the faith alive after priests were expelled from the country, during a March 20 meeting with the Japanese Catholic bishops.

The Pope told the bishops, who were making their ad limina visits, that the example set by the 'Hidden Christians' should encourage today's Catholics in the work of evangelization. "If our missionary efforts are to bear fruit, the example of the 'hidden Christians' has much to teach us", he said, noting that evangelization is a task for lay people as well as priests and missionaries. He said:

"The embers of faith which the Holy Spirit ignited through the preaching of these evangelizers and sustained by the witness of the martyrs were kept safe, through the care of the lay faithful who maintained the Catholic community's life of prayer and catechesis in the midst of great danger and persecution".

During his meeting with the Japanese bishops, the Holy Father praised the work of the Church in Japan in the fields of education, health care, and service to those in need. He offered a special word of thanks to the bishops for "your initiatives in favour of peace, especially your efforts to keep before the world the immense suffering experienced by the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the Second World War seventy years ago".

Catholic World News - March 20, 2015



Statue of Mary in Oura Church. This is the actual statue seen by the 'hidden Christians' 150 years ago.

Mission Intention for May

That Mary's intercession may help Christians in secularized cultures be ready to proclaim Jesus.

From the Director

Christ to the people



*I*n this issue of *The Far East* we read about Sr Mary Dillon who works with people who have AIDS in Myitkyina, Northern Myanmar.

In 1995 I was fortunate to meet Sr Mary Dillon in Korea and then again in 2004 in Myitkyina.

I visit her once again in this issue of *The Far East* and remember in this Easter season that she is the person of Christ to these unfortunate people.

What a difference it makes to have seen her in action, her story comes to life. The AIDS people live simply, and suffer a lot from illness and exclusion. Fear is a potent force which changes good-hearted people into people with hearts of stone.

We are witnessing this reality around the world. People are fleeing their own countries where war, ethnic and religious discord make life too dangerous. Countries are constantly resisting the movement of these refugees and boat people. Unlike desperate refugees fleeing their countries, these AIDS patients in Myanmar have nowhere to go.

Sr Mary has been practicing mercy all her life as a Columban Missionary Sister with her nurse training. She is the human face of mercy. She is Christ's face of mercy and her touch is that of His hand.

Pope Francis has declared a Jubilee Year of Mercy beginning on the feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) and concluding on the feast of Christ the King (November 20, 2016). Sr Mary has been practicing mercy all her life as a Columban Missionary Sister through her nurse training.

She is the human face of mercy. She is Christ's face of mercy and her touch is that of His hand.

This month, three young Columban deacons are featured in the magazine, two from Latin America and one from the Philippines. The Third World is the source of the Church's vocations at the present time. The face of the Catholic Church may change in terms of where our vocations come from but the Gospel doesn't. These young deacons are called to be merciful in their ministry; if they follow Christ's example and put His words into action they cannot go wrong. May they be as generous in living out their vocation as Sr Mary has been.

Finally, there is the extraordinary story of the hidden Christians in Japan. When the media reports of people abandoning their faith, especially in the West, we read this heroic story by Fr Barry Cairns about the people in Japan who kept their faith alive despite ferocious persecution for nearly two centuries.

People continue to live their faith in good times and bad times. It is the lived experience of Christ's followers like Sr Mary Dillon which changes hearts and invites people to become His disciples.

Gary Walker

Fr Gary Walker
director@columban.org.au

We have the same heart as you

FR BARRY CAIRNS

Japan's 'Hidden Christians'



A sketch of two martyrs being led to execution.

"We have the same heart as you". One hundred and fifty years ago a venerable Japanese woman whispered these words to French missionary Father Bernard Petitjean in a newly-built Church in Nagasaki on March 17, 1865. And that momentous phrase introduced a unique chapter in the history of the Church, announcing as it did the existence of hidden Japanese Christians after more than two centuries underground.

In the 1960's Fr Barry Cairns worked on Amakusa Island where the community was largely descended from the 'hidden Christians.' While there, he collected many articles used by the 'hidden Christians' and started a small museum there, visited by many pilgrims and tourists to this day.

Fr Barry tell their story.....



St. Francis Xavier had arrived as the first Christian missionary to Japan in 1549. He and the other missionaries who followed him had great success. In a remarkable period of growth, as many as 300,000 Japanese were baptized and the church was growing at the pace of 5,000 to 6,000 converts a year. At the peak of this '*Christian era*', the 40,000 strong population of Nagasaki was almost totally Christian.

But a radical change arrived with striking suddenness on January 27, 1614. On that day, having consolidated his power, strongman Tokugawa Ieyasu published a decree stating, "*Japan is the country of both the Shinto gods and Buddhism. Christianity, as their enemy, is a danger to the nation. It is to be eradicated*". The process of pressuring Japanese Christians into complying with this decree was set in motion. Twenty-five years later, the last priests were expelled or executed. The remaining Japanese Christians were on their own, without priests. This situation lasted for 226 years. During all that time, despite a cruel and thorough persecution, thousands remained faithful to Jesus Christ.

How did they manage to do that? As the last of the missionaries prepared for arrest or banishment, they prepared their congregations. Confraternities were founded and groups encouraged to come together for prayer and mutual encouragement in the faith. The Jesuit missionaries, for example, founded the "*Confraternity of Mary*", the Franciscans the "*Confraternity of the Cord*", and the Dominicans the "*Confraternity of the Rosary*". All had set prayers and practices. All were based on Jesus' words, "*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst*". (*Matthew 18:20*).

In each of these secret communities four leaders were chosen. There was the overall leader, '*chokata*', who was the custodian of the Church calendar with its liturgical seasons and feast days. The other leaders were the baptizer, '*mizukata*' - literally 'water person'; the catechist, the '*oshiekata*' - 'teaching person' and the 'notifier' - '*kikikata*'. This last person informed the members of the small group when and where their secret prayer meetings were to be held.

These underground communities held and passed on various concrete objects to remind them of their faith. For example, a Buddha statue would have a false back that contained a crucifix. A statue of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy who was often depicted with a child in her arms, was used to remind them of the Virgin Mary. I have personally seen polished metal mirrors with crosses

traced on their shiny side. Because this side would face the wall, the cross would remain hidden. Sometimes a simple round object - such as a round stone - would be used as a symbol of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Japanese word for 'round' (*marui*) is similar to '*Maria*'.

One family I know treasure a small stone that had been found on a beach by one of their ancestors. There is a hole going through the stone, and on the reverse side, three natural indentations. It was the family's "*Trinity stone*".

Notice boards forbidding Christianity and offering rewards for betraying Christians to the authorities were posted throughout the country. In the initial stages of the persecution, apprehended Christians were tortured and, if they did not recant, were crucified, beheaded or burned alive. Few recanted in the face of this violence. On the contrary, they looked forward to going to '*paradiso*'.

So a more insidious torture was devised to induce a verbal denial of Christ. This torture was called the '*ana-tsurushi*'. A suspected Christian was hung upside down over a pit. The body was tightly bound to slow the blood circulation. A small cut was made in the head, and so death would come slowly. One young girl endured 14 agonizing days. Others, including both foreign and Japanese priests, shrank from the excruciating pain and gave at least verbal recantation. There are documented records of 4045 martyrs who did not give in.

During these centuries of persecution, Japan was closed (even more closed than today's North Korea). Under pain of death, no Japanese was allowed to travel overseas and no foreigner was allowed to enter. Rare exceptions were Dutch merchants who were allowed to land not on the sacred soil of Japan proper, but only on an artificial island in Nagasaki harbor known as Dejima.

Through these traders, rumors of the existence of Christian communities and their continued persecution found their way all the way to Rome. The Popes showed a consistent concern and frequently asked Missionaries of the Paris Foreign Mission Society to attempt entry into Japan. All failed and some were killed.

In 1853 Commodore Matthew Perry with four U.S. Navy ships steamed into Edo (Tokyo) Bay with a letter from President Millard Fillmore to Tokugawa Ieyasu's successor, the Tokugawa Shogun. The U.S. was requesting friendship and trade. One year later, through the persistence of the U.S. Consul, Townsend Harris, a treaty was concluded. Britain, France and Russia also signed treaties. But the

doors of the country were not exactly thrown open. The foreigners were to be confined to concession areas in Yokohama, Nagasaki and Hakodate. The terms of the treaties allowed these countries to set up chaplaincies within these concessions. No Japanese was to enter. Persecution was still alive. The priests who were chaplains to the French built churches in Yokohama and Nagasaki. Each was topped by a large cross and a sign in Japanese proclaiming "Tenshudo" or "*temple of the Lord of Heaven*".

The Church they built at Nagasaki still stands prominently on Oura hill. This was where the Christian midwife Elizabeth Tsuru told Fr. Petitjean, "*We have the same heart as you*". The astounded priest was asked a further question, "*Do you have a statue of Mary?*" Shown the statue, they were delighted to see the infant Jesus in Mary's arms. Other questions followed to determine if this man was a genuine successor of the '*bataren*' or fathers of their ancestors' era. "*Do you honor the great chief in Rome? Do you marry?*" They had already visited a Protestant church and the minister introduced his wife. They never returned!

Elizabeth Tsuru revealed to Fr. Petitjean that there were 1,300 underground Christians in the neighbouring village of Urakami. She also explained some of their customs. "*A few days ago, we entered 'the sad season'* (Lent - remember it was mid-March.) "*We celebrate the birth of Jesus on the 25th day of the cold month.*"

In the succeeding months, almost 20,000 'hidden Christians' had declared themselves in Nagasaki and the outlying islands of Goto, Amakusa and Madara. When news of this reached the central government, persecution was intensified. Missionary priests visited the communities in secret. As the numbers multiplied the priests trained lay helpers to instruct and support the communities.

At this time Japan was in political turmoil. The Tokugawa family who had ruled for 250 years lived in Edo (now Tokyo). The Emperor, a powerless figurehead, lived in distant Kyoto. In 1867, the Tokugawa Shogun was deposed and the Emperor restored.

The powers behind this imperial restoration were the powerful families and trading houses. These were ultra-nationalist in outlook and used the Shinto religion as their instrument. At first they even demoted Buddhism and declared Shinto to be the state religion. The law was, "*to be a true Japanese citizen in loyalty to the divine Emperor, you must follow the way of the gods, Shinto*". Notice boards banning Christianity were again posted in every village.

There was a renewal of executions and exile. In January 1870, 2,810 Christians from Nagasaki, men, women and children, were forcibly loaded onto boats and exiled to 21 distant areas of Japan. The American, British and French consuls protested. "*We earnestly remonstrate against the treatment of Christians*". The appeal was ignored.

In December, 1871 a large delegation of Japanese officials, led by former Minister of the Right (Prime Minister) Iwakura set out on a tour of the U.S. and Europe to conclude treaties and promote commerce. The international press had featured the persecutions in detail. In the United States they were received rather coldly. In Britain, France and Belgium, the reception was even more frigid. In Brussels, as the Japanese delegation's carriages passed, the streets were lined with people demanding liberation of Christians. Iwakura cabled his government: "*this delegation will end in failure if the persecution of the Christians continues*". On February, 1873 the persecution of Christians officially ended. The anti-Christian notice boards were taken down and exiles still alive were repatriated.

Of course, it takes more than a government decree to change the attitudes of minor officials and the general public. Especially during the Pacific war, discrimination against Christians was rampant, but that has eased. Today, despite the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, which had its epicenter near the Catholic neighborhood of Urakami, the churches in Nagasaki, the Goto, Amakusa and Madara Islands are vibrant with faith.



Columban Fr Barry Cairns has been a missionary in Japan since 1956.

Multi-faith prayer vigils for climate action



AUSTRALIA

ASHLEIGH GREEN



Multi-faith prayer vigil held in Sydney.

In early December 2014 faith communities around the world staged vigils calling for climate action. The vigils took place as world leaders met in Lima, Peru, for the UN Conference on Climate Change (COP 20).

Columbans in Peru had worked hard with other religious groups for over a year to urge the negotiators to take strong action. Laura Vargas, Columban Co-ordinator of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in Lima said, "*We have been praying, fasting and visiting the embassies of wealthy countries, including Australia's Embassy*". This continued during the Conference even as Columbans Fr Sean McDonagh, Fr Peter Hughes, and Cesar Correa all presented on three separate panels.

In Sydney, the *Columban Mission Institute* was part of a Multi-faith Prayer Vigil organised by the *Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC)* in partnership with the *Faith Ecology Network (FEN)* and *Catholic Earthcare Australia* at Sydney's picturesque Botanic Gardens. In the solar lantern-lit vigil, diverse communities came together to pray for the success of the negotiations.

A special focus for the Sydney vigil was our nation's role in addressing the challenge of global warming. "*Australia has not been acting responsibly as a global player*", said Thea Ormerod, President of the ARRCC. "*Not only did Australian delegates frequently block consensus at last year's negotiations, but we are now listed along with Canada as the two worst performers of all industrialised countries on the Climate Change Performance Index*".

Prayers were offered for all communities on Earth, especially the people in Lima who will be severely affected by the impacts of climate change. They depend on the glaciers in the Andes for their water supply. Already 39% of these glaciers have melted due to human-induced global warming. Prayers were offered for today's youth and future generations who will inherit the problems of a disrupted climate system.

As well as the prayer vigil in Sydney, several interfaith vigils were held in North America, Canada, Israel, England, France, Scotland, Nigeria, India, Hong Kong and Japan. The vigils recognised that climate change is an issue that affects us all, and that care for creation is a priority for many religious communities around the world.

Pope Francis' message to the negotiators was "The effective struggle against global warming will only be possible with a responsible collective answer".

With this being a central issue across religions, coming together in prayer and solidarity seemed an appropriate action. What followed was a powerful, visual statement that flooded social media and news websites internationally.

However, there rightly was a feeling of disappointment at what was not accomplished at Lima to bring the world closer to climate justice. Much hope now rests on Pope Francis' upcoming encyclical on care for creation to be written out of his concern for the impacts of climate change on the poor and on the natural world.



Fr Charles Rue at the Multi-faith prayer vigil.

Ashleigh Green works at the Columban Mission Institute in Sydney.

With freedom comes responsibility

FR BRIAN VALE



Every culture has its own interpretation of what is harmful or offensive, its own mix of tolerance and intolerance, its threshold of freedom and its absence. Our own legal tradition presently upholds the right to free speech but also the right to protection from insult, slander or what we have come to call "hate speech".

Free speech is not purely a question of license but also of being able to seek out what is the common good of society. Many multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies are growing in their recognition of the need to respect diversity and to be cautious about the "us" and "them" polarised thinking which includes or excludes depending on one's own cultural, racial or religious logic.

This is a new challenge for our globalised world where we are growing in our awareness that my neighbour may have a different view of the world but is one of "us" (a fellow human being) and not one of "them".

The recent murders of the staff of the satirical French magazine "Charlie Hebdo" and other incidents created an interesting discussion about free speech. Some contend that the magazine, with its own brand of secular fundamentalism, went too far in outright ridicule of all people of faith and, most recently, Muslims.

Satire is supposed to have an enlightened perspective pointing out society's hypocrisy. However, if it is targeting maligned and vulnerable minorities, it is not contributing to social cohesion.

Pope Francis entered the discussion and stirred up some controversy. His stand can be summarized as the following:

- Everyone has the right to practice their faith in freedom.
- It is wrong to commit violence in the name of God and religion.
- Freedom of expression is necessary to build the common good of society.
- However it is important not to use this freedom to offend and insult.
- When this happens, it is "normal" for those insulted to react.
- Some things are sacred. It is wrong to insult and mock religion, contrary to what many in post-Enlightenment societies believe".

I do not feel it is right to ask mainstream Muslims to continually confirm their stance against violence and terrorism whenever a violent incident occurs, as if all 1.6 billion Muslims are guilty until they do so.

We all oppose the brutal acts of murderers, many with criminal pasts and little religious knowledge, who masquerade as religious believers. Angry alienated individuals tend to ignore established religious leaders. Fundamentalism does need to be tackled but ultimately from within that religion or ideology rather than from the outside, difficult and time-consuming though that may be. A stance of openness and cooperation will surely be better (rather) than rigidity and restriction. The starting point is seeing my neighbour as one of "us".

Fr Brian Vale works at the Columban Mission Institute in Sydney in the area of Inter-religious Dialogue.



Caring for HIV/AIDS in Myanmar

Columban Sr Mary Dillon works closely with families like Ja Ra's who live with HIV/AIDS and who also is a victim of people trafficking in Myanmar.

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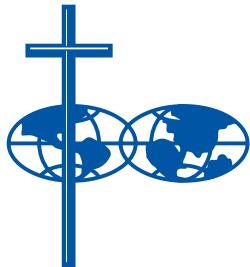
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