

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

October 2015



A tale of two communities

Reconciliation in China and the Philippines

Growing a community

Children learn to plant and care for trees in Peru

Kiribati...A country about to disappear

A Columban visits and reflects



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

PRICE \$1.50

The Far East

October 2015

Vol 97, No. 9

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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Association A.B.N. 17 686 524 625

Printed by Doran Printing, Melbourne



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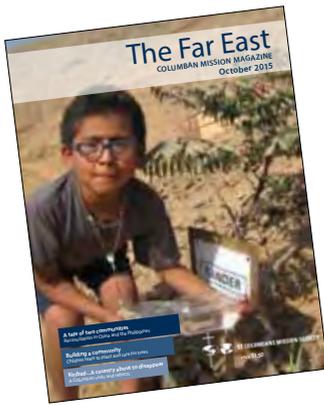


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Listen to: From the Editor: October is Social Justice Month



A child from the San Columbano Centre for children in the desert on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, planting and caring for trees.
(See Sr Martina Kim's story pages 10-11).

Photo: Sr Martina Kim



From the Editor

October is Social Justice month

Geelong native, Fr. Kevin O'Neill, has been Superior General of the Missionary Society of St Columban since 2012. On visitation to his homeland in August this year, he spoke of how Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* and his Encyclical, *'Laudato Si'*, resonate strongly with the lived experience of Columban missionaries in the many countries where they work.

As missionaries on the margins of society, Fr. Kevin stated that Columbans have been aware for quite some time of the growing danger of climate change, of the tragedy of unjust societal structures, of the plight of refugees and of the need to build bridges between peoples of different religions. At the same time, he said that Columbans continue to invite young men to consider a vocation to missionary priesthood as a way to respond to God's call to address the missionary challenges outlined above. According to Fr. Kevin, Columbans also offer today the possibility of a missionary experience for a short period alongside Columbans *'in the field'* in one of the many countries where they work.

This issue of The Far East is dedicated to many of the Social Justice themes raised by Fr. Kevin. October is Social Justice Month. An interview with Fr. Kevin about these themes is published in this issue.

There is the story of the Pacific Island nation of Kiribati, threatened by raising sea levels and the story of a new coal mining project in Pakistan which will contribute to Global Warming. From Peru, there is the story of a project to plant trees the area surrounding a Children's Centre, built on the desert landscape outside of Lima.

Other missionary themes covered by stories in this issue are the work of reconciliation and forgiveness in China and the Philippines, concrete support for the Subanen indigenous community in the Philippines who have suffered the loss of land through land grabbing, forestry and mining and the recognition of the pioneering work by Columbans in Korea for those living with a disability. This issue also carries the appeal of Columbans to support and welcome refugees in the current crisis in Europe.

As the year 2015 is the 1400th anniversary of the death of St Columban, we continue to offer reflections on his life and ministry across Europe. May the example and the intercession of St Columban continue to support Columban missionaries as they respond to the great missionary challenges that God calls them to address in the world of today.

Fr Daniel Harding
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A red banner with a white cross and globe logo at the top left, with the text 'COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES' to its right. Below the logo is the text 'Join Us...'. To the right of this is 'Columban Missionary Priests' and ''Crossing Boundaries''. At the bottom left is a small photo of people, and at the bottom right is the text 'For more information: www.columban.org.au'.

Tales of two communities

FR CIRENEO MATULAC

Recently I visited some small Catholic communities in the north of China. One particular community that I visited with the Parish Priest had little more than ten families gathered together. The Parish Priest asked me to give a short talk to the congregation while he was hearing confessions. I thought I would say something on reconciliation and forgiveness. I introduced myself as a missionary priest, coming from the Philippines, and a member of the Missionary Society of St Columban.

As you know, the Columbans work in many places in Asia including China, Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines. I spoke to them of the ministry of reconciliation between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao in the Philippines. I told the story of Fr Rufus Hally, an Irish Columban, who had spent many years working among the Muslims. He was known for his work as a peace-builder and was loved by the people.

However, on August 28, 2001, while riding his motorbike back to the parish, a group of armed men stopped Fr Rufus and tried to kidnap him. Rufus refused to go with them.

They tried dragging him, but he resisted and eventually they shot him and he died on the spot. His body was left there on the road. Both communities of the parish, Christian and Muslim, were deeply saddened by this event. All of them had lost a good friend.

A month later, three people were arrested as suspects for his murder. It turned out that they were Muslims. His friends who used to visit the prison, sat down together to decide whether they would visit those arrested for killing Fr Rufus. As I told this story to the members of the Chinese community, I asked them, *"should these friends of Fr Rufus have visited those accused of killing him?"* One woman stood and said that as a Christian one should visit, but it would be so difficult that she was not sure if she could do it. The hurt would be just too deep.

Another said much the same thing. A man said that he would encourage the friends to visit those accused, because Jesus had said *'love your enemies'*. So as the discussion went on it became clear that the gathered community agreed on what should be done, but questioned whether they themselves would have the strength or the courage to forgive. As I listened I told them that Fr Rufus's friends had a similar discussion and had come to the conclusion that Fr Rufus would want them to visit. So they did go and visit the accused. This was certainly a great act of forgiveness.

Our ability to forgive those who have done us wrong is the first step towards reconciliation. When we are ready to forgive our enemy, we give reconciliation a chance.

After our discussion, a man at the rear of the room raised his hand and said that he too had a story to tell. In his home village, during China's Cultural Revolution, there was a man who denounced the Christians of the village and was responsible for much destruction. This man burned the Catholic Church in the village, denounced the chief catechist so that the latter was imprisoned for a very long time. In the 1980s the chief catechist was eventually released from prison. The man who had denounced him was by now old and seriously ill. Since he was known for his tyranny, the neighbours simply ignored him. His sickness brought this man a lot of physical pain. The man he had denounced, who had served such a long prison sentence, went to visit him. Despite his previous suffering he was willing to forgive. He even persuaded his friends to visit him also.

Because of this kindness, the sick man asked why he was doing this. The catechist replied that this was the essence of Christianity, we were to forgive even as God forgives. Eventually, the sick man on receiving such care, concern and forgiveness from his neighbours, decided to become a Catholic himself.

I found this a very profound story of reconciliation: an instance where a community who had endured communal conflict had received the grace to be reconciled when the violence was over.

All Christians are called to respond to Christ's command, *"Go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). How do we proclaim the Good News? I think that these two stories show us that we proclaim the Gospel above all by the way we live our Christian lives. God's work in us must be evident in the quality of our daily lives.

Columban Fr Cireneo Matulac worked in Chile and China and is presently assigned to the Philippines.



PHILIPPINES



CHINA

*When we are ready
to forgive our
enemy, we give
reconciliation a
chance.*



A small Catholic community in China prays the Way of the Cross.

Photo: Fr Cireneo Matulac



Mission on the margins

A conversation with the Superior General of the Missionary Society of St Columban, Fr Kevin O'Neill.

One parish is more than a handful for any priest, but Fr Kevin O'Neill's territory extends from Myanmar to Mexico, and many points in between. As Superior General of the Missionary Society of St Columban, Fr O'Neill is leader of missionaries working in 16 countries around the world.

Hailing from Geelong, Victoria, the 52-year-old joined the Columbans in 1984, was ordained in 1992 and hasn't lived in Australia for 25 years. He's worked in Taiwan, Ireland and China, and is now based in Hong Kong.

Part of his role as Superior General is to visit Columban missionaries wherever they're working. This month he's back home, visiting Columbans in Australia and taking time to catch up with relatives and friends.

During a visit to Brisbane, Fr O'Neill, only the second Australian to be Superior General of the Columbans, reflected on his first three years in the role.

He said he took great heart from the words and example of Pope Francis.

*"Certainly what Pope Francis had to say in *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel) resonates very closely with our experience as missionaries," he said.*

"It's as though he's put words to our own experience, and very beautiful words, insightful words, challenging words."

"Also with his recent encyclical, what Pope Francis has written there in 'Laudato Si' also speaks to the experience that Columban missionaries have had for quite a number of years."

"We first became aware of the concern for the Earth as an integral part of mission probably in the 1970s and then in the late 1990s we became more aware of the human contribution to climate change."

"So we've had missionaries who have been educating on the whole area of climate change since the late 1990s."

When first elected Superior General in 2012, the Columbans had decided one of their aims was to strengthen their engagement in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Because of the volatile situation in parts of the world today, the Columbans

had discerned over a number of years that as a missionary society they needed to help to foster good relations between Christians and Muslims.

"Our missionaries in Pakistan, although they work in a Muslim environment, do not have many opportunities to dialogue with the Muslim community, but because of their experience of living among Muslims, when they return to their home countries they have the opportunity to dialogue with Muslims there," he said.

"For example, in Australia, we have a Christian-Muslim dialogue centre in Sydney."

"After September 11, our missionaries in Sydney were invited by a lot of the civic groups to run seminars on Islam so that Australians could come to a better understanding of Islam as a religion, and they also facilitated opportunities for Christians and Muslims to come together and get to know each other."

"So we've been doing that work now for quite a number of years – in Sydney, in Britain and in Ireland."

"We try in all the countries where we live among people of various religions to strive to develop bridges of mutual understanding and respect between people of different religions."

Fr O'Neill said the Columbans' mission included *"accompanying those who are on the margins of society and working with them to change the unjust structures that cause them to remain on the margins."*

"So in the countries where we work advocacy for change in structures is a constant challenge," he said.

"In Asia, human trafficking is a serious problem."

Columbans are also helping the local Church in Myanmar with the conflict in the Kachin state.

Fr O'Neill said Columban missionaries worked there in the past and had recently sent a new team there.

"For about the last four years as the conflict between the government, military forces and the local Kachin Independence Army has increased, a lot of the people have been displaced from their villages and have gone into the towns."

"The Catholic Church and the Protestant churches have set up camps for the people and we offer financial assistance for the education of the children in those camps."

Fr O'Neill said the decline in the number of Columbans was another challenge.

"Young men in Asia and South America and the Pacific are continuing to want to join us on mission and lay missionaries mostly come from these countries too," he said.

Vocations no longer come to us from western countries.

"So that's a challenge for us. Our numbers are going down so we're handing over some of the work that we have been doing for many years to the local Church and that's good for us too," Fr O'Neill said.

"It means that we're called now to work more closely with the local Church."

"Even though it's a challenge that the number of Columban missionaries is gradually going down, the invitation is to work more closely with other missionary congregations, like-minded organisations, and the local Church."

Fr O'Neill said he *"constantly prayed that young men in Australia and New Zealand might respond to God's call for them to be Columban missionaries."*

*"It's wonderful that young people now have many options in life, and God will be giving people different choices so I'd encourage those young men who feel that God has presented the choice of being a Columban missionary that they would seriously discern that choice. **It would be wonderful if more young men would be interested in taking up the call to be Columban missionaries,"*** he said.

"We do have some Lay missionaries from the West, but many more from Asia and the Pacific."

"And there is growing interest among young people in volunteering to work with us for a shorter period."

"We also have lay missionaries working with us on mission."

"The interest now seems to be young people wanting to volunteer for shorter periods of time. So we also offer that now."

"Hopefully that experience might create a spark in some to feel a call from God to be a Columban missionary."

The 1400th Anniversary of St Columban's death

On Sunday June 21, 2015, in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, Columban Fr. Neil Collins was the homilist at the National Irish Eucharist to mark St Columban's 1400th anniversary. Here are extracts from Fr. Neill's homily.

The readings referred to are taken from the reading from that Sunday, the 12th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B: Job 38:1, 8-11, Psalm 107, 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, Gospel-Mark 4:35-41 (Jesus calms the storm).



Fourteen hundred years ago on 23 November 615, a great Irishman, Saint Columban, died in Bobbio, Italy. His biographer, Jonas, tells us:

"Columbanus, who is also called Columba, was born on the island of Ireland, which is situated on the outermost Ocean...."

His namesake, St. Columba of Derry and Iona – St. Columcille – was about 22 years old when our St Columban – 'Columbanus' – was born, somewhere in Leinster. From there the young St Columban went to Cleenish Island on Lough Erne before becoming a monk at the monastery in Bangor.

Then, at the age of 50, *'he began to desire exile'* – remembering the command of the Lord to Abraham, *"Leave your country, your family and your father's house and go to the land I will show you."* (Gen. 12.1).

Our second reading today gives us an insight into the intensity and motivation of that desire, *"The love of Christ overwhelms us."* (2 Cor. 5:14).

The call to reveal the love of Christ to all, Christian or pagan, drove him.

His *'peregrinatio'*, his pilgrimage, brought him to France, Austria and Italy, where he preached the word of God, founded monasteries, and trained saints. He also ran into storms.

In France there were conflicts with the local bishops when he followed the customs of the Irish church, and when he criticized their sins.

St Columban believed that such storms were nothing new, and that *"the true disciples of Christ crucified should follow Him with the cross."*

In today's Gospel, Christ and his disciples are in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee. It's evening, getting dark. Suddenly *"it began to blow a gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped."* (Mk. 4:35-41).

And Christ – in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep.

When they woke him he rebuked the wind, as he would rebuke a demon, and said to the sea, *"Quiet now! Be calm!"* And the wind dropped, and all was calm again. He turned to the disciples and asked, *"Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?"*

St Columban and his companions needed such faith. When the king of the Franks invited him to stay in his kingdom of Burgundy in eastern France, St Columban chose lonely, desert places in the forests, homes of wolves and bears, first at Annegray and then Luxeuil. At Annegray when one monk got sick, Jonas,

his biographer says, "As the only nourishment they had was the bark of trees and some herbs they began to fast and pray that they might be able to procure some good food for the sick man." (Jonas 8).

A storm struck when the local bishops objected to the Irish method for calculating the date of Easter. St Columban wrote to Pope Gregory the Great. He addressed him with great respect before saying – to the Pope – that he was surprised that he had not corrected the error of the French bishops.

In 603AD, the bishops summoned him to a provincial synod. He did not go. Instead he wrote them a letter, defending the Irish practice, and asking that the monks be allowed to continue to live in 'the silence of these woods'. Then he went on, suggesting that they – the bishops – needed humility and poverty of spirit, and even hinting that among them were some, 'who often look at women and who more often quarrel and grow angry over the riches of the world'.

St Columban was even less diplomatic with the King Theuderic. He had married the daughter of the King of Spain and rejected her a year later. He had four children by four unnamed mistresses. St Columban rebuked him, and he promised to reform, but did not. Eventually, in 610, he expelled St Columban along with the monks from Ireland and Brittany. Armed guards brought him to Nantes.

While there he wrote to the monks still in Luxeuil, encouraging them to faith and unity, "For whatever you ask with faith and complete agreement shall be given to you". (Letter IV). He feared that they would be divided, remembering that when he was still with them some sided with the French bishops about Easter, and many objected to the strictness of the rule.

As he wrote a messenger arrived to say 'that the ship is ready for me, in which I shall be borne unwillingly to my country'. He wanted to continue his 'peregrinatio pro Christo', his pilgrimage for Christ. The love of Christ still overwhelmed him. And it seems that Christ acted, with a storm. As the ship that was to carry him to Ireland 'was making for the open sea, with oar and sail, a storm arose and they were driven back to land, and the ship went aground'. The captain decided that it was not the will of God that they return to Ireland and put them back on shore.

They began to walk, a long pilgrimage, back across France, avoiding Theuderic's kingdom of Burgundy, eventually reaching Metz. Some Burgundian monks from Luxeuil joined them there. King Theudebert, brother and enemy of Theuderic, granted St Columban land at Bregenz in Austria. Two years later, in 612, Theuderic defeated Theudebert forcing St Columban, at nearly 70 years of age, to flee across the Alps into Italy and his final monastery in Bobbio.

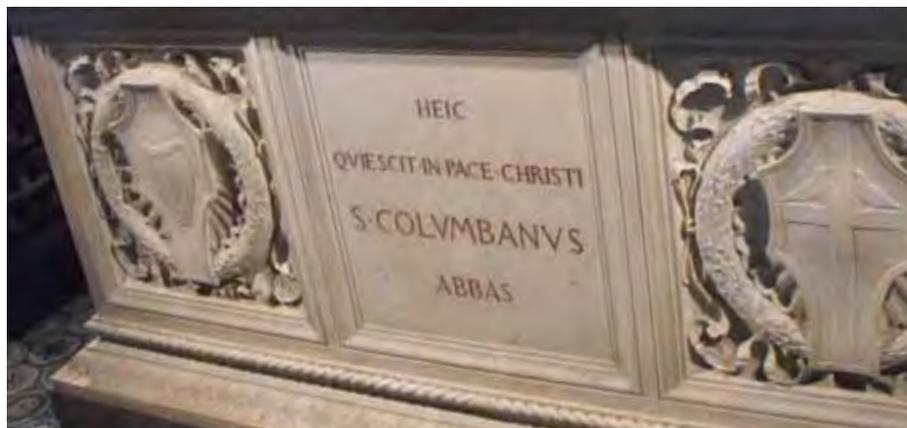
St Columban challenges each of us to dare to profess our faith openly. "What care I for saving face before mankind, when zeal for the faith must be shown?" He used to retreat to a cave with the scriptures. Can we find a space, each

day, to 'listen for the voice of the Lord and enter into his peace?'

We can encourage each other. I'm regularly grateful when hearing confessions and I see the faith of ordinary men and women, struggling to be humble disciples and witnesses of Christ in their families and daily lives. I still have vivid memories of First Fridays in a parish in the Philippines where I spent many years as a missionary. I'd visit all the sick in the town. One old lady I'd leave to the last. Others could be a bit depressing, but she was always different. At 104-years- old, stooped, deaf, she'd sit facing me, watching my lips. When we got to the *Act of Contrition* she'd get up, slowly kneel, and say, "Ginoo, pasayloa ako nga makasasala," "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." Her faith was contagious, and filled me with peace.

Each day we can discover that Christ is with us in the boat, even when the storm rages. At times he asks us, "Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?" But if like St Columban we go into the cave regularly we'll hear the risen Lord say, "Peace be with you. Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation." (Lk 15; 16).

Zenit June 22nd, 2015 (www.zenit.org)





Growing a community

SR MARTINA KIM

Sr Martina Kim with a family from the San Columbano Centre in Lima, Peru.

I got off the minibus at the last stop on the hillside in Huaycan, on the outskirts of Lima. The road ended here so I walked on the unpaved sandy track up the hill, past the shacks that seemed to sprout on the bare slopes. Sand, dust, dirt. Not a blade of grass. Not a flower. The only colour was the ragged clothes of the children who followed me, full of curiosity as they laughed at my funny accent. They were lovely, they were dirt poor.

After many more bus journeys, meetings with the parents, listening to them and seeing the children, I discovered that their most pressing need was to have a place where their children could do their homework after school. As it was, they had minimal space and no light in their small shacks. I often saw children trying to do their homework on the side of the road before darkness fell. How could we help them?

After talking things over with my community and receiving donations from generous benefactors, we built a fine brick Centre in this bleak area, the San Columbano Centre. And now, every day up to 70 school boys and girls come here to study after school. Not only do they have space and light but they are helped by the three teachers we employ. What a difference it has made to the whole community here!

Among the children who come are three little boys, sons of Josephina who came to Lima from the Sierra, the high valleys of the Andes mountains. She married a man who turned out to be a bully. A quiet woman, with a low self-image, she was no match for her tormenter. After years of

mistreatment, both physical and mental, she left home one day with her three small sons. Her understanding sister-in-law let her use a dilapidated wooden shack some miles away from her 'home'. The boys and their mother did their best in this wretched place, it being infinitely preferable to living with a tyrant. Helped by some of her poor neighbours they somehow managed to exist.

Despite, or maybe because of, her own lack of education, Josephina was firm in her determination that her sons would 'learn their books'. "Don't be like me," she'd say to them. She made sure they went to school every day, no excuses. And, they loved it. It was through her sons that I came to know this very reserved woman.

Our Centre is built in one of the poorest areas in Huaycan. The first question we ask the children when they come to study is, "Did you have lunch today?" Many, sadly, go hungry so at least we are able to give them some nourishment every day. We also put on various helpful programmes for them and we reach out to the parents also. Over the years the community has developed and what a joy it is to see how, given the opportunity, the people flourish.

One evening I visited Josephina; her living arrangements shocked me. But this very dignified woman wanted no charity. Sitting in that shack, I sensed her reluctance to engage with a stranger, though she had met me at the Centre and was appreciative of the help it was to her sons. Eventually she admitted that their most pressing needs

were water containers and bedding. We were able to supply these, thanks again to generous benefactors. Josephina came to the Centre to help with the cleaning and over months we persuaded her to come to various activities so that she got to know other mothers and feel more at home.

Later on we were able to purchase a small bit of land nearby and we built a little house for Josephina and her boys. How she smiled and smiled that day! Now at last she felt really safe and though she never fully shed that low self-image, she became much more hopeful, especially for her sons. They are her joy.

The area around the Centre is bleak beyond words. So one day I went to the Area County Office and asked them to give us 100 trees. Well, they were delighted that the local people at the Centre would be so interested. Not only did they give us 60 trees but they sent us a horticulturist to teach us how to plant and care for these saplings. How enthusiastic we all were!

The children promised to water their trees regularly and care for them. And they do - each one diligently bringing their bottle of water and carefully pouring it on the arid ground a few times every week. Every green leaf is as joyfully welcomed as a little baby! Not only do the growing trees nourish our spirit, but the children and their parents are learning the importance of caring for the earth in many little ways.

In order to encourage the children and their parents to come to the Centre we use many small tactics. One of the most successful is the paper 'money' we give to the mothers (you almost never see fathers) according to the points they accumulate. For example, so many points for making sure their children come to study, for attending various workshops or meetings, for helping keep the place spotless, seeing to the meals, and so on. A chart on the wall keeps the record straight and both children and parents take an avid interest in the points earned. These are then exchanged for the paper 'money'.

When Christmas comes we have a bumper market where they can use their paper 'money' to buy a variety of goods, mainly food and clothing. It's a win-win situation – and lots of fun. The community celebration and the good will and laughter that day must surely delight the Lord himself!

In some ways I think our Centre is like one of those saplings; it needs to be cared for, watered with love and patience, nourished with hope. In small ways we are growing 'into Christ' and seeing his Kingdom come here among us. *Every day I thank God for this mission, for the blessings for the poor, for the children who are the hope of the future.* And I thank Him too for the many, many people whose generous spirit enables us to be here. You too share in the blessings of our unstinting God.

Columban Sr Martina Kim has been on mission in Peru for the last eight years.



Children from the San Columbano Centre in Peru planting and caring for the trees.

Sand, water, coal and 'Laudato Si'

FR TOMÁS KING

The Thar Parkar Desert is situated in the south east of Pakistan in Sindh province. It covers an area of 22,000 square kilometres with an estimated population of 1.5 million and is one of the most densely populated deserts of the world. It is a place of beauty, especially after the monsoon rains..... that is, when they come, writes Fr Tomás King, an Irish Columban missionary in the Sindh. He writes about his parish in the Thar Parkar desert.

The Thar Parkar desert has an interesting geology. There are red granite hills with deep gorges which are home to a rich variety of flora and fauna. One of the trees found in the area is the Gugral tree, which is the tree that provides the resin from which incense is made. It is estimated that 70% of the trees have dried up due to criminal groups extracting its resin using poisonous chemicals to speed up the process of extraction so as to sell in greater quantities in the markets of the big cities.

There are springs associated with Hindu shrines, rituals and pilgrimages. Hindus and Muslims visit them in large numbers on special occasions. There are a number of Jain temples, some dating back to the 14th century, when the Jains were prominent in the area.

Nagar Parkar is a small town within a few kilometres of the Indian border. It is considered the homeland of the Parkari Kohlis, one of the many low caste Tribal Peoples to be found in Sindh. There is a parish centre in the town which has been administrated by Columbans since the mid-1980s. There are less than 100 Catholic families but scattered over a large

geographical area. It is the only area in Pakistan where more than 50% of the population is Hindu. The area also has white china clay deposits which are being mined. But for the most part Thar Parkar is an arid and semi-arid desert, where, underneath its sands massive amounts of coal have been found and large-scale mining is being planned.

The land is fertile when sufficient rains fall. Production of crops depends on the monsoon rains which should fall from mid-June to mid-August each year but for the last ten years there have been drought conditions in Thar Parkar. Due to this many people migrate to the interior of the Sindh province in search of work, food and water. In 2014 it was estimated that 470 people died due to drought, mostly children. But that is only the official number. Along with human deaths there were thousands of livestock deaths, which are vital to the economy of the desert people.

Obviously water is a serious issue in this area. Surface water is minimal, found in artificially dug depressions. Small dams and reservoirs are being built by the government and some Non-Government organisations (NGOs) to capture and store rainwater

when it does fall. As regards ground water, studies show that there is what is called aquifer zones at varying depths, including in the areas where coal is located. Some of this water is harvested through digging deep tube-wells for drinking and household use. What will happen to this water with the coal mining? For the mining itself massive amounts of water will be necessary.

Pakistan does not produce sufficient power to provide electricity for all its peoples' needs. 'Load shedding' is a part of life, where electricity is cut off for hours on end every day, including the hot summer months when the increased demand is not met. It is not unusual to have protests that sometimes turn violent, as people vent their frustration and anger at prolonged load shedding.

In such a context the discovery of massive amounts of coal under the sands of the Thar Parkar Desert, which has the potential to end load shedding and provide for all of Pakistan's energy needs for generations to come, is seen as a God send. But at what cost to the desert environment and its people today, and to future generations? This will increase climate change



This will increase climate change which is already been felt in the more prolonged droughts in the Thar Parkar Desert, as well as the heavier monsoons and increased flooding...



Fr Tomás King in Pakistan.

which is already been felt in the more prolonged droughts in the Thar Parkar Desert, as well as the heavier monsoons and increased flooding in recent years in other parts of the country.

The government and some mining companies, including a Chinese company, have begun the process of extracting the coal. China's presence reinforces its policy of seeking out natural resources from virtually anywhere in the world to feed its own domestic needs. Presently the road is being upgraded from the main extraction area to Karachi, a distance of almost 300 kms. Small towns are being by-passed. So any so called economic benefits will be for the big cities and China, with little for the poor of the desert, except contaminated water!

This is happening as Pope Francis has recently released the encyclical 'Laudato Si' in which he says climate

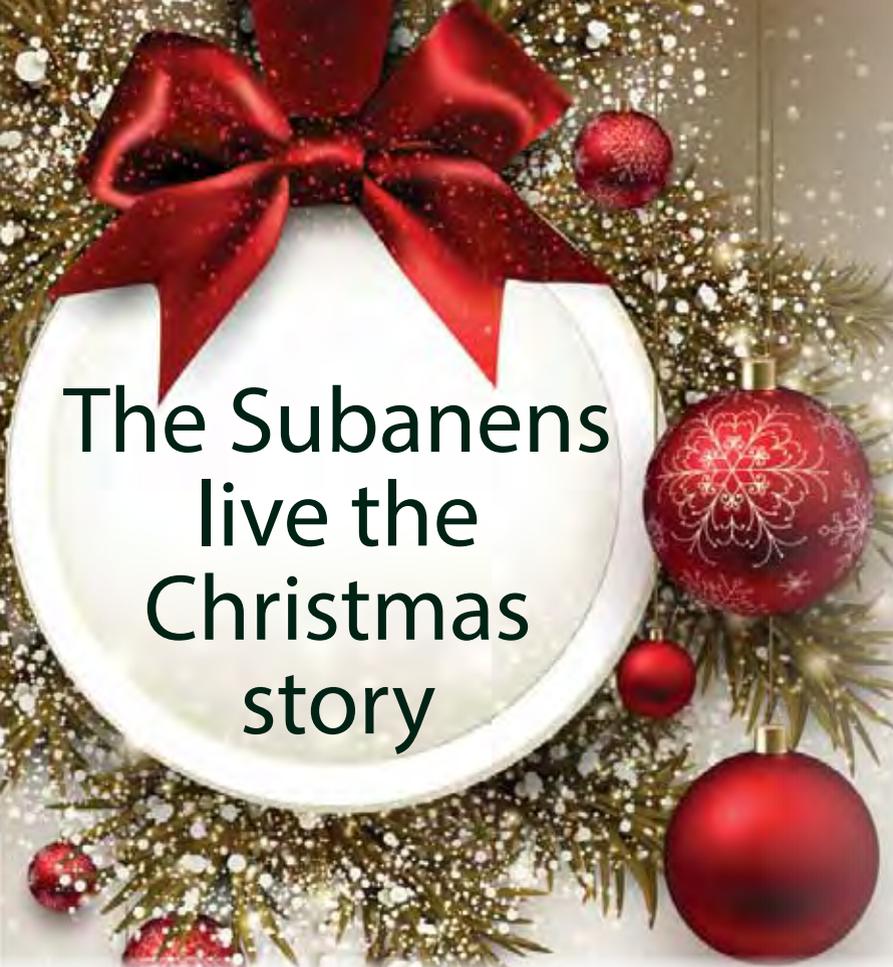
change is a moral issue. He endorses the science that says humanity is a major contribution to the ecological crisis facing planet Earth. A major part of that contribution has been the burning of fossil fuels. He writes; *"A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system ... The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system ... We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels - especially coal, but also oil, and, to a lesser degree, gas - needs to be progressively replaced without delay ... Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.... "*

This is a microcosm of the challenge facing humanity. How to provide the

energy necessary while decreasing the dependency on fossil fuels? The planet cannot tolerate the extraction of the vast quantities of coal in the Thar Parkar Desert and other locations around the world. It highlights the extent of the conversion and change of life style that is necessary to turn things around. It is also a missionary challenge facing the local church, and a challenge for the many NGOs who claim to be working for the betterment of the people..... A big challenge in the presence of a myriad of many other challenges.

Columban Fr Tomás King SSC has been a missionary in Pakistan since 1992.

ICN Independent Catholic News July 27th, 2015 (www.indcatholicnews.com)



The Subanens live the Christmas story



Fr Vincent Busch with the Subanen women.

The Gospels give us a good idea of the joys, fears and struggles that Mary and Joseph experienced that first Christmas. Jesus was born after his parents had walked 100 kms often over rugged terrain. Mary gave birth in a stable because there was no room for them in the Inn. Then, after visits from shepherds and wise men, Mary and Joseph had to flee to avoid Herod's soldiers. Over the past several decades the Subanen people have experienced similar joys, fears, and struggles. When Subanens hear the Christmas story they say Joseph and Mary are like us.

The Subanens are an indigenous people who live in the forested mountains of the Zamboanga peninsula in the Philippines. For centuries they fished, hunted, gardened and foraged for their food, medicine and household needs. They also formed a close spiritual relationship with their tropical habitat and they celebrated that relationship in song, dance, and ritual. Since the 1950s land-hungry settlers from other parts of the Philippines pushed the shy Subanens deeper into the forest. In the 1960s and 70s logging companies chain-sawed their forest. Then in the 1970s and 80s armed conflict broke out in the peninsula as government and anti-government forces carried out military operations which often included indiscriminate killing. And now mining companies want to bulldoze their remaining habitat. Slowly the Subanens are being evicted

from their forest home. The 'inn-keepers' of extractive industries and of warring political factions have no room for the Subanens in their world.

Responding to the beauty and to the pain of the Subanen people, the Columban Sisters started the Subanen Ministry. For 35 years the Sisters have worked with Subanen elders and leaders to find healthy and sustainable ways to protect, nurture and celebrate the Subanen culture and their endangered habitat. In 2001, with the help of the Subanen Ministry, I began working with Subanens to form a livelihood project by which they could use their traditional crafting skills to make saleable jewelry, mandalas, children's books and cards. Income from the Subanen Craft project helps the Subanen artists provide food, education, housing and health care for their families. This income is especially useful during the 'hungry season' which is the lean time between harvests.

Over the years the Subanen artists have crafted Christmas cards whose subject matter connected their experiences with the experiences of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. My contribution to the card-making process is to listen carefully to the Subanens and to study their habitat. Then, with their corrective help, I draw and re-draw card designs until we agree that the images were true to the Christmas story and true to the Subanen story. Then, after the finished designs

Photos: Fr Vincent Busch

Listen to: The Subanens live the Christmas story

FR VINCENT BUSCH



PHILIPPINES

are printed on card stock, the Subanen artists transform the images into works of art. With colored pencils they carefully tint each mountain, hill, and stone, and with razor-sharp blades they cut out each human figure and in lay the figures with colored paper. Each year it takes us about two months to design the cards and another five months to craft them.

Here are four examples of how the Subanens found the Christmas story in their lives:

1. Subanens walk daily over precarious mountain trails and so we created cards that highlighted how Joseph and Mary carefully helped each other and their donkey through the rugged hills to Bethlehem.
2. Like Mary, Subanen women also give birth in simple shelters with their farm animals kept safely nearby. Subanens know that, in such circumstances, a mother needs supportive care and so we created cards that portray a helpful Joseph who cleaned the stable, repaired the manger, gathered firewood, fetched water, made a warming fire, cooked a meal and watched over Jesus as Mary rested.
3. Subanens have seen armed men killing innocent people, and they know the fear and sorrow of having to evacuate their homes and farms to save themselves and

their children from such killings. And so we created cards that drew attention to the journey of a frightened Mary and Joseph as they fled Herod's soldiers to save their child.

4. Subanens know that the food they eat, the water they drink, the homes they build, the air they breathe and the beauty they behold depend on the health of the soil, rivers, plants and animals of their habitat. They know their habitat is a gift from God. And so we crafted cards that joyfully say "thank-you" to God whose humble birth on Earth invites them to live humbly with the Earth.

My years with the Subanen artists have been a meditation about living within the grace of God's creation. It has been a mutually beneficial experience. The Subanen families get to work in a project that provides them with modest livelihoods and I get to behold the miracle of creation through the eyes of a people who are gracefully cooperating with that miracle. Indeed, our planet with all its interconnected habitats is the ongoing miracle through which God gives food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, and a hospitable home to all.

Columban Fr Vincent Busch has been a missionary in the Philippines since 1974. He currently works with the Subanen people of Mindanao, Philippines.



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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.*

Columbans and the refugee crisis

Columban missionaries around the world are heartbroken and outraged by the ongoing humanitarian crisis facing Europe in the waves of refugees coming from the Middle East and Africa.

"Pope Francis urges us to offer 'concrete hope'," said Columban Superior General, Fr Kevin O'Neill.

"For Columban missionaries, this means welcoming the stranger in our parishes and mission centres. We also advocate for national and international policies that address root causes of migration such as violent conflict and environmental and economic injustice. We take heed of the Pope's Angelus address of Sept 6th 2015, when he called for a 'concrete gesture' ahead of a Jubilee Year of Mercy starting in December, calling on every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every sanctuary in Europe (to) take in a family."

Founding member and President of Migrants Rights Centre Ireland, Columban Fr Bobby Gilmore in Ireland, calls for a new European heart, saying, *"This is not just an individual member state issue. It is a European legacy and a European Union tragedy that needs a European institutional human response."*

Columbans have served refugees and asylum seekers in England for decades. Of the current crisis, Mauricio Silva, Columban Lay Missionary Coordinator in the UK said, *"We are more committed than ever to serving the needs of refugees and asylum seekers and pray that this crisis will bring to people's attention the plight of so many victims of wars, violence, poverty and abuse of Creation."*



Columban Fr Shay Cullen in the Philippines, founder of PREDA (*People's Recovery Empowerment and Development Assistance*) had this to say of the European refugee crisis: *"There are remarkable dedicated people and Non-Government organisations assisting the refugees and the desperate migrants fleeing awful degrading and oppressive regimes and poverty. However it is the government that has to respond and welcome and help them."*

Scott Wright, Director of the Columban Centre for Advocacy and Outreach in the US says it is not just Europe that must respond but that, *"The response of the United States has been woefully inadequate, especially since the US has been so directly involved in more than a decade of war in the Middle East. For Christians, it means taking seriously the biblical mandate 'to welcome' our Muslim sisters and brothers and to work urgently for peace in the Middle East."*

Columban Missionaries serve economically poor and marginalized communities globally, often in countries plagued by poverty, injustice, climate disasters, armed conflict, and religious, inter-ethnic or political persecution. These conditions drive people to migrate away from their homes in search of economic and human security. We believe that we are called to both serve the needs of migrants everywhere, and to address the root causes of migration so that people and their families have the choice to remain at home.

Ellen Teague is the Media Co-ordinator at the St Columban's office in Britain.

Photo: hikrcn/Bigstock.com

Mission Intention for October

That with a missionary spirit the Christian communities of Asia may announce the Gospel to those who are still awaiting it.

Listen to: From the Director
The perennial presence of God

From the Director

The perennial presence of God



The pilgrimage 'In the footsteps of St Columban' which extended over 21 days in August and September through Ireland, France, Austria, Switzerland and Italy is now over and I am back at my desk in Melbourne thinking about it.

We travelled as a group of 38 pilgrims: three Columban priests, two diocesan priests, one lay missionary from Korea, one Columban co-worker and the rest- pilgrims from Australia and New Zealand. Our ages ranged from 60 years to 86 years. The pilgrimage, unlike a tourist jaunt, had a deeper dimension of placing our normal lives aside for a short time and listening to the 'small voice' of God as we visited holy places.

We experienced the presence of God each day as we travelled to places where St Columban's dynamic determination was evident, like Luxeuil from where he was banished for his truthfulness and his prophetic utterances about the morals and activities of kings and bishops. He left behind monasteries that flourished for many centuries and contributed to the rehabilitation of Europe and re-established the Catholic faith in what is now Europe.

It was in Luxeuil, France that we attended Sunday Mass at St Therese's church where we experienced a dynamic liturgy and a full throated

choir. This was a celebration at which we did not need to understand the language but felt at home with our Catholic faith in common.

The pilgrimage, unlike a tourist jaunt, had a deeper dimension of placing our normal lives aside for a short time and listening to the 'small voice' of God as we visited holy places.

We moved through a Catholic culture as we travelled by bus through the European countries that St Columban and his monks evangelised. We were uplifted and privileged to celebrate Mass in the magnificent churches and the small simple chapels where St Columban's spirit and legacy was apparent 1400 years on. From the basilica in Bobbio, Italy packed with hundreds of people who gathered to celebrate his life and legacy on August 30th, 2015 to the small chapel of St Columban at Disentis, Switzerland which barely held our pilgrim group.

Our schedule included a visit to the cave overlooking Bobbio where St Columban died. The trek was a steep and difficult climb of one and a half hours each way and turned out to a serious challenge for those who wished to do it. However, to the delight of all, the goal was achieved with much effort and cooperation. There was great

satisfaction and jubilation on arriving at the cave where we had time to pray and reflect on the fact that this is where St Columban came for prayer and solitude. For many the trek to the cave was the highlight of the pilgrimage where God's presence was experienced yet again.

That evening, Columban Fr Peter Toohey celebrated Mass in the crypt of St Columban in Bobbio. In his homily, he referred to our trek to St Columban's cave and asked us to try and find our own cave (metaphorically) where we can stop and think about where God is in our lives.

For many the trek to the cave was the highlight of the pilgrimage where God's presence was experienced yet again.

On our last night together pilgrims shared some of their experiences and reflections of their time on the pilgrimage. There was a general consensus that we were going home with uncluttered minds and heartened to see the love and spirit of St Columban and the Holy Spirit at work.

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

Kiribati...

A country about to disappear

FR FRANK HOARE

Found memories

As a teenager in Ireland, unaware that I would spend most of my life in the South Pacific, I chanced to read two fascinating books by Sir Arthur Grimble – a *Pattern of Islands* and *Return to the Islands*. Grimble was a British colonial official in charge of the Gilbert (now Kiribati) and Ellice Islands (now Tuvalu) in the early years of the 20th century. His stories of life on the Gilberts, of the courage of this sea-faring people and of their communal lifestyle left indelible memories in my mind. So it was with great anticipation that I travelled to Kiribati in May, 2015 to test the reality against my nostalgic memories.



Purpose of my visit

It was because of Betero Atanibora that I got the opportunity to visit this most unusual country. Betero is a 32-year-old Kiribati man who spent almost four years at the Pacific Regional Seminary (PRS) in Fiji. Before Betero left Fiji in 2012 to help his family for one year, Fr Pat Colgan, a Columban lecturer at PRS at that time, said to him, "Be sure to send some young men from Kiribati to join the Columbans." Betero began teaching scripture in the Kiribati Pastoral Institute (KPI). During the year he fell in love with a young woman and decided not to return to the seminary, but he continued teaching at KPI. He advised a young student at KPI to apply to join the Columbans. Three others applied to me later by post. So I visited Kiribati to see if these young men would be suited to missionary work. I also did vocation promotion at a Catholic Secondary school and made a presentation on the life of Saint Columban to two parish youth groups.

Kiribati - a unique country

Kiribati is situated on the Equator and consists of three main groups of islands thousands of miles from each other. South Tarawa, the capital and seat of government, has 50% of the population, about 50,000 people. South Tarawa is about 15 miles long and consists of thin strips of land (400 to 900 metres wide) connected by causeways. It is like a necklace of islands. Villages run one into the other along the main road which is like a spine running the length of the island. Public transport up and down this road is by minibus.

Tarawa is an atoll with a big fish-filled lagoon. The sandy soil is poor and can produce only banana, papaya, breadfruit, coconuts, a few vegetables, and a little cassava. People rear chickens and pigs but fish is the main source of protein. Nowadays supermarkets sell imported foods. Rice and fish are the staple food for everyday but the families try to make Sunday lunch special by having meat on the menu.

Poverty is a big problem and fundraising by families for education or other necessities is a common concern. Women weave mats to sell. They also buy fish from the fishermen and smoke them on makeshift ovens by the road side, hoping to sell them to passers-by.



The Maneaba

*T*he Maneaba is a big open hall. Traditionally they were thatched structures but are now built with concrete floors and pillars, and roofing iron. They are used for village meetings, communal celebrations and bingo (a very popular past-time, especially of older women). I could hear a choir practicing for hours in the maneaba across from the house where I was staying.

The children of Kiribati

*K*iribati is full of children and young people as it is not unusual for couples to have 10 or more children. They have a carefree energy for life. I noticed one young boy balancing on the raised kerb of a footpath that was under construction as cars and minivans passed dangerously close by. A small lorry travelling in front of our car one night had a tray packed with standing youngsters. Some were also sitting on the rim of the tray. I sighed with relief when we passed it.



An accident



KIRIBATI

*A*s Betero and I travelled from the airport along the potholed road made slick by rain we came to a halt at the site of an accident. A motor bike lay sprawled in the middle of the road. One young man was lying unconscious but shaking in the tray of a van. Another young man was still stretched out on the side of the road with an open gash the length of his calf. Neither had been wearing a helmet. They were rumoured to have been drunk and riding too fast. We heard later that both died in hospital.



Sketch of Catholicism

I arrived in Kiribati on May 10th, 2015, the day that the catechists Betero and Tiroi are remembered by Catholics there. They brought the Catholic faith to Kiribati in the 1880s, first to their island of Nonouti and later elsewhere. They had encountered the faith and were baptized in Tahiti. On their return they taught the people prayers and used to face toward Tahiti to join their worship with Catholics who were attending Mass there. Kiribati is now 50% Catholic but is being targeted by some other denominations. The bishop has appointed a group called Guardians of the Faith to strengthen the faith of Catholics against proselytization. Catholics in Kiribati are devoted to Mary and say the rosary before dawn every day, especially during the month of May.

Photos: Fr Frank Hoare SSC

Catechist retreat

Betero was asked at the last minute to give three talks to 60 catechists on retreat. He co-opted me to give one of the talks. Despite the noise of the heavy thunderous rain I gave my talk and Betero translated. We were both then invited to the final Mass on Friday and the party to follow. The Mass was notable for a group of catechists and their wives ritualizing with song and dance the procession of the bible, the offertory procession and the thanksgiving after communion.

“

They brought the Catholic faith to Kiribati in the 1880s, first to their island of Nonouti and later elsewhere.



The Catechist party

The party was held in the Maneaba. Some ladies entertained us with hip-swinging dancing and invited us to join them on the floor. The catechists and their wives were divided in three teams of forty, distinguished by the design and colour of their clothes. Each group sang a number of songs relating the story of their predecessors, Betero and Tiroi. After the prize giving we tucked into a fine buffet of food. I had raw fish, grilled red snapper, chicken, cassava and breadfruit.

20 The Far East - October 2015

Kava Kiribati style



KIRIBATI

On my last night in Kiribati Betero and I went to a kava bar. Kava, imported from Fiji, is made from the pounded roots of a species of pepper plant suffused in water. The bar had long tables to sit at and a stage at one end where the local talent sang the night away. For A\$10 we got 10 plastic bottles filled with kava. One took a bottle, shook it and drank. To someone used to the Fijian ritual surrounding kava this seemed almost blasphemous. We chatted with a local diocesan priest and as we were leaving another priest arrived who had been my student 20 years previously at the seminary in Fiji.

Climate change challenge to Kiribati

Kiribati, which is only just above sea level, is very vulnerable to rising sea levels caused by global warming and the melting of polar ice. I saw workers building a wall along a causeway that was completely flooded by strong rain and heavy seas a few weeks previously. A home-owner next to the Marist Brothers' house, where I held a vocation seminar for 8 young men, had men building up a sea wall with rocks to prevent the sea eating away their property.

The Kiribati Government bought a property of some thousands of acres from the Anglican Church in Fiji for resettlement of people in the future. The President has said that the sea will cover Kiribati by the end of this century. Government officials have asked Australia and New Zealand to accept Kiribati people as permanent refugees. So global warming is not a matter of inconvenience and of changed conditions for the I Kiribati people. It is a matter of losing their homeland and being cast adrift to find shelter in different foreign countries. This would threaten the survival of their culture. This is one example of those causing least damage to the environment being made to suffer most because of it.

During our vocation seminar the electricity was cut off all day because of road work nearby. We sat in a small traditional maneaba on mats made from pandanus leaves under which there were rougher mats made from coconut leaves. These were placed on a base of small pebbles and sand. The thatched roof and the breeze from the sea kept the maneaba beautifully cool despite the hot sun. I remembered Arthur Grimble and an era that was simpler and kinder to the I Kiribati.

Columban Fr. Frank Hoare first went to Fiji in 1973.

'The Rainbow Community' receives prestigious award in Korea

FR NOEL O'NEILL

The Rainbow Community, a foundation, offering services to peoples with intellectual disabilities, founded by Irish-born Columban Fr Noel O'Neill, has been the recipient of the Manhae Award in the field of social service. The award ceremony took place in Inje County, Gangwondo province, South Korea, on Tuesday 12 August, 2015, a site a stone's throw from the temple where the Korean poet, Manhae, wrote his poetry and also within roaring distance from North Korea.

The Manhae Award is named after the Buddhist monk, Han Yong-un (1879-1944), a Korean independence fighter and a renowned poet, who used the pen name Manhae. Each year the *Manhae Foundation* gives awards in three categories: peace, social services and literature. Former recipients of the Manhae Peace Award were Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama.

The Rainbow Community was selected for the social service award because it had pioneered community-based services for people with intellectual disabilities with the introduction of group homes. Besides pioneering community-based residential services, the community had also started a factory in an industrial estate where 40 people with intellectual disabilities make candles and toilet paper while earning the minimum wage. They are the sole suppliers of toilet paper to the Incheon International Airport.

In his acceptance speech Fr Noel said, "that just as the monk Manhae fought to free Korea from the bondage of the Japanese occupation, so also the Rainbow Community struggled against society's disinterest and prejudice towards peoples with special needs. If those institutionalized in large institutions throughout the country were given the opportunity for learning and training they too could live with dignity in the local community and make their contribution to society".

When interviewed by the influential daily newspaper the '*Chosun Ilbo*', Fr Noel said that he had prayed to God to extend his life for 20 more years, so that he would have the opportunity to establish '*group homes*' for the intellectually disabled both in North Korea and nearby China.



Fr Noel O'Neill at the award ceremony.

Kim Han Sou is a Korean journalist.



Fr Noel O'Neill and the Rainbow Community.



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A Children's Centre on the outskirts of Lima

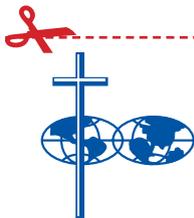
Sr Martina Kim, a Columban Sister from Korea, works with poor families and their children in a large squatter area in the desert on the outskirts of Lima.

Through her efforts, a Children's Centre has been built where 70 children have a safe place to do their homework every night. The children have planted many trees around the Centre and are learning to take care of them.

With your help, Columban Missionaries like Sr Martina Kim can continue to meet and minister to those living in poverty. Your "stringless" gift helps us to respond with flexibility to the most **urgent needs** of people.



Photo: Sr Martina Kim



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