

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

November/December 2016



Christmas in Myanmar

Remembering Christmas in Myanmar.

Reflection - Old story always new

The flight into Egypt and refugees today.

Pages from a missionary diary

Moments from Fr Hoare's life in Fiji.



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

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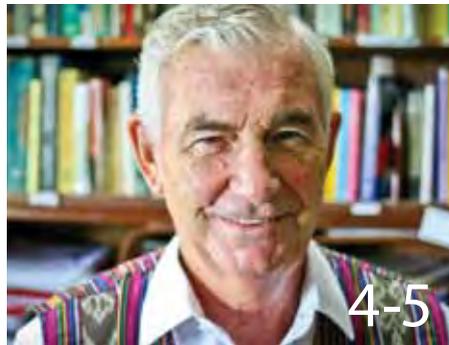
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Front cover of the 2017 Columban Art Calendar.
The Visitation, 1491 (tempera on panel) (detail of 192460), Ghirlandaio, Domenico (Domenico Bigordi) (1449-94) /Louvre, Paris, France/Bridgeman Images.

To order your 2017 Columban Art Calendar, fill in and return flyer included with this month's issue of *The Far East* or order online: www.columban.org.au



From the Editor

Offering one's life for Christ

"If these brave lads are ready to die for Ireland, I, as a priest, ought to be ready to die for Christ." With tears in his eyes, Fr John Heneghan said this to a fellow priest during Easter Week 1916 the morning after hearing the confession of the Tuam Volunteers on their way to join the Easter Rising.

Fr John went on to become one of the early Columbans six months later. He became the first editor of *The Far East* magazine. In 1931 at the age of 49 he went on mission to the Philippines and along with three other priest residents at the Columban parish of Malate in Manila, 'died for Christ', on February 10, 1945, during the Battle for Manila. Their bodies were never found. Fr John was 62 years old.

As the Missionary Society of St Columban prepares to celebrate the centenary of our foundation in 1918, Columban Fr Frank Hoare explores the influence of the 1916 Easter Rising on the development of the Irish missionary movement, of which the Columban foundation was a part. In this issue, he also writes of four humorous moments during the many decades he has served as a missionary in Fiji.

This November/December issue offers a wide panorama of the way Columban Missionaries have spread around the world since our foundation in Ireland in 1918. For almost 100 years Columban missionaries have spent their lives 'for Christ' in other countries, answering His call to leave their homeland like Abraham and Sarah, for another land, another people.

Columban Sr Margaret Murphy explains how the Columban Sisters would be celebrating Christmas this year in Mandalay and the Kachin State in Myanmar. Columban Fr Bobby Gilmore reflects on how the story of the Holy Family's flight as refugees into Egypt is repeated daily across the world. Sadly it is a story, never old, always new.

Columban Fr Shay Cullen has been selected as this year's winner of the 'Hugh O'Flaherty Humanitarian Award', for his work in defence of child and women victims of the sex industry and trafficking in the Philippines.

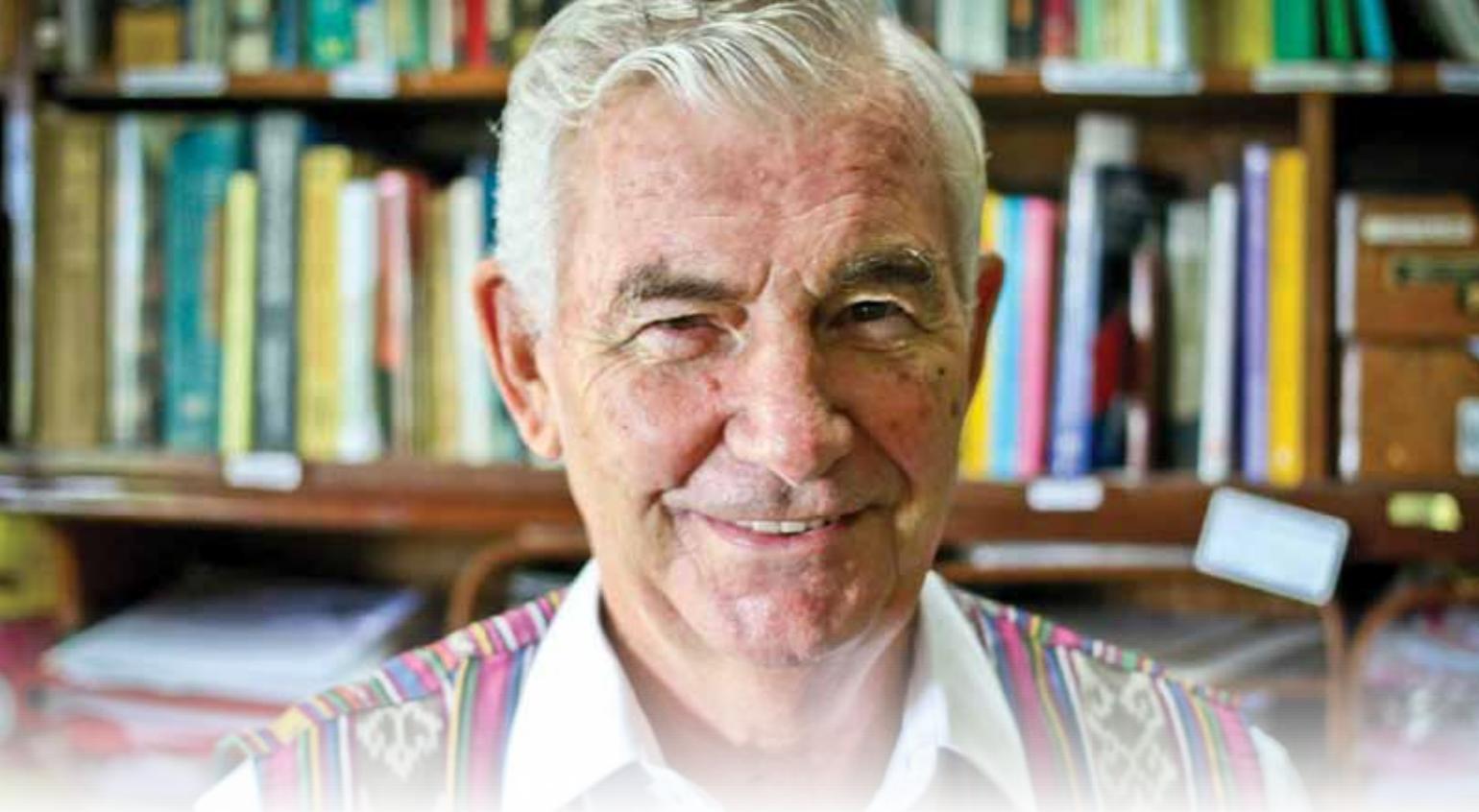
Erl Dylan J Tabaco, a Columban seminarian from the Philippines, shares with us his powerful missionary experience in the Andes Mountains

of Peru. Columban staff member Steff Fenton writes of the largest interfaith event for young people in Australia - *Youth PoWR*.

One important development in the almost 100 year history of the Columbans has been the recent decision to divest from fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy, community-based microenterprises and peace initiatives. This is an important response to the dangerous problem of global warming and the call from Pope Francis.

On behalf of all Columbans and staff members of *The Far East* magazine, we wish all our readers a holy Christmas and Happy New Year.

Fr Daniel Harding
Fr Daniel Harding
TFE@columban.org.au



Fr Shay Cullen wins major humanitarian award

*W*ell-known Irish Columban missionary Fr Shay Cullen has been selected as this year's winner of the 'Hugh O'Flaherty Humanitarian Award'.

Fr Shay has worked tirelessly over his lifetime in the Philippines battling for the rights of children to be respected and trying to stem the depredations of child traffickers, paedophiles and the sex industry.

The award was set up in honour of Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, an Irish prelate, who was based in the Vatican from 1938 until 1960, and who courageously helped save the lives of 6,500 Jews and Allied soldiers from the Nazis via the Rome Escape Line.

Fr Shay set up the PREDA Foundation in 1974 to help child victims and trafficked women who were being exploited in the sex trade that flourished alongside the huge United States Naval Base on Subic Bay in Olongapo City and at the US Clarke airbase in Angeles City. PREDA stands for "Peoples Recovery Empowerment and Development Assistance."

PREDA uncovered and exposed widespread child sexual abuse and human trafficking involving children as young

as nine years abused by US personnel and sex tourists including local men.

It works to change the unjust economic, political and social structures and attitudes that allow such abuse. It is open to people of all faiths.

Announcing the Hugh O'Flaherty Memorial Committee's chairperson, Jerry O'Grady said, "*Fr Shay has given his life to protecting the human rights of oppressed and exploited children and has fearlessly challenged those who were not prepared to shoulder their responsibilities, including local vested interests, local and national government in the Philippines and the US Government.*"

Fr Shay said the award was in recognition of the children PREDA has rescued and "*those human rights workers who, like Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, continue to work for the unjustly imprisoned, the refugees trying to escape from Isis and war and those risking their lives to help them escape.*"

Fr Shay has been nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize. He has received the Ireland Meteor Award, Irish Personality of the year award, German city of Weimar and Italian city of Ferreira Human Rights awards.



PHILIPPINES



IRELAND

Fr Shay has given his life to protecting the human rights of oppressed and exploited children...

About PREDA

The PREDA Foundation is an internationally recognised human rights and child rights advocate for social justice, peace, dialogue and human dignity. It is an active social development organisation today with 54 professional Filipino paid employees, implementing projects that save children from sexual abusers, human traffickers and from life in the brothels and sex bars frequented by Filipino men and foreigners of all nationalities.

It provides residential care with therapy, education, empowerment and legal action for the children in two centres in Zambales Province, one for abused girls and one for boys rescued from jails and detention centres.

The PREDA boy's home is an open community with an average of 35 boys resident in a farm setting without fences or walls. The boys are free to stay or leave. Most choose to stay. It has a full time staff of 15 therapists, social workers and qualified male nurses.

An average of 44 girls between 8 to 17 years-old live in the Girls home.

PREDA has also set up an awareness and reporting system to help people report abuse. A hotline alerts PREDA to a child in need and the PREDA rescue team is sent to rescue the child with the help of the government social worker and police if needed.



Article source: 'Independent Catholic News' (ICN), Friday, August 26.
For more information on PREDA visit: www.preda.org





After my father died my mother did not have enough money for my education.

I was selected to attend the Columban Sponsored Boarding House where I received food, accommodation and a good education. I passed my matriculation with distinction in economics.

I was then selected at another institution to study English and Computer Studies.

My ambition is to share the knowledge with my 'people' and poor students in Myanmar.

Thank you Columban benefactors.

Maran, Myanmar.



Photo: Columban



Christmas in Myanmar

Columban Sister Margaret Murphy recalls how they celebrate the coming of the Christ Child in Myanmar

Christmas in Mandalay

*A*s I prepare for Christmas this year, my thoughts are with the people of Myanmar with whom I have celebrated Christmas since 2007. I lived in a community in Mandalay. Our work there involves us in various education projects – seminars and teaching but always with the underlying principle that we are there to facilitate dialogue among different ethnic and more importantly different religious groups – Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians – the relevance and necessity of which is becoming ever more apparent in today's world.

It is with this in view and in the spirit of Christmas that we invite members from the different religious communities to join us in our house within the church compound to share a meal. We sit and chat and wander around the compound looking at the Crib and the other Christian symbols which are new to the majority of them. We exchange stories. We gift each other with new insights, deeper understandings of each other and hopefully forge friendships that will dispel some of the misunderstandings and fear that exists between the different communities. Over the years this has become a tradition and we are frequently asked "when will the Christmas celebration be and can we come to visit you?"



Sr Margaret at Christmas dinner in Myanmar.

Christmas in the Kachin State

*I*n another part of Myanmar, in the Kachin State, up near the China border, our Sisters will be celebrating Christmas at a Centre set up for people suffering from HIV. This Centre not only helps to treat the illness but also seeks to give each person an understanding that they matter as human beings and are precious in the eyes of God.

Our sisters also have a Youth Training Centre there that provides alternative education for many young people. The youth in the Kachin State are particularly vulnerable as they are often caught up in the civil war between the Kachin and Burmese armies. Many are unemployed and easily become drug victims. Hence our sisters are involved in setting up of a drug rehabilitation program as well as a rural health program for communities living far from population centres.

I am sure that as the Sisters celebrate Christmas, even in the midst of suffering and pain, there is still hope. ***My hope and my prayer is that as each of us continues to prepare for Christmas that we may experience ever more deeply the mystery, the wonder of God becoming a human being and the wonder of God's presence in our own hearts, in the heart of each other and in the heart of the world.***

Columban Sr Margaret Murphy has been a missionary for many years in the Philippines and in Myanmar and now resides in Ireland.

Old story always new

FR BOBBY GILMORE

Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left that night for Egypt, where they stayed until the death of Herod. (Mt: 2.14)

The image of Joseph, Mary and Jesus sitting in the shade of a tree with their donkey tethered to a branch outside some Egyptian town all those years ago is repeated almost daily in newscasts. The plight of Syrian, Iraqi, Libyan and African families fleeing for their lives across water, desert and mountain with a few belongings is reminding us that little has changed for millions of men, women and children. Daily we see the terror in their faces as they scramble aboard rickety boats, reach a Mediterranean beach and then a border crossing secured by military armed with assault rifles.

Worse still is the anxious face of a woman guarding her children as their father is handcuffed by border police in Hungary. The anxiety on her face resembles that of Mary under the tree in Egypt, the Jewish children arriving at Liverpool St. Station waiting to be given a home by an English family, the men, women and children on the St Louis in Havana in 1939, the woman and children on Route 66, the Vietnamese woman and children tossed around in a boat in the Pacific, the woman and children at the US-Mexican border fence, the women and children in a refugee camp in Turkey, Lebanon or Jordan, the woman under a tree in the Sahara, the pregnant woman in the camp at Calais, the father of the dead child on a Greek beach, a woman and children waiting to board a bus in a European railway station, the face of the woman and children at the Migrant Rights Centre in Ireland.

It is hard to accept 2,000 years after the flight of Joseph, Mary and Jesus into Egypt that people are running for their lives from the same part of the world today. But more disturbing is the impotence of present world governance to prevent this from happening. Never are there more resources at the disposal of governments to accommodate desperate people who have to flee. Yet, with some exceptions, the application of these resources is found wanting in responding to basic human shelter and safety.

When it comes to making resources available in preparation for war there seems no shortage or lack of military management. And it is precisely the misuse of these military and associated corporate resources initiating and maintaining war and conflict that are causing the human deprivation we see on the faces of people today. How come that the management expertise evident in military expeditions cannot be used to manage human desperation, the residue of war?

The present exodus from the Middle East and Africa didn't happen overnight. It was predicted years ago by Susan George in her book, *The Debt Boomerang*. While great progress has been made over the latter half of the last century and in the early years of this century the care of the weak and the dispossessed has become an irritant. Frequently, tabloid media headlines highlight the weak, immigrants, refugees as swarms

of scroungers. They are animalised, corralled in 'jungles' of despair, treated with indifference at the drawbridges of European fortresses. Europe has developed a sanitised memory of its post and pre-war exodus of people looking for safe havens around the world. Echoes of the pre-second world war Evian conference are heard around Europe today as nations threaten to close their borders to those seeking refuge.

Immigrants and refugees, just like Joseph, Mary and Jesus, do not want to leave home and familiar surroundings. Television images of destruction in their homelands tell the reason for people's decisions. World powers vie with each other putting their interests before the needs of populations. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is one exception. She responded recently to criticism for allowing refugees into Germany, "If we now have to start apologising for showing a friendly face in response to emergency situations - then that's not my country."

As long as that continues to happen the flight into Egypt is never old, always new. How do we respond as we commemorate that event?

The mystery of salvation has known unpredictable and mysterious integrations of peoples, cultures and races (Cardinal C. M. Martini. 1991).

So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother and went back to the land of Israel. (Mt: 2.22)

Columban Fr Bobby Gilmore has worked for many years in the Migrant and Refugee Apostolate in Ireland.



Pages from a missionary diary

FR FRANK HOARE

Columban Fr Frank Hoare, who has spent many decades in Fiji, shares with us several humorous occasions from his missionary life there.

June 18, 1983: Indo-Fijian fire-walking at Nadera Temple

Today I went to take photos of the fire-walking at the Hindu temple at Nadera, a few miles from Suva. In the early 20th century the British colonial government brought indentured laborers to Fiji from South India. These brought their ancient practice of fire-walking with them.

I arrived to find a large crowd already seated on the benches parallel to the 30 foot long fire pit. In this pit there were the smoldering ashes, of logs six inches deep, which had been burning for the previous 12 hours. A dozen men and women of different ages had undergone purification rituals for nine days and, on returning from bathing in the sea, would be led across the hot ashes by the Hindu priest.

Without a telephoto lens I needed to get close to the pit across which the devotees would walk. Spotting an empty space near the pit I excused myself as I crossed over the outer benches to reach it. As I sat down I heard a young woman behind me say to her companion in Hindi, *"How can this be! Your father-in-law has just arrived and is sitting in front of you!"* She presumed that I was a tourist and didn't understand Hindi. Communication is not allowed between father-in-law and daughter-in-law in Indian tradition.

I said nothing at the time, but concentrated on taking photos as the Hindu priest cracked his whip urging the devotees to cross the burning ashes. Some ran across, some walked with dignity but all crossed the pit without anyone getting burnt. For Hindus, this was a manifestation of the power and protection of the goddess whom they had worshipped.

When I was ready to leave, I turned around to the two young ladies behind me and said in my best Hindi, *"Your father-in-law excuses himself as he must leave now!"* They almost fainted.



June 13, 1984: St Anthony's Feast at Raviravi

St Anthony is a favorite saint of South Indian Catholics. Today I celebrated his feast with the mainly Indo-Fijian congregation at Raviravi, a rural settlement on Fiji's main island. A South Indian Catholic, known as Tambi, had built a small thatched church in his honor. Later in the 1960s Fr John Mahoney, a Columban from the US, had the present church constructed. St Anthony's feast is the high point of the Church year in Raviravi.

A few hundred people attended the Mass this year. Afterwards the officials tied the statue of St Anthony holding the child Jesus on a litter with ropes. People vied for the honor of carrying the litter as it was taken in procession three times around the church.

I was walking behind a Hindu woman on the second round when a rope came loose and the statue fell to the ground. I noticed the Hindu lady raise her eyes to the sky rather than see this inauspicious accident.

There was general unease as the statue was retied and the three rounds completed. People then made a donation to the Church and waved burning camphor in a brass plate in front of the statue three times.

Later, I happened to be standing behind two Catholic men as they chatted. *"Wasn't it terrible that the statue fell today,"* said one to the other. *"Ah, yes,"* the other replied, *"but it could have been worse. Only the child Jesus lost his head. St Anthony wasn't damaged at all!"*



August 11, 1996: A brush with the law

The drive from Ba, where I am stationed as assistant priest, to Suva takes well over four hours. Load-carrying lorries are one of the obstacles on the way, as I found out today.

A few miles outside of Lautoka City I passed a slow lorry on an incline only to be flagged down immediately afterwards by two Indo-Fijian policemen. One of them brought his speed gun over to me as I got out of the car. *"You were over the speed limit,"* he said. *"But I wasn't doing more than 80kms per hour,"* I replied. *"The 60km speed limit sign is just back there,"* the policeman pointed. As I saw it I realized that it had been obscured from my view as I passed the lorry. I tried to explain this to the policeman.

The second policeman surprised me then by asking me in Hindi where I was going.

"How did you know that I could speak Hindi?"

"I was the policeman who gave you a speeding ticket at Karavi Primary School two weeks ago," he said. *"But I also attended a Hindi wedding that you officiated at in Vatukoula 10 years ago."* I was amazed that he remembered me.

"Is this man a priest?" asked the first policeman who had his ticket book at the ready by now. *"Yes, he is,"* said my friend. *"Then we should ask him for a blessing,"* said he, putting the ticket book away. I gladly gave the two Hindu policemen a blessing and continued on my way to Suva.

January 18, 2009: Missionary zeal and down-to-earth reality

I am back in Naleba, the rural settlement on the second Island of Fiji where I began, in 1975, my missionary journey. After seven years away I feel the need to refresh my Hindi language here.

Last evening I visited Salen and his wife Natasha. Salen, despite never attending church services, gave me a great welcome and we drank *yaqona* (kava) and chatted until late in the night. This morning as I had breakfast with them of fresh roti and curry I wondered how I could approach with him the big question of the meaning of life.

After breakfast Salen insisted on mixing more *yaqona*. As we sat amicably together I said to him, ***"Salen, do you ever think about death?"*** *"Yes,"* he said emphatically, *"I think about it all the time."* The heart rose up in me, thinking that I'm onto to something here. *"So, what do you think about,"* I asked eagerly. *"I think constantly about who is going to grab, when I go, all the things I have worked for and accumulated!"* he answered. My heart settled down again.



Columban Fr Frank Hoare first went to Fiji in 1973.

Peru was far beyond anything I could have ever imagined

ERL DYLAN J. TABACO

Encountering God in the Andes



Erl Dylan J. Tabaco, a Columban seminarian from the Philippines, spent two years in Peru as part of his formation for missionary priesthood. He writes of a visit to a Columban parish in the Andes Mountains.

Since childhood I have been fascinated with geography. As a child, I would love to build different islands and mountains on the seashore and imagined myself at the top of them. It was a lifelong dream for me to travel from one place to another but being in Peru was far beyond anything I could have imagined.

After spending a year of pastoral experience in a Columban parish in the Peruvian capital city of Lima, I had

an opportunity to visit a Columban parish in the Andes Mountains of Southern Peru. I was very excited to arrive in Cusco even though I immediately felt breathless and faint due to the 3400 metre altitude. Cusco is the birthplace of the Inca civilization and is the point of entry for Machu Picchu, one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

I was accompanied by Fr Gregory Young-In Kim, a Columban priest from Korea who works in the parish

of St James the Apostle in Yanaoca. I was happy to spend the night in Cusco to acclimatize to this high altitude before heading off next day to Yanaoca, which is even higher than Cusco. It was a night filled with awe and wonder as I prepared myself physically for the continuation of our journey.

Early next morning we left Cusco and drove for two and a half hours to the parish of St James the Apostle in Yanaoca. Columban Fr Paul

Photo: Erl Dylan J Tabaco

Prendergast, from New Zealand welcomed us on behalf of the community with their traditional tea made of coca leaves that was helpful in alleviating altitude sickness.

The serenity of the place and the simplicity of the locals amazed me. It was very cold and the freezing air penetrated my bones. Nevertheless I was mesmerized by the beauty of God's creation. It was my first time to see snow. This thrill took away my dizziness. I started roaming around the place feeling excited not knowing what new experiences I would encounter. I struggled to understand the local people since the majority only spoke Quechua, their native tongue, rather than Spanish.

Aside from the main parish, there are several chapels and far-away communities where Columbans visit and administer the sacraments. It is customary that once a year, the Eucharist is celebrated for the feast day of the patron saint of the chapel.

One of these distant chapels is Machucayo A, a distance of 90kms. As we were driving there I kept remembering how Fr Paul Prendergast had shared that in his early years as a missionary in this area he either walked or rode a horse to these distant communities.

Fr Paul has spent most of his life building friendships with the local people. As a missionary, bringing God's love and building friendship with the locals are inseparable. We can only be effective in our ministry once we value the dignity of every person that we encounter. His love of his ministry transcends time. Fr Paul is now almost 80 but his passion for his priestly ministry remains an inspiration to me.

The people slowly began to arrive at the chapel after our arrival. Most of them had walked for a long distance just to attend the Eucharist. I had a chance to talk to one of the ladies who was catching her breath as she laid down her basket full of fruit and vegetables. She told me that she and her family had walked for almost five hours in order to attend the Eucharist in honour of the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The chapel looks like a run-down shack. It was very old and empty except for the little altar. As we commenced the Eucharist, the whole community sung the hymns wholeheartedly. I was amazed by the participation of the people. Even though I didn't understand a single word as the Eucharist was celebrated in Quechua, I could sense the great reverence of the people as they offered their lives, their families and their work to God.

I was moved to tears. It was a life changing experience for me. In that moment of grace it seems that the banquet in heaven with God and the saints was occurring here on Earth in this remote chapel. Through the faith of the local people I sensed the presence of God. It touched me deeply.

After the Eucharist, we were invited by the head catechist to have lunch with his family. They lived in a small house along with the catechist's aged mother. In spite of his mother's health, she generously prepared for us a traditional Andean meal. As she served us the meal she spoke in a low tone repeating, "This house maybe very small but our heart is very big". Reflecting on those words I've learned that encountering the

presence of God doesn't have to be in extraordinary situations. Experiencing Him doesn't have to be mystical. Even in the most ordinary of situations you can encounter Him, as long as your heart remains open.

The beauty of these high mountains and valleys along with the goodness of the local people prepared me for that unforgettable encounter with God. The people of the mountains may be deprived of material things but their faith in a loving God as expressed in their daily lives was very rich.

As I continue my journey in becoming a missionary priest, I want to tell the story of this encounter with God high up the Andes Mountains of Peru among the indigenous Quechua people.

Erl Dylan J. Tabaco is a Columban seminarian from the Philippines.



Reflecting on those words I've learned that encountering the presence of God doesn't have to be in extraordinary situations. Experiencing Him doesn't have to be mystical.



A Subanen woman's story

FR GEORGE HOGARTY

Mercy Gawason tells her story to Columban Fr George Hogarty.

I am Mercy Gawason and I am a Subanen woman. I am 26 years old and I work in the Subanen Craft Centre in Ozamis City, the Philippines. I met Columban Fr Vincent Busch in 2004 and he taught me the art of making mandalas and wooden beads. In 2007 we began making Christmas cards at the Centre and I am now in charge of mailing, packing and sending the Christmas cards we make. I have been a craftwork artist for 12 years now after leaving Midsalip which is in a remote area in the forest and the hills where the majority of the Subanen people still live. You may ask how I came to be here so far from my forest home in the northern hill country of the Island of Mindanao in the Philippines. Well this is my story of how I came to be one of the leading craftswomen of this centre.

My family and I lived in the hill forests ever since I can remember. Originally, my people, the Subanens, were animists. We believed that nature and all creation is alive with good and evil spirits and these spirits governed our lives. As a result of our ancestral beliefs we are imbued

with a deep reverence of creation. We lived isolated in the forest until the decade of the 1970s when the Columban Fathers and Sisters introduced us to the Catholic faith and our lives began to change. They presented Jesus to us as a member of a family along with Joseph and Mary which really appealed to us because Jesus, Mary and Joseph were always on the move going from one place to another just like us. Now nearly half of the 80,000 Subanen tribal people are Christians.

Moreover, we Subanens are a very shy people and we flee from conflict. This led us to retreat further and further into the forest as outsiders encroached on our land destroying it as they came. However, the Columbans taught us that God loved us and this helped me and my people to be more open and relate to others. The Columbans challenged us to accept that we couldn't keep running for ever and encouraged us to defend our lands by protesting to the Government against the mining companies and all who would destroy the forest out of greed.



However, the Columbans taught us that God loved us and this helped me and my people to be more open and relate to others.

When I was young I met Columban Fr Sean Martin. My family was very poor and Fr Sean wanted to help us. As a result of his and other Columban Missionaries' concerns for the welfare of our people, the Columban Sisters formed a crafts group in Midsalip 15 years ago. I was invited to join.

Gradually, I gained confidence as I became more aware of my talent for art and craftmaking. Being a member of a Subanen craft group also helped me realise too that we as a people have a special gift that we can share with others. Eventually, the Columban Sisters encouraged me to go to Ozamis where I discovered that Fr Busch's ideas of expressing concern for creation through mandalas matched my talent and deepest religious convictions. Gradually more women like me joined our group from Midsalip as the Columban Sisters discovered new artistic talent among our people and sent them to Ozamis to promote the cause of the Subanen people. Today when we produce mandalas and cards that come from the depth of our hearts and express our profound love of creation and our faith in a God who has created such a beautiful world to live in.

Now I am a professional craftsperson and I'm proud to be a Subanen woman. Not only do I help my family but the work I do here also helps my people gain the resources we need to defend our land and protect the forest we love. I believe we Subanens are artists. We have a special talent for expressing our love of God's creation in art works which we can use to help our brothers and sisters all over the world understand they come from nature and are part of creation. I am happy that our creative talents can reflect the love God shares with all of us through nature.

Next year I hope to study communications systems at La Salle University in Ozamis City. I want to communicate my gift to other Subanen people and encourage them to follow the path I have taken so that the forest will always remain our home.



Mercy Gawason

Columban Fr George Hogarty is currently assigned to Columban promotion in the Diocese of Rockhampton, Queensland.

To order the Subanen Christmas cards fill in and return flyer included with this month's issue of The Far East or order online: www.columban.org.au



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.*

Columban Missionaries pledge to divest from fossil fuels

*T*he Columban Missionaries have pledged to divest from fossil fuels. They issued the following statement for the feast of St Francis of Assisi, October 4, 2016.

"Inspired by Pope Francis and in honour of September's Season of Creation and the Feast of St Francis, the Missionary Society of St Columban pledges to take steps to divest from fossil fuels. In addition, we commit to putting resources into Positive Impact Investing alternatives."

Pope Francis is leading the way for Catholic institutions to choose a Divest - Reinvest strategy when he writes in the encyclical 'Laudato Si': *On Care for Our Common Home*, that "technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels... needs to be progressively replaced without delay" (par.165) and "A change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic, and social power. This is what consumer movements accomplish by boycotting certain products". (par.206)

Columban Superior General, Fr Kevin O'Neill, said: *"Columbans have a long history of commitment to caring for the Earth as part of our missionary identity. We see our Socially and Environmentally Responsible Investment policy as an important expression of that commitment and therefore are exploring ways to direct our investments towards funds which respond positively to our issue priorities such as renewable energy, community-based microenterprise and peace initiatives."*



Columban Fr Sean McDonagh, leading international eco-theologian, advocate for divestment and corporate responsibility, said, *"For religious people, the aim of divestment is to bankrupt the fossil fuel industry morally, not financially. Hopefully, because of their duty to manage their resources, these companies will invest in renewable forms of energy."*

From moral, environmental and financial perspectives, fossil fuels are not the way forward. Over the next five years, the Missionary Society of St Columban will begin divesting away from fossil fuels, as well as putting resources into Positive Impact Investing alternatives. This is a concrete step we can take as missionaries to demonstrate our commitment to the care of and respect for the earth as well as faithful stewardship of the goods entrusted to us.

Fr Gary Walker is the Regional Director for the Missionary Society of St Columban in Australia and New Zealand.

Photo: beboy/Bigstock.com

Mission Intention for November

That within parishes, priests and lay people may collaborate in service to the community without giving in to the temptation of discouragement.

Mission Intention for December

That the peoples of Europe may rediscover the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Gospel which gives joy and hope to life.

From the Director

The work of Christmas



Howard Thurman (1899 – 1981) was an American writer who has left us with powerful thoughts and insights about Christmas. In his book, *“The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations”*, he wrote these stirring words which we have chosen this year for our Christmas prayer card:

When the song of the angels is stilled/When the star in the sky is gone/When the kings and princes are home/When the shepherds are back with their flock/The work of Christmas begins:

- To find the lost
- To heal the broken
- To feed the hungry
- To release the prisoner
- To rebuild the nations
- To bring peace among others
- To make music in the heart.

Those of us who believe that Christmas is a holy event understand that the imperative to do these ‘works’ comes from our belief in Jesus Christ who set this example of living by the way he lived his life. Our relationship with him dictates that we live the same way.

There is a tricky part in all this for us. It is this: if this service of people ceases to be an activity which is ‘a search for God’ for us and becomes an activity only to help people to bring about a change for the better in their life, we are in big trouble. What happens if they do not respond? What happens if their lives do not improve?

Without the God connection to sustain us we can get down-hearted and frustrated when the best of our efforts do not meet with success. When we see sad, miserable, poor people who remain sad and miserable despite our best efforts, the questions arise: why am I doing this? Why am I wasting my time helping people who will not help themselves? These are questions from good people who have tried and believe

they have failed in trying to help those described by Howard Thurman.

But the failure or success of our efforts is not the point. We need go no further than the lives of the saints through the history of the Church to get the point. St Francis of Assisi, who gave us the idea of the Christmas crib, was a poor man with no resources but inspired his followers to love God and have that life-giving relationship flow on to their relationship with other people. We may not be a St Francis of Assisi but the principle is valid.

Without the God connection to sustain us we can get down-hearted and frustrated when the best of our efforts do not meet with success.

St Mother Teresa of Calcutta’s phrase of doing ‘something beautiful for God’ goes to the heart of the matter - we must have a good heart in what we do for Jesus Christ. People know if we don’t have a good heart if ‘the music in the heart’ is gone.

Christmas is a holy feast when we contemplate the amazing fact that Jesus Christ was sent by God to come and live with us and change the way we look at the world. Our Christmas gift to others, but especially the people that Howard Thurman refers to, is to be the compassionate presence of Christ in our world.

Gary Walker

Fr Gary Walker
director@columban.org.au

Sydney's Youth Model Interfaith Harmony, Justice & Compassion to the World

STEFF FENTON

In September 2016, over 300 young people from diverse faith backgrounds met in Sydney for the largest interfaith event for young people in Australia. Youth PoWR (Parliament of the World's Religions) saw youth vote on and commit to a message of common and critical concern; 'Towards a More Compassionate & Just Society'.

Youth aged 17-35 from Aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and no faiths were represented with high energy on Saturday September 3 at Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College in North Sydney. Speakers from these eight religions addressed the parliament, inspiring them through religious texts and teachings.

In two sitting sessions, they voted on which social, political and environmental issues they want to see civic and religious leaders to take concrete action on. Youth then wrote their own commitments to build more compassion and justice in Australia by working in harmony with each other.

Youth PoWR was paused halfway through proceedings for one minute of silence when, amidst all of their differences, everyone prayed, meditated and reflected together on a shared vision: *"Injustice and indifference cannot flow from the Divine, nor should injustice and indifference flow from any of our religions. Formed by our faiths, we care deeply about poverty, inequality, discrimination, violence, and the wanton exploitation of people, animals and the environment. **We have an opportunity and a responsibility to take charge of the change we want to see in the world."***

Results from Youth PoWR show the injustices surrounding Refugees, Racism & Discrimination, Aboriginal Rights and Domestic Violence are most important to young Australians of faith. Proposals emerged from the youth around the areas of Poverty, Climate Change, Gender Equality, Mental Health and Religious Freedom.

Presentations of the 'Youth PoWR 2016 Message: *Towards a More Compassionate & Just Society*' will be made to a range of Australia's politicians and religious organisations in the coming months. Many also volunteered on the night to

coordinate 'Youth PoWR Action Groups' to carry out their commitments to interfaith action.

Youth PoWR has not only given young people a platform for their civic and religious leaders to hear and heed their concerns. By committing to work together across their differences, differences which have, and continue to divide religious believers across the globe, these youth have also become a living model of interfaith harmony, of paving the way in overcoming old prejudices and building a new world.

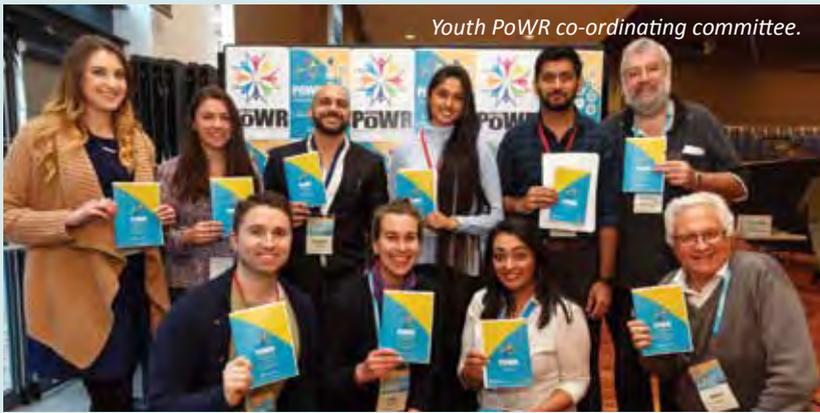
A day after Youth PoWR, representatives from Christian, Hindu, Jewish & Muslim faiths went on ABC Radio's Sunday Nights to discuss the social, environmental and political priorities of Australia's religious youth – the show has since been aired and podcasted across the world to tens of thousands of listeners. Two weeks later, on Sunday September 18, representatives from Baha'i, Christian and Muslim faiths shared in a special Q&A event at the Australian Baha'i Temple's International Day of Peace Service.

Steff Fenton is the Youth PoWR Event Coordinator at the Columban Mission Institute and the Networking, Media and Projects Officer for the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, Sydney.



**YOUTH
POWR**
PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

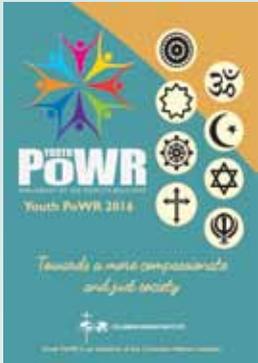
Photos: Steff enton



Youth PoWR co-ordinating committee.



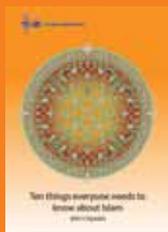
AUSTRALIA



Indigenous performers at Youth PoWR.



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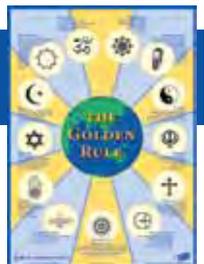
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Listen to: 1916 - Birth of a nation and of an Irish missionary movement



Columbans prepare for the 2018 Centenary

MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST. COLUMBAN

Sharing Gospel Joy

1916 - Birth of a nation and of an Irish missionary movement

As Columbans prepare in 2018 to celebrate the centenary of their foundation in Ireland, Columban Fr Frank Hoare explores their origins in the light of the 1916 Easter Uprising in Ireland.

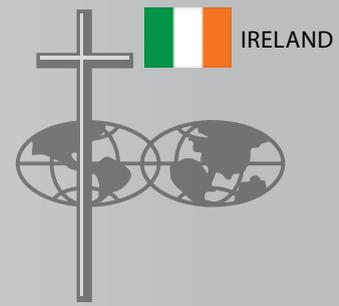
"You are mad to try to organize a foreign missionary society while Ireland is in the throes of a World War," was the warning which met Fr Edward Galvin, just returned to Ireland after four years work in China. He and Fr John Blowick, a very young Professor of theology at Ireland's national seminary in Maynooth, were working together for that very purpose in that summer and autumn 100 years ago. Driven on by the need they felt for missionary priests in China they counted on God's favour and ignored the voices of caution.

Awakening a missionary consciousness

On October 10, 1916, the bishops of Ireland gave permission for the founders of the Maynooth Mission to China (afterwards known as the Columban Fathers) to begin recruiting and collecting money to send Irish missionaries to China. Frs Galvin and Blowick launched a monthly missionary magazine, the *Far East*, in Ireland in 1918 to gain the support of the Catholics of Ireland for the new Society and its activities.

There were early indicators of success. The *Far East* had a circulation of 45,000 in 1919. By 1921, priest volunteers numbered 50 and seminarians 88, and over 150,000 pounds had been collected from the people of Ireland for the mission.

Church historian, Colm Cooke, comments that, *"For the awakening of missionary consciousness at a national level and an increasing commitment on the part of the Irish church to the missions, the foundation of the Maynooth Mission to China was of paramount importance."* In the 21 years subsequent to its founding, four other missionary societies were formed in Ireland to work in Africa and Asia. By 1976 there were 5803 Irish missionaries working in Africa, Asia and South America and at least another 5000 Irish priests and religious in the English speaking churches. The missionary movement in the Catholic Church in Ireland developed phenomenally in the 20th century.



The Easter Rising

A few months earlier, on Easter Monday, 1916, a small force of poorly armed Irish Volunteers took over the General Post Office and other strategic buildings in central Dublin and declared Ireland a free and independent Republic. The superior numbers and fire-power of the British army quashed the uprising by the week-end.

Patrick Pearse, and other Insurrection leaders, drew inspiration from their religious beliefs for an armed rebellion, which they realized would have little chance of success. They believed that their blood sacrifice would inspire a renewed nationalism in the whole country. Britain's preoccupation with the Great War seemed to them to offer an opportunity.

The public reaction in Ireland was overwhelmingly against the rebels and several bishops condemned the rising on Sunday May 7. However, by May 14, 14 of the rebel commanders had been executed and the mood of the people began to change. During Easter week the rebel garrisons had frequently recited the Rosary together. A historian said, *"Even those churchmen most disposed to condemn the rising must have been led to hesitate when they saw its apparent spiritual fruits - the huge crowds at months-mind Masses for the executed leaders, stimulated, no doubt, by the widely reported Christian piety and fortitude with which they had met their deaths."*

The old order of acquiescence to colonial rule with long-term hopes for political change through negotiation no longer seemed convincing or viable. The successive political events of the anti-conscription campaign, the general election victory for Sinn Fein in 1918, and the setting up of the Irish Parliament in 1919 were incremental steps in the process. They led inexorably to a renewed struggle between 1919 and 1921, this time in the form of a guerrilla war, which was made possible by popular support.

Nationalism and missionary fervour

Early Columban missionaries were inspired by the sacrifice of the leaders of the 1916 Rising. Fr John Heneghan was so moved after hearing the confessions of the Tuam Volunteers on their way to join in the Rising that he told a friend with tears in his admiring eyes, *"If these brave lads are ready to die for Ireland, I, a priest, ought to be ready to die for Christ."* Heneghan joined the new mission as soon as it was launched six months later.

The Maynooth Mission to China avoided publicly taking sides in the nationalist politics of the day in their contact with the clergy while on their parish appeals for funds. But Fr John Blowick is on record as saying, *"I am strongly of the opinion that the Rising of 1916 helped our work indirectly. I know for a fact that many of the young people of the country had been aroused into a state of heroism and zeal by the Rising of 1916 and by the manner in which the leaders met their death. I can affirm this from personal experience. And accordingly, when we put our message before the young people of the country, it fell on soil which was far better prepared to receive it than if there had never been an Easter week."*

On August 24, 1920, the day after the first group of Columban missionaries, led by Fr Edward Galvin, reached Hanyang, his brother, Michael, was killed in the ambush of a British army contingent in the south of Ireland.

The June 1921 issue of the *Far East* published a story entitled, *'For God and Country'*, describing how a poor widow woman desired and prayed 'that her little boy James would be a priest and that Johnny would, as a true son, help in the resurrection of his country'. Johnny adopted the patriotic ideal but the story gave prominence to James, who volunteered to be in the first band of missionary priests to leave for China.

The nobility and romance of the ideal of self-sacrifice for faith and fatherland was incorporated and affirmed by the early members of the Maynooth Mission to China but primacy was given to the faith. The spirit of nationalism sweeping Ireland from 1916 onwards inspired them to a similar fervour in offering themselves to the spiritual ideal of missionary commitment for Christ and the Church.

Immersion programme in the Australian way



AUSTRALIA

FR BRIAN VALE

Columban Fr Brian Vale and Josephite Sister Anne Bond help prepare newly arrived missionaries within the multi-ethnic Australian Church and culture.

Three Sisters and 17 priests representing Nigeria, Kenya, South Sudan, Colombia, Indonesia, South Korea and India immersed themselves into the 'Australian way' of ministering during the annual Winter Acculturation Program held at St Joseph's Centre For Reflective Living in NSW in July.

Course attendees included Frs Michael Odiwa, Josy Sebastian, Biju John from the Adelaide Archdiocese and Sr Kaspar Mary from the Port Pirie diocese who, along with their peers, welcomed the opportunity to share stories from their countries of origin and their many and varied ministry experiences.

The 11-day program featured several guest speakers who gave the Australian perspective of ministry. They included Aboriginal elder Mrs Elsie Heiss who spoke about her people and shared her personal story, which created much discussion about Aboriginal culture and history.

The idea for a Winter Acculturation Program grew following the success of the 'Cross Cultural Summer School' which was set up by the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart and the Columban Fathers about 15 years ago. The summer school assists in preparing people to minister in cultures other than their own.

Five years ago organiser Fr Brian Vale and Sister Anne Bond RSJ established the winter program to help Sisters, Brothers and Priests coming to minister in Australia.

"As in previous years it was a privilege to journey with these women and men, coming from very different cultures and understandings of Church, as they shared their struggles to understand our Australian culture and Church," Sr Anne and Fr Brian said.



Fr Brian Vale SSC

"We became more aware that in today's multi-ethnic Australian Church we are all called to respond to the gift of this new wave of missionaries with mutual sensitivity to each other's diverse backgrounds."

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



Our little mate



AUSTRALIA

Farewelled with a Columban presence

*M*ichael Lane, brother of Columban Fr Bernie Lane (Peru) was farewelled from St Columbans Chapel, Essendon on July 9, 2016.

Michael had a close association with the Columbans in Essendon where he and his mother Kath volunteered for many years.

The Chapel was packed to capacity - a great tribute to our little mate, as Bernie called him.

Bernie also said *"that the memories and recollections of so many happy moments and the significance of his life, out-weighed the sadness and sense of loss. Mick is definitely smiling again and at peace; reunited with Mum with a huge motherly hug.*

And how beaut that Mick's life was celebrated from the Chapel there in Essendon. He was indeed an evangelizing influence for all of us who knew him." May he rest in peace.



Michael Lane, 09.07.1960 - 01.07.2016



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Christmas in Myanmar- Kachin State



Photo: Sr Margaret Murphy

In the war torn Kachin State of Myanmar, the Columban Sisters operate a Youth Training Centre for unemployed youth affected by the war, a Rehabilitation Centre for drug addicts and a Centre for people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

In this way, the Columban Sisters such as Sr Mary Dillon offer a positive response to the devastation wrought by the ongoing civil war between the Burmese and the Kachin armies.

With your help, Columban Sisters such as Mary Dillon can continue this valuable work. (See page 7)

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