

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

March 2017



'Silence'

A scene from Martin Scorsese's new movie, 'Silence', starring Andrew Garfield. This movie deals with the persecution of Christians in 17th century Japan.



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Andrew Garfield (left) and Shinya Tsukamoto (right) in a scene from the movie 'Silence'. This movie deals with the persecution of Christians in 17th century Japan. See Reflection pages 08-09)

Photo: AAP image/Kerry Brown/Paramount Pictures



From the Editor

Columbans past, Columbans present

In 1971 Columban Fr Lynn Whitely died from hepatitis at the age of 31 in Chile. His brother, retired Christian Brother, Br Reginald Whitely, has written his memories of his brother Lynn from a family perspective for *The Far East*. Lynn lived at a time of great change in society worldwide and in the Church. This article is part of our preparation for the celebration in 2018 of the Columban Centenary of our foundation.

This March issue of *The Far East* carries many other stories of the lives and work of Columban missionaries both past and present from around the world. Columban Fr Keith Gorman was in his 73rd year of ordination and one month short of 97-years-old, when he died in December 2016. Fr Keith had worked in Japan and later back home in different parts of Australia for many years. He is remembered as a humble, outgoing man with a good sense of fun.

There is the story of Columban Fr Dan Troy's journey from Cork, Ireland, to China. Columban Fr Rafael Ramirez recently stopped off in Australia

en-route from Chile to Myanmar. He explains why he has to take this risk in leaving home and going to a foreign country. Columban Fr Liam O'Callaghan writes of the situation in Pakistan.

During 2016 Pope Francis called on the church to celebrate a *Year of Mercy*. Columban Fr Michael Hoban relates how the Vicariate of Maipo in Santiago, Chile, responded to this call by reaching out to the 1,300 male prisoners in the local prison.

Columban Fr Paul McCartin writes of a visit to Fukushima, Japan, the site of the 2011 nuclear disaster that occurred as a result of an earthquake and tsunami. Also from Japan, Columban Fr Barry Cairns offers a reflection on the new Martin Scorsese movie, *'Silence'*, based on the novel by Shusaku Endo. This movie attempts to deal with the apparent 'silence' of God during the persecution of Christians in Japan in the 17th century.

Category five Cyclone Winston brought the strongest winds ever recorded in the Pacific Basin. From December 4 to 10, the Columban

Companions in Mission in Fiji made a visit to the cyclone-devastated village of Veidrala. Former Lay Missionary, Pablo Rabakewa writes of this experience.

As Columbans prepare to celebrate in 2018 our centenary year of foundation, we remember some Columbans who have gone before us, such as Lynn Whitely in 1971 and Keith Gorman in 2016. Through the stories shared in the magazine, we also read about the ongoing work of Columbans today, working alongside local people to make manifest the Kingdom of God in the most abandoned and diverse places.

Fr Daniel Harding

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To visit the imprisoned

Pope Francis continually reminds us that the Church is missionary and is called to reach out to the poor, to sinners, to unbelievers and to those who live on the margins of modern society. In 2016 Pope Francis called the Church to celebrate a *Year of Mercy* and to discover once again the importance of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The *Jubilee Year of Mercy* was a unique opportunity for the Church in Chile to be missionary and to reach out to those who feel that there is no place for them in society.

The Archdiocese of Santiago is divided into seven territorial vicariates. The most recent vicariate to be established in the Archdiocese of Santiago is the Vicariate of Maipo where I am privileged to be the Episcopal Vicar. Our Vicariate is located on the southern outskirts of the sprawling city of Santiago and includes two very different municipalities: Puente Alto (the most populated municipality in the country) and San José del Maipo (a rural municipality nestling in a canyon of the Andes Mountains).

Our Archbishop, Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati invited each Vicariate of the Archdiocese to emphasize one of the corporal works of mercy and to implement that particular work of mercy in a special way. The priests, sisters, deacons and lay pastoral agents of the Vicariate of Maipo decided that we were called to live out the corporal work of mercy: 'To visit the imprisoned'.

We based our decision on the fact that Puente Alto has a prison with 1,300 male inmates. It was built to house 700 inmates. The inmates are condemned to live in overcrowded conditions in large dormitories with bunk beds. Each bunk bed has mattresses for three men. The man on the top can touch the ceiling with his nose! The food rations provided by the prison authorities leave a lot to be desired and so the inmates rely on their families to bring them food which they cook and share among themselves. Many of the inmates come from the Columban parishes of San Matías and Santo Tomás.

When I returned to the Maipo Vicariate after four years as the Episcopal Vicar of the Southern Zone, I brought with me a frightening memory. On December 8, 2010, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, there was a fire in the San Miguel prison. 81 inmates were burnt to death. It was caused by a fight among the inmates. Some of the prisoners had built a flame thrower using the gas canisters of their little kitchen. The flames ignited mattresses. The fire was so intense that the gates of the prison cell could not be opened. I went to the prison and spent the day consoling families who had lost their sons, husbands or brothers to the fire. I went with Cardinal Francisco Javier Errazuriz to the area of the prison where the charred bodies of the dead prisoners were being kept. Cardinal Errazuriz prayed for the dead and blessed the bodies of the victims of the fire. After that experience, I could not ignore any longer the plight of the men and women who are deprived of their liberty for the crimes which they committed. As Pope Francis teaches us, no matter what sins we may commit we are never excluded from the love or the mercy of God.



Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati greets inmates.

Not long after returning, I visited the prison in Puente Alto. I discovered that a small group of Catholics were visiting the prison every Wednesday. I met with them and we began to explore ways of increasing the number of pastoral agents for this apostolate. Then the merciful Lord sent us a great blessing. A new chaplain was appointed to the prison, Padre Armando Vergara. Padre Armando is a native of Iquique in northern Chile and in his youth he participated actively in the Columban parish of Espiritu Santo. Fr Armando proudly claims that he owes his vocation as a diocesan priest, to Columban Fr Hugh McGonagle who accompanied him in his discernment about the priesthood while he was in the seminary and in his early years as a priest.

Together with Fr Vergara, the Vicariate of Maipo organized workshops and courses on Prison Apostolate increasing the number of lay pastoral visitors from seven to 30. The increase in volunteers has meant that four days a week Catholic prisoners can avail of spiritual accompaniment and prayer. When Fr Vergara arrived in Puente Alto, the small Catholic chapel was in a deplorable condition. The Maipo Vicariate made a commitment to raise funds to repair and renovate the prison chapel. So far we have raised more than \$600,000 pesos (a little less than one thousand US dollars) for the renovation. On August 12, 2016 Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati, visited the prison and celebrated the Eucharist for the prisoners.

During the same month of August, we organized a campaign in our parishes to donate toiletries for personal use: toothpaste, tooth brushes, soap, toilet paper, shampoo etc. In all our parishes there was a generous response. ***I joked with Fr Armando that his inmates have the cleanest hair and the whitest teeth in Chile!*** In September, a religious sister of St Ann, Sister Maria Luz Treupil came to our Vicariate to work in prison ministry. She had spent many years in this ministry in the prison of the northern city of Antofagasta. While she was there, she began a choir and taught some of the younger inmates to play the guitar. Eventually, they produced a CD. Sr Maria Luz hopes to repeat that experience in Puente Alto. On December 19, 2016 we organized a Christmas party for the inmates who regularly attend Mass together with members of their families. Finally, for the first time ever in the pastoral life of our Vicariate, the Summer School for the Laity will offer two courses in the prison for the men.

As the *Jubilee Year of Mercy* came to an end, Pope Francis wrote a Pastoral Letter, '*Misericordia et Miseria*'. There is no doubt that prisons are necessary in society but we also need to remember: "*No law or precept can prevent God from once more embracing the son (daughter) who returns to him, admitting that he/ she has done wrong but intending to start his (her) life anew*". '*Misericordia et Miseria*' No.11



The prison chaplain Fr Armando Vergara (left), alongside Fr Michael Hoban (right).

Columban Fr Michael J Hoban has worked in Chile for more than 40 years.

Fukushima update

FR PAUL MCCARTIN

Columban Fr Paul McCartin writes a report of his recent visit to the site of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, which occurred on March 11, 2011 as a result of an earthquake and tsunami. Fr Paul is the Columban 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation' Coordinator in Japan.

Recently I joined a small group going to Fukushima to get an update on the situation after the disaster of March 11, 2011. Alighting from the Bullet Train at the town of Koriyama, 60kms west of Fukushima Number One Nuclear Power Plant, the first surprise was the large radiation monitor in front of the station. Over the next three days I saw similar monitors in cities, beside country roads and along expressways.

We were taken to the National Teachers' Union Koriyama office. On the way we saw a fenced off area in front of the City offices where radioactive waste has been buried.

After the accident a Koriyama resident invited friends to evacuate to Koriyama, but Koriyama turned out to be more dangerous. The government did not provide accurate information to people and many fled in the direction the wind was blowing the radiation. Schools had no radiation-measuring equipment. Exams were cancelled and water cut off.

In Koriyama, roofs of buildings and the ground are being decontaminated, but not the walls of buildings. A trade union counsellor told us about the inquiries and complaints from workers doing the cleaning up of the contaminated area. Brazilians are among the workers.

We were driven around the area for the next two and a half days. I had taken face masks but our guides gave us better ones. We were told to make sure we washed our hands and around our mouths before eating. I was given a small radiation monitor to wear around my neck. Over the two and a half days I was exposed to 8.1 micro Sieverts, an 'acceptable' amount. Some roads are closed to ordinary traffic and evacuees are still not allowed to return to the heavily contaminated areas. Properties in these areas are barricaded to prevent looting.

The most dangerous area is the Number One Plant where the nuclear fuel meltdown occurred. The technology to decontaminate the plant doesn't even exist yet. Remote-control robots sent in to the plant were destroyed by the radiation. When I mentioned that I do a bit of hiking, I was advised not to hike in Fukushima as there is a lot of radiation in the mountains, especially at the base of mountains as rain washes it down.

What we mostly saw was a massive clean-up still continuing five years after the accident. Buildings and roads are being washed down and contaminated soil and vegetation being removed. Farm topsoil to a depth of five centimetres is being removed and replaced with soil from the many hills

being razed for this purpose. There are large collections of industrial waste bags all over the place. There must be hundreds of thousands, if not millions.

Low-level waste is being recycled. Highly contaminated waste is being burned. So far only one percent of high-level waste has been burned. More incinerators are being constructed. Some residents oppose construction of incinerators. Among residents who gave consent to construction of one incinerator are some dead people.

Contaminated waste is being used in the wall being built along the shore to prevent another tsunami hitting the area. In fact, there is so much radioactively contaminated waste that local facilities can't handle it, so 'low-level waste' is being transported to many distant places for disposal.

Contaminated fishing gear, nets, etc, is being disposed of in the town where I live. I attended a meeting to oppose this. In this way radiation is being spread to many parts of the country. It would seem to make sense to keep it where it is and avoid unnecessarily contaminating the rest of the country.

One of our guides has worked as a day labourer doing the clean-up. He told us that the health of the workers is not a priority for some of the employers. Considering the nature of the work, wages aren't that high. Workers can't work on rainy days but still have to pay rent. There are deductions for gloves, masks, etc. For workers wearing protective clothing in highly contaminated areas, it might be 30 minutes from the work site to a toilet (a round trip of an hour), so sometimes they can't go.

Our guides told us that many people in Japan think the radiation problem has been solved, but they don't know the situation. This is because the media don't tell the full story. A Catholic in Yokohama told me last year that after his

daughter wrote a piece on Fukushima for the newspaper she works for, her boss told her, "No more on Fukushima". Newspaper and TV reporters don't go to dangerous areas, only free-lancers do.

Newspapers have carried reports about children from Fukushima being diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Authorities claim that, "it is unlikely that the disease was caused by radiation exposure". At a public talk at a convent in Tokyo, a woman from Fukushima said that doctors in Fukushima, following government instructions, do not tell parents the results of their children's tests for thyroid cancer. She had to bring her child to a doctor in Tokyo to find out the result. The situation does not help families stay together. Some men want to stay in or near the contaminated area as that is where their work is. But their wives, worried especially about their children, want to stay in a safe area.

A baby crawling on a contaminated floor could get radiation on its hands and then in its mouth. Internal exposure via air, food, etc, to radiation is said to be more dangerous than external exposure. However, some people decide not to get anything tested to avoid the stress involved. Suzumebachi, a kind of hornet, and flowers have high levels of radiation, so honey is probably contaminated.

My personal conclusion is that the only response to Fukushima is to abandon nuclear power as the Japanese Catholic bishops have called for. ***I believe that if the government transferred a small fraction of the trillions of dollars it throws at the nuclear industry to the renewable energy industry, the country would be awash in safe energy in a very short time.***

Columban Fr Paul McCartin has worked in Japan since 1978.



Roofs of all buildings cleaned by hand, one by one.



Photo: AAP image/Kerry Brown/Paramount Pictures

'Silence'

FR BARRY CAIRNS

REFLECTION



JAPAN

'*Silence*,' Director Martin Scorsese's film starring Andrew Garfield has recently hit our screens. (The World Premiere was in the Vatican on November 29, 2016). This film is based on the historical novel by Japanese Catholic author, Shusaku Endo. The novel and film portrays a Portuguese Jesuit Priest, Fr Sebastian Rodrigues, witnessing his Christian flock being tortured and killed. He suffers with them. He asks: "*Where is our God? Why does he keep silent?*" Finally captured himself, he seems on the surface to deny his faith by trampling on the image of Christ. But he does so to obtain the release of those under torture. That is the promise of his torturer. This is the crux of the story.

To obtain their release, should he trample on the image of Christ or not? It is here that Christ speaks to Rodrigues: "*Yes! You may put your foot on my image. I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. You may trample! It was to be trampled on by others that I came into this world. It is to share human pain that I carried my cross*".

For Endo these comforting words of Jesus are the very purpose of his novel, '*Silence*'; and one of the many portraits of Christ which followed in later years.

I live in Yokohama and tucked into a lovely flower garden quite near the Sacred Heart Cathedral is a small but very interesting Literature Museum. In 2011 the museum published letters of Shusaku Endo written when he was writing this novel. They are written to his friend, Professor Yoshie Hotta. Endo tells Hotta that he is aiming to portray the gentle, warm figure of God in Jesus, a God who fully understands and accepts human weakness. He is a God in Jesus who stands beside us in our human suffering. He is a God who actually suffers with us.

To emphasise this theme Endo's chosen title of this novel was '*The Aroma of Sunshine*' (Hinata no Nioi). Endo was emphasising the warmth of God. However, the publishing company thought such a title would not sell, and so came into being their recommended title: '*Silence*'.

When published in 1966 initial reviews and reactions concentrated on the apparent despair and apostasy of Rodrigues and the seeming silence and powerlessness of God. Overlooked was the warmth and words of a kind God who fully understands human weakness.

The Yokohama Literature Museum has 31 letters of Endo written to his friend Hotta while writing this novel. Endo describes how during his long confinement in hospital he experienced the kindness and gentleness of family and nursing staff. Endo realised that his consoling support was a reflection of God's warmth as He accompanies us in the journey of life, especially in suffering.

These letters tell us that this powerful warmth triggered Endo to write his novel, '*The Aroma of Sunshine*' (aka '*Silence*').

The Literature Museum Curator, Ms Yoko Nomiyama, tells us in an interview that '*Silence*' is often misinterpreted. She herself did until these letters came to light!

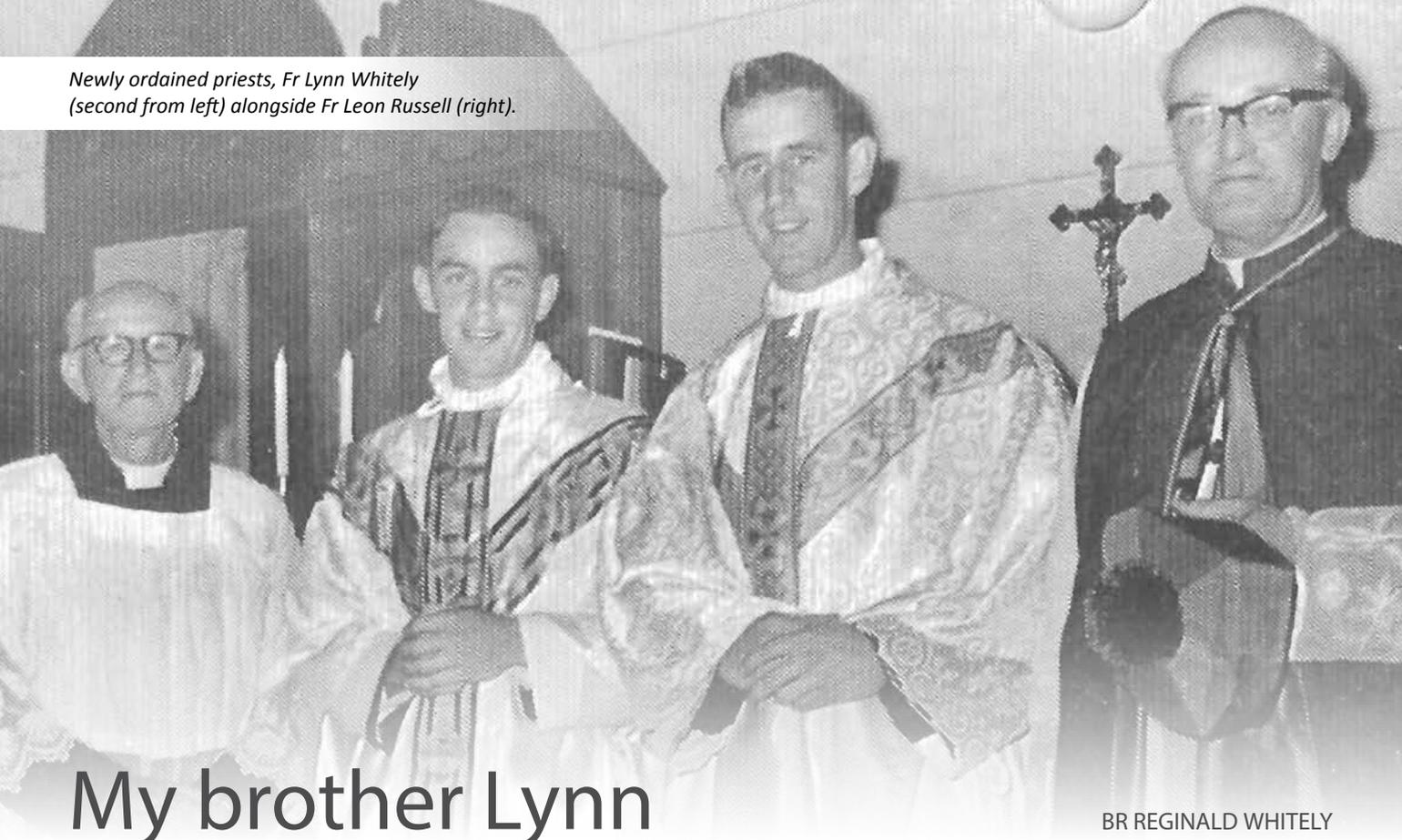
She challenges us to read '*Silence*' again to discover the deep and intended message of Endo. The message is that God at times seems to be silent but that he stands beside us always. God suffers with us. In the last page of the book Rodrigues says to Jesus: "*Lord, I resented your silence*". Jesus answers: "*I was not silent. I suffered beside you*".

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



God suffers with us. In the last page of the book Rodrigues says to Jesus: "Lord, I resented your silence". Jesus answers: "I was not silent. I suffered beside you".

Newly ordained priests, Fr Lynn Whitely
(second from left) alongside Fr Leon Russell (right).



BR REGINALD WHITELY

My brother Lynn

Preparing for the Columban Centenary 2018

Retired Christian Brother, Brother Reginald Whitely shares memories of his Columban brother, Fr Lynn Whitely, who died from hepatitis in Chile in 1971 at the age of 31.

Lynn's classmates, Columbans Frs Sean O'Connor and Don Hornsey remember Lynn as an outstanding sportsman, singer and musician. In Santiago he is not buried in the Columban Mausoleum but in a local cemetery, lovingly cared for by his parishioners and ever close to them.

Just before mum died, Lynn gave us a great surprise, when he arrived from Chile at home in Perth. He just walked into mum's room. He wanted to say goodbye to her. When asked by mum about his own illness, he said, "I just want to keep on living at the moment. There is so much to do".

Lynn had contracted hepatitis from drinking contaminated water in Peru. He died on January 14, 1971, just five months after mum. It was all so sudden and very hard on the family. Considering what happened to some of his friends when the military coup occurred two years later, maybe it was for the better.

We were a family of four brothers, one became a Diocesan priest, myself a Christian Brother, Lynn a Columban and the fourth a family man. Lynn had a beautiful singing voice and frequently won first prize at Eisteddfods. He completed his top A grade piano qualifications while in the seminary.

My last memory of Lynn was when he celebrated Sunday Mass after visiting mum. The text of the homily he preached was from Romans, 12:16, "Be not condescending to the poor".

Lynn had made a tape for mum before she died. It was such a treasure saying goodbye, "This is the last tape I



will be sending, mum". We used it in the 45 minute radio programme we made about Lynn after he died. This programme was repeated three times due to popular interest.

In the tape, Lynn said to mum, *"You trust me, mum and that is so important to me. Perhaps you think me a "commie" and that doesn't worry me but let me tell you about a little family I know in my parish in Chile where this young chap has a wife and a couple of kids. He is a skilled carpenter and got a job making door frames and window frames. Do you know how much he was getting for each door and window frame? Less than a penny! Now he can only buy a little milk for the baby and some bread and tea for everyone else"*.

After ordination in St Mary's Cathedral, Perth, in 1964, Lynn was sent to the Columban parish of San Martin de Porres, Lima, Peru. His name in Spanish was *"Padre Lino"*. His education really began there.

When a parishioner said to him, "You people only come here for two years and leave us. You don't love us", Lynn became determined to stay. Later on in Chile Lynn would tell his family he would never come home to work but would spend the rest of his life working there amongst the poor.

After two years, Lynn was sent to the parish of San Marcos, in the southern periphery of Santiago, Chile. He worked there with English Columban Diocesan Associate, Fr Dick Harding. At that time, the Chilean economy had collapsed and farming families were moving to the city. Hundreds of families squatted in makeshift settlements around the parish.

In 1968, the Latin American Bishops met in Medellin in Colombia. The *Medellin Document* called on the Church to develop a real option for the poor, to form Base Christian Communities, promote biblical reflections and develop a shared ministry between clergy and laity. Lynn and Dick began sending for tapes on Liberation Theology and any reading coming out of the Medellin Conference.

Several Columbans in Chile at that time had made a commitment to combine parish ministry with the idea of working alongside parishioners in voluntary labour. In order to help families in the squatter camp, Lynn set up a workshop to make slippers. He worked there himself with

the families. Lynn, along with other Columbans, worked in bicycle repair shops. Lynn joined the local Fire Brigade and became the driver for the fire engine up until his death. Later the Fire Brigade formed a guard of honour at his funeral.

"So you are Padre Lino. All the way down from Lima, I have heard of you. So tell me what you are doing!" With these words, the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal John Heenan, greeted Lynn, on his pastoral visit to the English priests working in Peru and Chile. He had been appointed to report back to Pope Paul VI about the new theological movements of liberation in Latin America.

Lynn sat with the Cardinal in an old truck outside the presbytery until one o'clock in the morning explaining the need to be close to the people. He said that some weekday Masses had been replaced by lay led liturgies using biblical themes. The Cardinal grew alarmed. He asked Lynn, *"Were your family not faithful Mass goers and did they not say the family rosary?"* He concluded by saying, *"I do admire your zeal however!"*

Not long after Cardinal Heenan's visit, Lynn received a letter from the Columban Superior General, Fr James Kielt, asking him why he should not be expelled from the Columbans. Thus began a period of stress and tension between Lynn and the Columban authorities until providentially a new Superior General was elected at the 1970 General Assembly and the issue was settled.

Lynn would often camp out overnight on mountain sides with university students who helped in the parish. Here Lynn would offer reflections on his favourite piece of scripture, *St Paul's Letter to the Romans*, chapter eight. They would make kites, tie them together to make one giant line and then release it into the mountain air. Lynn wrote about it, *"It just makes you want to live. There is so much joy and happiness in life"*.

Pope Francis would be proud of one of his priests who got out of the sacristy, to get *"the smell of the sheep"* on him. Yes, Lynn made his mistakes but the Pope says it's okay to take risks. His life was more powerful in death than when alive.



Letter from Pakistan

FR LIAM O'CALLAGHAN

Columban Fr Liam O'Callaghan has spent many years working in Pakistan. In his Christmas 2016 letter, he looks back over the events of that year.

Greetings to you from the 'land of the pure' which is the meaning of the word Pakistan. It is hard to believe that another year is almost over. I would like to share with you some of this year's happenings for me.

In January, I moved from Lahore to Hyderabad which is almost a 1,000km journey to the south of the country. After over 15 years in Lahore it was a big change for me as the provinces of Punjab and Sindh are quite different. Because of our falling numbers, now only five Columbans in Pakistan (four Irish and one from New Zealand), we decided to concentrate in one area

and so left Lahore after 35 years of ministry there. We will all be now based in Hyderabad diocese, where the Columbans have been working with the Parkari Kholi tribal group since 1983.

I am living in the parish house of the Cathedral parish in Hyderabad City and am involved in a number of different works. Bishop Samson Shukardin appointed me Coordinator of the Ecology Commission of the diocese and I have been busy working on the translation into Urdu of a shortened version of Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, 'On Care For Our Common

Home'. I have also been visiting many parishes and schools giving seminars on this topic and trying to create groups who will work on this issue. I am convinced that climate change and its effects is the biggest issue facing Pakistan today. The problem of unsafe drinking water is chronic. Surveys reveal that 80% of all illnesses in the country and 40% of all deaths result from it. We are looking into and researching different types of water filters, especially those that are affordable to the poor.

Another area of focus for me is *Interreligious Dialogue* (IRD) and one of the ways I am trying to work this out is



by working on the above issues with Muslim and Hindu individuals and groups, involved in these issues too. By working together on such issues for the common good, automatically peoples of different faiths are coming closer together and can help to dispel the misunderstandings which often are present. Working together on campaigns, social and political lobbying, trying to get the government and political leaders to provide clean water, working to mitigate the effects of climate change. are some of the areas we will be focusing on together. The Columban IRD website, www.columbanird.org is proving helpful in enabling people to engage with those of different faiths or none, in our increasingly multi-religious, multi-cultural world. Please feel free to share this website with anyone you think might use it or benefit from it.

Life in Pakistan continues to be a struggle for the majority of its estimated 200 million people. The biggest struggle by far is the ever growing extremism and ongoing violence. Provisional figures released show that so far in 2016 over 1,300 people have died in violent attacks, 732 'militants' killed in attacks by security forces, 423 civilians and 177 security force personnel. Suicide bombs and attacks occur at alarming regularity, some of the worst being the Easter Sunday suicide bomb attack at a park in Lahore, where 75 were killed, including many Christians, the Quetta police training centre attack in October where 64 security force personnel were killed and in November 54 people were killed in an attack on a Sufi shrine in Baluchistan.

Economically, Pakistan is struggling and mired in debt. The only hope of

economic improvement depends on its economic partnership with China. Pakistan has become central to China's broader infrastructure push across Eurasia. In 2015, both countries signed the agreement known as the *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor* (CPEC), in which China will invest \$51.5 billion in infrastructure projects, a planned network of roads, railways, fibre optic cables, power plants and gas pipelines. The government of Nawaz Sharif is banking on the CPEC to drag the country out of the economic doldrums, as well as return him to power in the 2018 general election. Twenty one billion dollars of this money is to fund power projects, unfortunately mostly coal plants and one nuclear plant, to increase electricity supply by over 50%. This is a central promise of his election campaign in 2013 and a chronic problem in the country which can have up to 12 hours of power cuts per day in summer. 10,000 Chinese workers are already present here working on many of these projects.

I wish you all the blessings you and your loved ones need at this time and especially pray that the new-born Prince of Peace be a source of good news, love and peace for you this Christmas and throughout the New Year.

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



Life in Pakistan continues to be a struggle for the majority of its estimated 200 million people.



Fr Liam O'Callaghan working in Pakistan with the people.

From Cork to China - a Columban journey

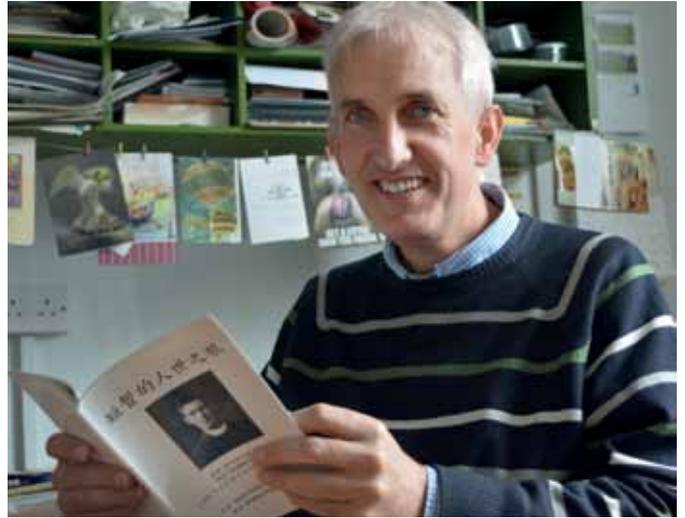
Columban Fr Dan Troy discusses with The Far East magazine his life as a missionary in China since ordination 16 years ago.

*F*orty-nine-year-old Fr Dan Troy hails from rural north Co Cork, Ireland. He grew up on a farm in Newtownshandrum and later studied civil engineering at university. While working as an engineer, he began to seriously consider a missionary vocation. *"I got to meet great people on the building sites but I decided I would at least try priesthood. I didn't want to wait until I was 45 and it would be too late".*

He joined the Columbans in 1991 and was ordained in 1999 when he was 32. After serving in St John's Parish in Limerick City for a year, in 2000, he was sent to China, where he has ministered ever since. When he was home recently on a visit, he brought with him a newly minted copy of the first Chinese language edition of 'A Journey Too Short' on Fr Charles Cullen (1897-1923), one of the early Columban missionaries to China, a subject he is deeply interested in.

Even after 16 years in China, Fr Dan continues to reflect on the real meaning of his presence in the country. *"It has to be a faith-based understanding. In spite of any publications we might do or stories we might write or projects we might engage in – it is all a drop in the ocean in terms of the scale of China. If we just disappeared in the morning, China is not going to miss a heartbeat".* He believes that the presence of people from overseas communicates how the Universal Church is deeply concerned about the Church and the people of China.

As to whether the people he encounters in China understand his presence, Fr Dan thinks they do at a deep level. *"It has been said to me by someone I knew for a number of years, a seminarian – 'You could have an easier life in another country but you have decided to come to China; that is good'. That in some way symbolises how they see it. The local people know how complicated it is with the restrictions. If people from overseas are willing to live with that uncertainty, the Chinese appreciate it. It is important to be there. China is the country with the biggest population in the history of the world, if the Church doesn't take that seriously, where are we going?"*



Columban Fr Dan Troy.

Fr Dan has seen some rapid changes in China over the past 16 years. *"I live in a city called Wuhan which has ten million people. It is a second-tier city. The Chinese define it that way. Beijing and Shanghai are the big metropolises and they get the major funding. The second-tier cities are considered less important. Wuhan would be a second-tier city but it still has a population of 10 million! The scale of everything in China is huge. When you tell people the size of Ireland they actually laugh".*

"The Church in China is a very small percentage of the country's population. There are 10 million Catholics in a population of over one thousand million... it is a small number of people. But these are a very dedicated people. They are still emerging out of a penal-time experience". He explains how in the 1950s all foreign missionaries were expelled, with the last Columban told to leave in 1954. Only Chinese clergy were left while the Church itself was under government control. The divisions today between the underground and overground communities in China are well known.

For Fr Dan, Pope Benedict XVI's Letter to the Catholics of China in 2007 was an important development. The Pontiff encouraged reconciliation, stressing that there was one



Church in China, though there are different experiences within that one community. *“People took that seriously, so there has been progress and while it is not complete, it is certainly better”.*

Though Fr Dan is known to be a Columban priest, officially his role in Wuhan is not as a parish priest. *“The government, without writing it down, have their own tolerance of what people like me can do. If it is small scale involvement, it is ok”.*

It is possible to get to know people locally within the Church. Fr Dan helps with the pastoral care of many Catholics from overseas who are working or studying in China at the Holy Family Parish in Wuhan. In addition, his skills as a spiritual director are often called on by religious communities. *“There are many missionary groups like ourselves who are making a specific contribution which is small in scale but collectively, along with all the other missionary groups, is a serious contribution”.*

He also helped set up a project for people with special needs. He started a sheltered workshop where participants are paid for the Christmas cards they make. Its first participant was Li Qiong, a young woman who is still with the project today. Due to her cerebral palsy, she had never been to school, and she was ten years of age before she began to walk, while her speech remains restricted. *“Her parents could never get her into school so she has never had any classmates – she has never had a job or workmates. She was isolated. Yet within three years of starting on the project, she got married and a daughter followed, a fine healthy girl”.*

Since arriving in Wuhan 16 years ago the years have flown for Fr Dan. It is a long way from Newtownshandrum, Ireland, to Wuhan, China. Nevertheless, Fr Dan’s life and ministry in Wuhan continues to flourish and answer the needs of local people.



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.*

'Climate change affects the poor and women', says Cardinal Gracias of Mumbai, India

"Women, the poor and the vulnerable are the first victims of climate change. We are administrators and we are not masters of creation. We have a moral obligation to protect and preserve it", Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay and President of the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)* told *Fides*, the Information Service of the Pontifical Mission Society.

He was speaking at a conference on climate change organized by the FABC that was titled, *'Climate change: the impact on vulnerable groups and from a women's perspective'*. The conference was attended by 45 delegates and experts from groups dealing with climate change in Bangladesh, Nepal and India.

The conference was intended to make a contribution through reflection and understanding of the phenomenon of climate change and its impact on the most vulnerable groups.

"The developed world remains the main cause of greenhouse gas emissions that have contributed to global warming. At the same time, developing countries and emerging economies (including South Asia) continue to contribute to greenhouse gas emissions because of their pressing development needs", explained Bishop Allwyn D'Silva, Executive Secretary of the Human Development Office in the FABC.

"It is urgent that all nations understand that climate is a common good that belongs to everyone and is for everyone.

The entire human race is called to acknowledge the need for changes in lifestyle, production and consumption to combat this warming or at least the human causes that aggravate it", said Deepika Singh, Office Coordinator for Climate Change in the FABC.



A poor woman with a child on the streets of India.

The fundamental task of the Church in Asia is to *"call all the baptized, and every person to radical conversion, to abandon excessive consumption and to choose a more sustainable way of life, for a renewed culture of respect for creation, of simplicity and sobriety, hope and joy",* added Bishop Jacob Mar Barnabas. He went on to say, *"guided by the social teachings of the Church, Catholic communities must promote green technologies, organic and sustainable agricultural production, responsible consumption, recycling, thus contributing to intergenerational justice".*

"To take action against climate change a sense of solidarity and a basic orientation to the common good are urgent and this can be achieved through a continuous education process of reflection-action", said Wendy Louis, Executive Secretary of FABC Office for the laity and the family.

For this reason the Asian Bishops will continue to operate in this field, at a reflection and action level.

Agenzia Fides - Mumbai, January 30, 2017

Photo: olegd/Bigstock.com

Mission Intention for March

That persecuted Christians may be supported by the prayers and material help of the whole Church.



From the Director

A poor woman in Chile says...

I am a little disoriented in my world at present; the world lurched with an earthquake's nudge when Britain withdrew from the European Union, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States of America and the spectre of terrorism still leaves us uneasy in Australia and New Zealand. An abiding sense of uncertainty grips us as nations display their inability to deal with people who are moving in their thousands across the globe.

In Australia, add the Royal Commission into sexual abuse in our Catholic Church and I ask myself: how do I move through Lent this year in preparation for Easter?

An answer came unexpectedly in an email from Fr Dan Harding, the editor of *The Far East* who is in Chile at present. He mentioned that he was celebrating Mass in one of the poorest areas of Santiago where the congregation is accustomed to participate in a communal reflection on the Sunday readings after a short homily from the priest. The gospel was from the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time where Jesus says that his disciples must be like 'the salt of the earth' and they must be 'the light of the world'.

Fr Dan was moved by the words of one of the women who spoke about how important it was to be like 'salt' and 'light'. She said then that we can help people see that Jesus is truly alive, not dead, not someone who lived a long time ago with good moral teaching, and not some mythological figure. She added that there is nothing worse than Christians who have lost their flavour; a Christian without the flavour of Jesus and the gospel is merely going through the motions.

Fr Harding said he had known this woman for many years. She is poor, ill-educated, married with children. He added that her reflection was moving because it was about what is important for a Christian believer – Jesus is real, alive, present and close.

In the light of this inspiration, how do I proceed with Lent? It seems to me that the practices laid down by the Church for Lent have the purpose of making Jesus real, alive, present and close. They sound strange and odd in our secular society but here they are: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

...a Christian without the flavour of Jesus and the gospel is merely going through the motions.

Prayer builds our relationship with God, especially through Jesus Christ. It is fundamental. Prayer makes us place God at the centre of our world, not ourselves.

Fasting makes us strong spiritually. Being able to say 'no' to oneself is important in many ways; the spiritual purpose of fasting is to make inner space for God.

Almsgiving reveals our relationship with others and our responsibility to them. It is probably the easiest of the three.

These practices are meant to bring Jesus Christ into the centre of our lives where He will be alive and dynamic. That's my aim this Lent.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fr Gary Walker
director@columban.org.au

Reaching out to cyclone victims

Pablo Rabakewa is a Columban Companion in Mission in Fiji and former Columban Lay Missionary in Chile. He tells of a recent visit to the cyclone devastated village of Veidrala.

At the 2016 annual gathering for the *Columban Companions in Mission* (CCIM) in Fiji, it was decided to make a pastoral visit to the village of Veidrala, which had been destroyed ten months previously by Cyclone Winston. This category five cyclone brought the strongest winds ever recorded in Fiji and the Pacific Basin. At the time of the visit, many of the families in the village were still living in makeshift shacks of scrap wood and corrugated iron, in tents and under tarpaulins.

Veidrala is an isolated village on the northeast of Fiji's main island, Vitilevu. It is a community of around 100 families making their living through farming coconuts and from fishing. Despite their isolation, over the years Veidrala has provided many excellent athletes, rugby and netball players.

There is no road into Veidrala from the highway. This means that the village children have to walk out to the highway every Sunday afternoon to catch a bus to the boarding school they attend during weekdays. They return home on Friday afternoons.

Villagers traditionally make their living selling coconut and marine produce at low prices to middle men who visit the village every Wednesday. These middle men then sell this produce at double the price in the large towns.

Our Columban outreach to the Veidrala villagers took place from December 4 -10, 2016. Fifteen Columban Companions in Mission from the towns of Ba, Labasa and the capital Suva, including several former Columban Lay Missionaries,

took part in this outreach. These were accompanied by two Fijian Columban priests, Frs William Lee and Iovane Gukibau.

In order to arrive at Veidrala, we had to travel two and a half hours by bus from Suva, then take a 45 minute boat ride. At a gathering of the villagers we presented our traditional Fijian gifts, introduced ourselves and explained the purpose of our visit.



The village of Veidrala, Fiji.

Our purpose was to spend time with the villagers, do house visitation and participate in the daily routine of "talanoa", which is the Fijian custom of storytelling. Story telling is a traditional part of Fijian culture and allows the participants to engage with post traumatic situations such as the experience of surviving Cyclone Winston and be able to express built-up emotions such as fear and sorrow. It also helps to develop hope for the future.



Most families are still living in poor makeshift housing. They have not been able to rebuild their homes.

Former Columban Lay Missionaries facilitated the different “talanoa” sessions on topics such as *Trauma and Timeline*, *Community Empowerment* and a special session for the village children. The children’s session started with a creation story, followed by a song and then the children acted out their stories during and after the cyclone. Former Lay Missionary Vulina Sakulu is a professional teacher. She gathered the responses of the children and helped turn them into a song.

During the daytime, the Columban team accompanied the villagers as they worked on their small farms or went fishing with them in the nearby sea. Important story telling sessions occurred during house visitations in the evenings when the Columban team gathered with families around the “tanoa”, the large wooden bowl from which the traditional Fijian drink of Yagona is ritually served.

What are the ongoing problems of the Veidrala villagers ten months after the cyclone? Most families are still living in poor makeshift housing. They have not been able to rebuild their homes. Coconut products are the major source of income for the villagers. All the coconut trees were destroyed in the cyclone and have not recovered. New coconut plants are urgently needed. Parents are worried that they will not be able to pay the school fees for their children during the 2017 school year.

During our outreach, the Eucharist was celebrated, Communion brought to the sick who were then anointed. While we accompanied the villagers, as they sought to recover from this natural disaster, through listening to them and spending time with them, we also spent time in prayer with them, asking that God would give them strength, insight and hope to rebuild their lives.



Columban outreach team, Veidrala, Fiji.

Our Columban outreach to the villagers of Veidrala was a powerful experience for all of us who participated. We were touched by the strong spirit of the people of Veidrala, as they gathered in true Fijian style in community, to rebuild their lives, organize and plan for a better future. We felt privileged to have accompanied the villagers as they work for that future. It was truly a blessing from God for all of us who participated.

Pablo Rabakewa is a Columban Companion in Fiji.



The aerial footage of Veidrala after Cyclone Winston.



Columban Fr Rafael Ramirez

I have to take the risk

A young Columban reflects on his missionary calling

"I have to be in Myanmar. I have to go. I have to take the risk. I know there will be a lot of frustration, difficulties and struggles, yet inside my heart I hear the voice of God gently saying, 'Go! You must go, you have to go'".

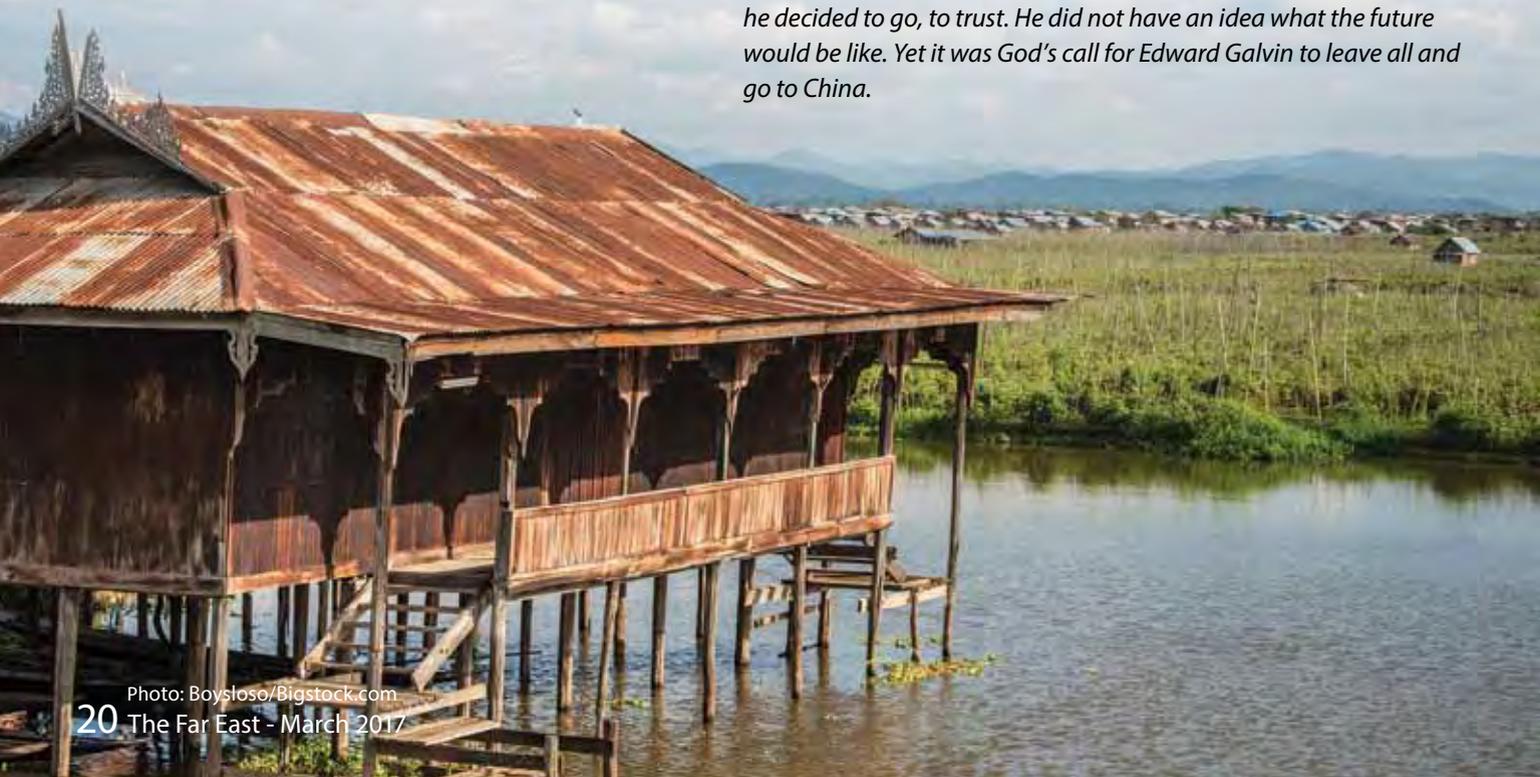
These are the words of recently ordained Chilean Columban priest, Fr Rafael Ramirez. He spent several weeks in Australia at the end of January on the way from Chile to his mission assignment, Myanmar. In Myanmar Fr Rafael will spend 2017 in the capital, Yangon, learning the Burmese language and then will move up to the north of the country to learn the Kachin language. He will then work amongst the Kachin people who live in an area of civil conflict.

"Until I ran into the Columbans by accident, I had never thought of being a priest. A priest, no way, I would have said. Then after meeting Columban missionaries who had come from Fiji to a remote area of Chile and lived amongst marginalized indigenous peoples, I thought to myself, why not be a priest! Something happened inside. I began to think differently. I was being called by God.

"I identify very much with the Columban co-founder, Bishop Edward Galvin. Something was calling him to China. Something had touched him deeply. He did not know what China would be like, yet he decided to go, to trust. He did not have an idea what the future would be like. Yet it was God's call for Edward Galvin to leave all and go to China.



Why go to a difficult and dangerous place like the north of Myanmar, engaged in a civil war. It seems crazy to them".





CHILE



MYANMAR

"All my university classmates have good jobs, good careers and bright futures. It is hard for them to understand why I am not with them. Why go to a difficult and dangerous place like the north of Myanmar, engaged in a civil war. It seems crazy to them.

"Yet the calmness I felt with my classmates at university about my future has all been stirred up and changed. The calm waters of my soul have been stirred up. God has placed his finger into my soul, stirring up my life and nothing will ever be the same again. God is calling me to go to Myanmar. I have free will. I could have refused the call if I wanted to. Yet despite what others feel, I know I have to go, I have to be there. I accept the call.

"When the apostles were called, they did not know what would happen to them. I do not know what it will be like in Myanmar. I am afraid but not paralysed. Maybe it will be very different from the way I think it will work out, but I have to see what God has in store for me in Myanmar. I will keep trusting in the Lord, keep moving forward".

The Far East wishes Fr Rafael all the best for his new mission in Myanmar and will keep him in our prayers. We thank him for his beautiful reflection.



Photo: DoozyDo/Bigstock.com





AUSTRALIA



JAPAN

In loving memory

Columban Fr Keith Gorman

Columban Fr Keith Gorman died at Mercy Place, Parkville, Victoria, on December 19, 2016 the day after the 73rd anniversary of his ordination and a month before his 97th birthday. Fr Keith was born in Brisbane, Queensland, an only son between two sisters.

He travelled to St Columban's Seminary, Essendon, to begin his seminary training in 1937. Then, because WWII made it unsafe to travel to Ireland, in 1940 he went to the Columban Seminary in Omaha, Nebraska, USA, to complete his theology studies. He was the first of a number of Australian and New Zealand Columban seminarians to do this during the war years. He was ordained in St Joseph's Cathedral, Buffalo, NY, on December 18, 1943.

Returning to Australia the following year, Fr Keith worked in a number of parishes until 1948 when he was appointed to China but this was changed to Japan after a few months in Shanghai. He studied Japanese language at Yokohama and was then appointed as pastor at the parish of Chigasaki, diocese of Yokohama. After vacation in 1955 he was appointed pastor at Yakatamachi in Wakayama City.

In 1964 Fr Keith was appointed to the Australian/New Zealand Region, stationed at first in the Columban House in Toowong, Brisbane. Then he did parish supplies for three years and Columban promotion work in the Perth Archdiocese. This was followed by a few years as Bursar at the Columban Seminary in Turrumurra and then as Vocations Coordinator in the state of New South Wales.



In 1975 Fr Keith began a ministry to the aged as chaplain at Nazareth House Aged Care, Turrumurra, Sydney. After a sabbatical and some studies in the subject of ageing Fr Keith continued in this ministry as chaplain to the retired Presentation Sisters at Windsor in Melbourne. Around the same time he helped to found ROTA - *Religious of the Third Age*, a social and spiritual organisation for retired Religious. During this period Fr Keith wrote a number of articles on the theme of ageing, some of which were printed in *The Far East*.

Fr Keith himself retired to St Columban's, Essendon, in 1997 and was a lively and cheerful presence there until a fall in September, 2012, resulted in hospitalisation and a subsequent move to Mercy Place Aged Care, Parkville, Victoria.

Fr Keith is remembered and loved as a humble man who always had time and respect for everyone. He excluded no one. He was fun-loving and always ready to laugh, share a joke – even one on himself – and join in whatever was going on. In one of his articles he wrote that his idea of heaven was having breakfast with Jesus on the shores of eternity following the scene in John 21. A Requiem Mass for Fr Keith was offered on December 23, 2016 at St Columban's, Essendon, by his Columban confreres, a number of his relatives, former associates and friends. He was laid to rest at Melbourne General cemetery, Carlton. May he rest in peace.

Taking action

SVDP SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERS



AUSTRALIA

On Friday August 12, 2016 St Vincent de Paul Primary School, Strathmore, Melbourne raised money for the Pehuenche people of Chile. The students asked sponsors to donate money for each lap, or to make a straight donation.

The students needed to walk around the school and parish grounds as many times as they could in 40 minutes. As social justice leaders we motivated the walkers to keep going and to go as far as they could.

"Our school decided to raise money in a walkathon to help the people of Chile replant the native forests because they have been chopped down. The Chilean people rely on the trees for traditional food and for their livelihood. They use the wood to make souvenirs and furniture to sell so they can provide for their families".

"The walkathon was successful as we raised \$5,797.35 . We felt very proud of each other for raising this amount of money during the walkathon. ***It was important that we developed awareness in the school community about what the countries have been through around the world and to take action as part of our mission as a Catholic school.*** We hope that these donations help them with what they are going through".

The St Vincent de Paul Primary School 'Social Justice leaders' are a group of school students who work to promote Social Justice awareness and action within the school.



SVDP Primary School students participating in the walkathon.



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To visit the imprisoned - Chile

Within the southern zone of Santiago, Chile, where Columban Fr Michael Hoban is Episcopal Vicar, there is an overcrowded prison with 1,300 male prisoners. In response to 'The Year of Mercy', Fr Michael and local parishes are making an extra effort to reach out to the prisoners, offering them spiritual accompaniment, pastoral care and material support.

With your help, Fr Michael can continue to work with these prisoners and provide them with the support they need.
(See pages 04-05)



Photo: Fr Michael Hoban SSC



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