

The Far East

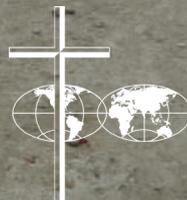
COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

March 2018



A tale of two brothers

The love for a brother.



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The Far East

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Fr John Boles visits a young paraplegic in Lima, Peru. (See story pages 12-13)

Photo: Fr John Boles SSC

From the Editor

The March issue of *The Far East* carries stories of the lives and work of Columban Priests, Sisters and Lay Missionaries and fundraising efforts from a small rural parish in Victoria.

In 2008 Columban Fr Willie Lee was ordained in Fiji and almost immediately was assigned to be in charge of *San Matias*, a sprawling parish of 90,000 people on the outskirts of Santiago, Chile. Fr Lee spent eight years there responding to the call of Pope Francis to go to the peripheries of society before returning to Fiji as Vocation Director.

Sr Susanna Choi is the new Congregational Leader for the Columban Sisters. You can read about her remarkable journey of faith. She was one of the first group of Columban Sisters that returned in 2003 to Myanmar where she began a programme in health-care and education.

The reflection - *The Last Supper*, by Columban Fr Shay Cullen challenges us to reflect on the life of Jesus. As St Paul says, we are called to imitate Him, 'to put on Christ' and be doers of the Word and not just listeners.

In our Centenary coverage we feature Columban Fr Tom Rouse who spoke out against the military coup in Fiji in 1987 and was forced to leave the country. We continue to receive a steady stream of 'Your Columban Story'. These stories are an important part of Columban history. Thank you.

Poverty in Peru is highlighted with the story of a wheelchair-bound paraplegic boy who cannot leave his home due to the steep and rocky terrain. Columban Fr John Boles visits David and is moved by the family's care and affection for him.

The people of *St Mary's* in Birchip, Victoria, were so moved by an article in the October 2017 *Far East* that they decided their annual fundraising would support the *Children's Centre of Yanaoca*, Peru.

The Vatican Museum is currently showcasing a new book: *Australia, The Vatican Museums Indigenous Collection* which features some of the earliest known documentations of Australian Indigenous cultures.

In his column Columban Fr Brian Vale speaks about the joy of returning to his home parish of *St Joseph's*, New

Plymouth, in New Zealand to see the faithfulness and vibrancy of the Mass-goers.

When the Director of the *Hope Workers Centre* in Taiwan assisted a young woman named Amy to document her story for transfer papers with the Council of Labor Affairs, she was shocked by the appalling treatment that Amy endured.

We read yet again of another disaster in the Philippines where Typhoon Vinta devastated villages and killed 39 people.

Columban Fr Tim Mulroy, originally from Ireland, recounts an amusing tale of when he visited school children in third grade. They spoke about St Patrick and the significance of the four leaf-clover. Kids continue to surprise us with their insights as Fr Tim found out.

Wishing you a happy Easter

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[Click here to listen](#)

Fr Willie Lee follows Pope Francis' call to go to the peripheries of society

MARK BOWLING

Growing up in Fiji, Willie Lee greatly admired the Columban missionaries who travelled across the world to serve the people of his island home.

His great-great-grandfather had welcomed the first Catholic priests to Vanua Levu or 'Big Land', the second major island of Fiji.

Little did young Willie know that one day he would become a Columban missionary. *"I saw that the Columban missionaries were people-oriented. They were always there with the 'grassroots people', crossing boundaries and cultures and learning another language,"* he said.

"The local people were very happy to see a foreigner speaking their own language. It gave them a feeling of belonging. And that's what caught my attention."

Willie Lee is the fourth child amongst six boys and three girls. His father expected that he would one day take over the family's kava growing business.

He studied farming. However, all the while, there was "a yearning within".

"It was very difficult for my father as he was looking forward to me taking over the family business, but it didn't happen the way he wanted. It was to be the way God wanted," Willie said.

"I started communicating with the Columbans, reading their Far East magazine, listening to their stories and seeing what they were doing with the Fijian people," he said.

"The sacrifices they made in their calling, in their missionary life, amazed me a lot. If these people can leave their family, come this far, eat the food we eat and

drink Kava and be happy on their mission, why can't I do this? That's what I was thinking about, looking at the Church, God and missionary life."

At 23 Willie Lee started nine years of formation as a Columban missionary: three years in Fiji, a spiritual year in the Philippines, pastoral work in Peru - where he learnt to speak Spanish - and theological studies at *Chicago's Catholic Theological Union*.

Finally he was ordained on August 2, 2008, and almost immediately he was assigned to be the Parish Priest in *San Matias*, a sprawling parish of 90,000 people on the outskirts of Santiago, Chile.

Fr Lee entered the tough world of the barrio slums, amongst the city's poorest. *"All these social challenges were there, drugs, prostitution, murder, gangsters and shootings, suicides and young pregnancies,"* he said.

Fr Lee said the people of the barrio welcomed him. As a missionary, his challenge was to "come down to the grassroots", to listen and understand the daily lives of the people.

"I left my country with my suitcase filled with my own culture, food and other things, but when I arrived, I learnt that I should have left with an empty suitcase. I needed to feel and learn new things from the people there. It was then that I started filling my suitcase through listening" he said.

There were times when Fr Lee feared for his life. Once he was conducting a wake for a drug dealer, in an apartment, protected outside by gun-wielding gangsters. There were fears that a rival drug gang might launch an attack.

"Suddenly I heard shooting outside. They were only firing their weapons in the air, but it was frightening," he said.

"One thing that struck me is that in the barrio there is a lot of respect for the priest. And when they can see us attending to the people's needs they protect us."

Fr Lee said he learnt a lot about being a priest and holding on to faith during his six years in the parish of *San Matias*.

"It is a challenge for us to respond to Pope Francis who is asking the Church to go to the peripheries, the edges," he said.

"I saw the periphery in the barrio because I lived there. I can be preaching about love and reconciliation from the pulpit every Sunday but if I am not practicing it then I feel in myself that it's nothing."



Columban Fr Willie Lee at his ordination in Fiji, 2008.

In 2016, Fr Lee was assigned back to Fiji as the *Columban Vocation Director* to promote vocations throughout the Pacific islands.

"Our Vocations can come from Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga and the Solomon islands. I promote vocations in schools and parishes and I enjoy this role immensely," he said.

Fr Lee accompanies the young seminarians for the first few years of their training before they move to the Columban seminary in Manila.

He said his own formation for missionary life was a great experience and one he could pass on to others.

"Great experience in crossing boundaries and learning another culture and another language was always the main charism of the Columbans in preaching the Good News," he said.

"We reach out to those people in need within society, especially the marginalized."

In 2017 Fr Lee attended Ignite, a national catholic youth conference in Brisbane sharing his experiences with participants.

Mark Bowling, Multimedia Journalist, The Catholic Leader, Brisbane.

Susanna, the seeker

IRELAND

SR MARIE GALVIN

Sr Susanna Choi SSC is the new Congregational Leader for the Columban Sisters. She shares her remarkable journey of faith with Sr Marie Galvin SSC.

Growing up in a farming family in Young Am in the Archdiocese of Gwangju, Korea, gave me a great love of nature and of country life. I was the second youngest of seven girls and with my sisters worked to help my parents on our family farm, so I am familiar with the joys and sorrows involved in this way of life.

Daily we walked the 30 minute journey to and from our local primary school. Like that of the majority of the pupils who attended our school, our family was not affiliated with any religion.

Near our school was a tiny chapel which always aroused my interest. A local catechist, attached to the Columban parish in the area, held classes in the chapel. I was curious and joined some of my friends who were preparing for Baptism. I heard, the 'seeking' call. I so wanted to be baptised when I was 11 years old but the catechist advised me to wait. Eventually two years later, permission was granted. I was so happy, my 'seeking' had found Baptism and the beginning of a whole new journey in faith. Columban, Fr Dan O'Gorman, baptised me in 1983 and I received the name Susanna. When I told my mother I was to be baptized a Catholic, she said: "Now you will have to be a good girl" and I replied "Yes I will".

Following my Baptism, as an enthusiastic Christian, I became active at the local chapel, helping to prepare the weekly liturgies with my companions all under the supervision of the catechist as the priest was able to visit only once a month. It was a precious time and experience for me as I continued my faith journey with joy.

I completed high school and went to Seoul to work. My elder sister was already there and she, too, had been baptized a Catholic.

My quest and seeking continued when I heard about the Columban Sisters' 'Vocation Days' which I attended. Again I felt a call and wished to enlist right away, but once again was advised to wait. This was not easy for me but in hindsight, it was right. I spoke with my parents and they gave me permission. My father said, "Go and try" while my mother's wish was that I remain in Korea rather than go overseas.

In 1994, at the age of 24, I made my profession as a Columban Sister. Following studies in Birmingham I qualified as a nurse and in 2003 became one of the re-founding group to go to Myanmar. It had been 36 years since our Columban Sisters were expelled from what was then known as Burma. Here I found great scope for my nursing skills among the desperately sick and poor Kachin people.

The political situation was dangerous but I yearned to cross boundaries to seek out the needy. Given the courage, freedom and trust of the Congregation "to go beyond and take risks", I was able to spread my wings to meet God in His beloved poor and sick where I experienced a real deepening of my faith.

The Kachin people allowed me to be myself. They loved and accepted me and this helped propel me on my missionary journey. It was a deepening of my faith that began by my seeking baptism in Korea. It was further nourished through the simplicity of life and warm relationships of the Kachin people.

As a missionary I am convinced that seeking leads to finding real treasures.

Sr Marie Galvin, Missionary Sisters of St Columban.



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Columban Sisters Kathleen Geaney (left), Susanna Choi, Rebecca Conlon and Angela Yoon (right).

New central leadership team for Columban Sisters

Susanna Choi is the new Congregational Leader. From Young Am, Gwang Ju Diocese South Korea, Susanna, a nurse, studied in England and Ireland. She is one of the first group of Columban Sisters that returned to Myanmar in 2003. She began a programme in health care and education, training local people in the Myitkyina area. This is of immense value to the villagers, most of whom had no access to a doctor. She also worked with others at preventing malaria. Her ministry took her on long distances which she travelled by bike, car and boat to reach outlying areas.

Angela Yoon from Seoul, South Korea, was sent to the Philippines for a term and later came to Dublin where she studied theology. After her studies she was sent to China where she engaged in retreat work and related education with the Christian community.

Rebecca Conlon from Miltown Malbay, Co Clare, was one of the first group of Columban Sisters to go to Pakistan in 1990. She worked in Christian communities, setting up many programmes for women, as well as leading on-going formation courses. She also spent some years in Korea and was novice mistress in Ireland.

Kathleen Geaney from Nenagh, Co Tipperary, a teacher, spent several years on mission in the Philippines before helping to open an international novitiate in Birmingham, UK. After a spell as Congregational Leader, she was sent to Myanmar as a teacher and engaged in on-going dialogue with the Buddhists.

[Click here to listen](#)

The Last Supper

FR SHAY CULLEN



*B*efore we leave on a journey, move house or migrate abroad many of us like to gather with family and friends. We give them a parting gift, something symbolic so our love and friendship will be remembered and our life will be recalled and cherished. It can be a photograph or favourite book, a recorded video or audio message.

Jesus left no such mementos by which to be remembered. He left something greater, He left Himself present to all.

The meal of bread and wine, the Last Supper, the Eucharist, is much more than a farewell party, more than a religious rite and more than a religious obligation.

It's a unique spiritual event through which Christians experience His presence and during which the redemption of humankind that He brought about by his life, death and resurrection is re-enacted and renewed.

During the Eucharist we are called to be true and faithful disciples - to be another Christ. We are called to serve others



The preaching of Jesus and his compassion for the poor and the outcasts was at the heart of the Kingdom of God. He uplifted their human dignity and restored them in the 'image and likeness of God'.

as Jesus did - helping the poor, lifting up the downtrodden, releasing captives, healing the sick, challenging the causes of poverty and oppression, helping orphans and widows. This is the way to extend His presence and love in the world - through unselfish service.

It was not by chance that Jesus shocked his disciples during the Last Supper when He began to wash their feet. This was the work of a domestic servant and Peter refused until Jesus told him he could not be a disciple unless he accepted.

He gave them and us this example of discipleship. This is an important part of the Eucharist, it bonds us to Jesus and to each other in a commitment without asking for rewards.

A true disciple must take an active stand for the truth, justice and dignity of every person. The Eucharist not only gives us the spiritual power to embrace such principles but the courage to act for and on behalf of the abused, exploited, sick and the hungry. When this meaning is lost and the Eucharist becomes more of a church ritual than a dynamic call for commitment to community service then we will have empty pews and fewer Christians.

The preaching of Jesus and his compassion for the poor and the outcasts was at the heart of the Kingdom of God. He uplifted their human dignity and restored them in the 'image and likeness of God'.

All were to be treated equally as children of God. That's the basis of our declarations on human rights as we know them today. When we defend them we are taking a stand as Jesus did. We take the risks He did.

He paid the ultimate price for his unwavering faithfulness to the Father - death by crucifixion. The rulers of the day saw Jesus as a threat to their power and authority. Before He was falsely accused, arrested, tortured and executed, He left us the Eucharist.

Food and drink are the essentials of life, spiritual and physical. The symbolism and the reality became one when He and His disciples celebrated the Jewish Passover meal. This recalled the historical deliverance of the Jewish people

from the slavery of Egypt when Moses led them into the desert, into a covenant with God.

During the supper Jesus broke the bread and gave it to his disciples and said *"This is my body which is given for you, do this in memory of me.* In the same way, he gave them the cup after the supper saying, *"This cup is a new covenant sealed in my blood, poured out for all."*

When Jesus told his disciples and believers to *"Do this in memory of me,"* it wasn't just a sentimental ritual he left, but a memorial of his life, death and resurrection. That is why reading and reflecting on the Gospel account of His life is so important. We are called to imitate Him, *"to put on Christ"* as St Paul says and be doers of the Word and not just listeners.

The Eucharist is the moment when Jesus is present among us, inspiring us to go out and preach his Word and fulfil his mission. We can't be true to Him if we don't bend down and *"wash a foot."*

Through faith in Jesus Christ we are one with God. When we break the bread and share the cup we celebrate this and commit ourselves to imitate Him and continue His mission to transform the world. Above all, the Eucharist is the living presence of Christ who is always with us.

Columban Fr Shay Cullen has been a missionary in the Philippines since 1969.



MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST. COLUMBAN

Sharing Gospel Joy

Where are they now?

Columban Centenary - Fr Tom Rouse

After spending almost 23 years in Fiji, Fr Tom Rouse returned to his homeland in 2014 as the Columban Mission Coordinator for New Zealand. He is also the New Zealand Coordinator for *Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation* (JPIC).

Edited from *The Far East* magazine, August 1989: *During Fr Tom's first twelve years in Fiji, he became fluent in Fijian and well versed in local customs. He was concerned for the poor, including workers and squatters, and the inequalities of the social system. Having studied social analysis in France, he spent a number of years helping trade unionists, rural and religious communities to understand why there was a gap between the rich and poor and to develop ways of overcoming these inequalities by standing up for the rights of the poor.*

Since Fr Rouse had spoken out against the military coup of 1987, the Rabuka regime has been out to silence him. On the first anniversary of the 1987 coup, he took part in a prayer gathering in Suva's Sukuna Park. There was a large crowd. The police eventually arrested 18 people. These included Columban Frs Tom Rouse, John McEvoy and Paul Tierney. The group were charged with unlawful assembly. They were also subjected to gassing in the police station. After only one night, they were released. Their trial lasted for about nine months. On the final day of the trial, they were all discharged without conviction.

On April 21, 1989, the government refused to renew his work permit. To the distress of his parishioners of Raiwaqa parish, Fr Tom was forced to leave the country four days later! There was no legal process of appeal that the parishioners or their bishop could adopt to appeal against his deportation.

On the day of his expulsion, a local journalist wrote an article in The Fiji Times, mourning the loss of a "true Christian". Many people came to the airports at Nausori and Nadi to farewell Fr Tom.

In 2004, Fr Tom returned to work in Fiji, first as Assistant Parish Priest in the parish at Ba, then for two three-year terms as Columban Regional Director for Fiji, firstly in 2007 and then in 2010.



Fr Tom Rouse (left) being welcomed by Fr Trevor Trotter (right) on his arrival into Sydney in 1989.

Your Columban story

Benefactors share with us...

Sr Alice from Auckland wrote:

The Far East is an inspiring magazine. Just yesterday one of our Sisters told me how it inspired her when she was growing up. I decided then to write my COLUMBAN STORY. So here it is...

The Far East was eagerly read in our home. It helped nurture my desire to be a missionary. The missionary stories were exciting, the pictures vivid and attractive. I loved Mickie Daly's Diary! I also loved the picture of Jesus and his apostles in the wheat field on the back of the Calendar with words like, "The harvest is great and the labourers few." My youngest sister, Frances, worked with the Columbans in Fiji and I was missioned to Samoa for many years. We are both Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. I was 60 years professed, December 8.

Thank you for your witness. Keep on visiting the schools. I remember Fr Rillstone's visit when I was in school. We were also in awe of Fr Vernon Francis Douglas' life story. When studying in the Philippines I visited the church where he was tortured. My sister also shared on her contact with and admiration of the priests she worked with in Fiji.

Mary from New Zealand wrote:

My mother Patricia Douglas always got the Far East magazine. Her brother Vernon Douglas (Father Francis Vernon Douglas) was killed in the Philippines during WW2. I have continued to support the work of the Columban Fathers and look forward to getting my copy of their magazine every month.

I never knew my uncle because he died before I was born but I often think of him and ask him to look after my two sons. He is a very special person in our family and has a special place in our hearts.

*I pray that one day we will find out where he died. **We only know he was taken away in a truck by the Japanese after he was brutally tortured.** He is a martyr for his faith. Maybe one day he will be recognized as a saint in New Zealand.*

If you would like to share your Columban story with us, in 100 words or less, send your story and photo (optional) to:

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PO Box 752
Niddrie VIC 3042 **OR**
E: tfe@columban.org.au



A tale of two brothers

FR JOHN BOLES

Sometimes you come across a bond of love that makes you feel really humble. This is what happened to me when I met Josè and David.

Josè and David Ayala are brothers. I met Josè first in 2014 when I arrived at the Columban parish of *Saints Columban and Francis Xavier* on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. Josè was a young and cheerful catechist, working with young children. So good was he that soon I asked him to run the First Communion programme in one of our chapels. It was much later that I met David. David doesn't come to church, for a good reason.

David is paraplegic. Since birth he has been almost entirely paralyzed from the neck down. He can hear and make sounds, but he can't speak. Although in his mid-twenties, he has a mental age of about four.

David has a wheelchair. In fact, he has been confined to one for most of his life. At first I wondered why Josè and his parents never wheeled David to church, especially when we had our annual Mass for the sick. "Come and see why," Josè told me one day and invited me to his home.

It soon became clear why David was never brought to church. The family is desperately poor, but, more to the point, their flimsy two-room wooden house clings precariously to the side of a hill. Around Lima, the Andes Mountains sweep right down to the sea and the poorest inhabitants are often forced to live on the barren upland slopes where land is less expensive.

The hill where the Ayala family lives is rather special. It has been continuously settled since prehistoric times, and is pitted with archaeological sites. Part of it is occupied by a huge and ancient cemetery, famous in Lima as the place where the poor were buried. Nowadays the local authority has constructed great funerary walls, and bodies are inserted into niches built into these walls. This is the cheapest way to bury people in Peru. However, not so long ago, bodies were invariably buried clandestinely in shallow graves, and it is not unusual to find your feet crunching through old bones if you stray from the designated paths.

The track up to the Ayala household is steep and rocky, totally unsuitable for wheeled traffic. On arrival, Josè presented me to David, his elder brother by three years. A relative was sitting with David. "He can't be left alone", explained Josè. "He is strong and can rock his wheelchair, even until it tips over."

I asked after the other members of the family, father Apolonio, mother Yolanda and younger brother Tony. "Tony is out most of the day studying", Josè told me. "Mamá and Papá work. They leave very early and come back at night". They are market gardeners, specializing in flower-growing. Due to Lima's meteoric growth in recent years, they have to travel ever further to suitable fields. "Normally they leave at 5:00 am but it can be earlier", remarked Josè. This is six, sometimes seven days a week.

So the main burden of looking after David falls on Josè's shoulders. He looks after him during the day, caring for him and feeding him. You'd think a young man like Josè would resent being tied down like this, but he is not. "It really isn't a problem for me, having a brother like David. I've looked after him for as long as I can remember. You just need a lot of patience. He's like a child. Sometimes he plays with me" continues Josè. "I'll be feeding him when he suddenly closes his mouth and looks away. Then, when I'm moving off, he'll turn his head back and open his mouth again. Then he'll shake with laughter. It'll be his little joke."

This really moved me. Even more surprising was Josè's view of the effect David has had on them all. "We have a great affection for David. He's kept us united as a family. Maybe he's been God's way of keeping us together."

Josè receives some help from his Aunt Rosa, who lives nearby. If Josè has to go out, she'll sometimes come round to mind David for him. She brings her three year old granddaughter Aiko, who has become great friends with David. Aiko will dance round him, and he'll reward her with big toothy grins.

In the evenings, Josè works part-time in a call centre, but he wants to go back to college to continue his education. "I'd like to get a good job", reflects Josè. "I'd like to earn enough money so we could get a house down on the flat, where we could take David out, wheel him around, take him to the church and the park and so on."

I asked Josè what particular career he'd have in mind. "What I'd really love" he tells me, "would be to qualify as a physiotherapist. Then I could spend all my life helping people like my brother."

Like I said, some people's devotion to others makes you feel humble indeed.

Columban Fr John Boles has worked in South America for over 20 years.

Fr John Boles with brothers José and David Ayala in Peru.



Birchip parish takes action

NOELINE HOGAN

After reading an article in The Far East (October 2017), organisers at St Mary's parish in Birchip¹ decided they had found the ideal beneficiary for their annual fundraising effort held in November, 2017. The piece was entitled "Peruvian Children Find Safety; the Children's Centre of Yanaoca, Peru".



The article explained how the area of Yanaoca is a very impoverished region in a country where over 44% of the population live below the poverty line. The *Children's Centre of Yanaoca* began with the initiative of a few Columban benefactors and their concern for the survival of children during a couple of years of intense cold. With the assistance of generous benefactors, the Parish Priest, Fr Young-In Kim, was able to convert an existing building owned by the parish into the new *Children's Centre*.

This space is not just a place where children can come to play in safety; it's a learning place where they can attain valuable skills for their future life including hand crafts, painting, music and communication skills.

With that in mind, we went ahead to organise a youth Mass followed by a fundraiser for the children of Yanaoca in Peru. Children of Grade Five to Year Nine participated in the liturgy of the Mass including the offertory, prayers of the faithful, singing and playing the keyboard and liturgical

Photos: Noeline Hogan

dancing. This was the first time in a long time that liturgical dancing had been introduced at Birchip. These dancers were aged from kindergarten to Year Four and made us all smile with the looks of concentration on their faces. Fr Eugene McKinnon made everybody feel welcome and relaxed and thoughtfully managed to include everyone in his acknowledgements.

Following a buoyant Mass, we went across to the Parish Centre (formally the Catholic primary school: *The Immaculate Heart of Mary Primary School*, Birchip, closed at the end of the year 2000). Here the children organised their own activities including nail painting, neck massages, lucky dips, a golf putting competition. We had to put Fr Eugene on a huge handicap due to his golfing prowess and a basketball hoop throwing competition, which we allowed him to enter even though he shot very successfully!

It was a hot muggy day at the start of our annual harvest of canola, barley, wheat and legumes in the north west of Victoria, but spirits were high even if a lot of the men folk were otherwise busy with their harvest to attend our fundraiser. The main attraction for the adults was a Dutch auction where some randomly donated goods were wrapped and auctioned off. Packets of lollies and jars of tomato paste sold for around \$20.00. The amount of excitement that surrounds a mystery gift is astounding and also the degree that these wonderful parishioners were keen to go to donate towards such a wonderful cause, is admirable. It was a joyous auction with lots of laughs involved.

We raised just over \$700.00, which is the most our little community has ever collected at one morning tea fundraiser. And it is with great pride that we hand over this money to support Fr Young-In Kim and his children's centre. The morning brought us all so much pleasure and we hope that we were able to pass that happiness onto the beautiful youth from the parish of *Santiago Apostol* in Yanaoca.

Noeline Hogan, parishioner of St Mary's Parish in Birchip.

¹ *Birchip is located on the southern edge of the Mallee in N.W. Victoria, approximately 320 km from Melbourne with a town population of 822 and an area population of 1200. The farms in the area typically grow wheat, barley, canola, and other cereals. Some people farm pigs, turkeys, ducks and cattle but most livestock in the district are sheep.*



Birchip nail painting.



With the assistance of generous benefactors, the Parish Priest, Fr Young-In Kim, was able to convert an existing building owned by the parish into the new Children's Centre.



St Mary's Catholic Church, Birchip.

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.*

Mission Intention for March

That the Church may appreciate the urgency of formation in spiritual discernment, both on the personal and communitarian levels.



New Vatican publication highlights Indigenous art, culture

When people think of the Vatican Museums, minds turn to Michelangelo and Raphael. But a new book celebrates the prominent place of Indigenous Australian art and culture on display at the much-visited attraction.

Australia – The Vatican Museums Indigenous Collection, which features some of the earliest known documentations of Australian Indigenous cultures, was officially launched in Canberra in December, 2017. The publication was a joint project of Aboriginal Studies Press and the Vatican Museums.

Fr Nicola Mapelli, curator of the Ethnological Collections at the Vatican Museums, was in Australia for the launch. He had visited the Kimberley and the Tiwi Islands, among other Indigenous communities, in preparing for the publication of the book.

Fr Mapelli said the Australian exhibit at the Vatican Museums is the first one visitors come across after leaving the Sistine Chapel – a nod to the place of Indigenous Australians as the oldest continuous culture in the world.

“This publication shows how important it is to connect with Aboriginal people and to show respect for their culture which is as important as a painting of Michelangelo or a painting of Raphael.”

Bishop Christopher Saunders of Broome, where many of the pieces in the Vatican Museums and many of the items featured in the catalogue originate from, said Indigenous communities will treasure the publication.

“It is a reflection of the Vatican’s respect for those peoples, who have suffered greatly in this country but I believe are emerging from those times into something positive. I know it will be immensely popular among our people.”

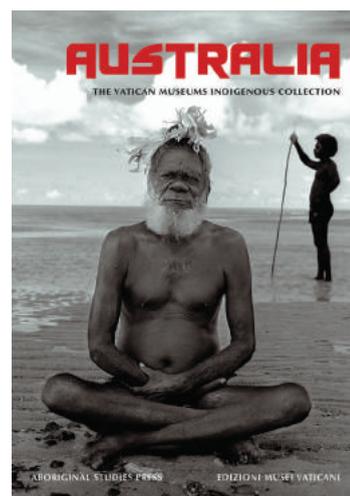
In addition to showcasing Indigenous art and culture, the book also contains 18 essays from Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors.

The book’s editor, Australian National University historian and ethnologist, Katherine Aigner, said the development of the publication brought many Indigenous communities together, sparking conversations between young and old about the history of various objects, their stories and their significance.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, as well as local dioceses and religious orders, provided financial and other assistance to support the project.

As well as items dating back 150 years or more, the book also features on its back cover the artwork ‘Pilgrimage’, which was given to Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 to mark the canonisation of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

Fr Mapelli said the image, which depicts the convergence of Indigenous Australia and the Roman Catholic Church, is a fitting metaphor for the publication’s ability to bring together and celebrate those two distinct heritages.



Front cover of the Vatican Museums Indigenous Collection.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Photo: Katherine Aigner

From the Director

Being present to others

I always enjoy returning to my home parish of St Joseph's, New Plymouth, in New Zealand over the Christmas period. There is something refreshing and nourishing about going back to familiar places and meeting again with friends. Each year I visit there are fewer familiar faces and many of those faces have a couple more wrinkles but somehow that makes the encounters and the conversations more poignant and significant. As a returning visitor I appreciate that I bring a limited, outsider's view and there is a curiosity in me about all the new faces from many different ethnic backgrounds which now make up this constantly changing parish community. At a lively Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve I noticed a woman in a beautiful bright coloured sari walking into church behind more casually dressed long term locals and I quietly mused at the contrast of dress styles in our modern church communities.

I was also impressed by the faithfulness of the regular Mass-goers. Simply being present to others is a significant dimension of any community and I wondered about the variety of reasons which drew together the individuals attending those Eucharists. For some it is obviously a chance to pray together as a community on a regular basis. Many would probably be seeking the social nourishment of human company as there was a noticeable vibrancy about the way parishioners greeted each other when they gathered. The familiar faces for me were mostly the older parishioners and many of them would presumably be regular attenders because they are seeking that sense of community. In our sacred scriptures we read and hear about the faithfulness of God but there is also something uplifting and inspirational in the faithfulness of our regular attendance at community Eucharists.

It is clear to me why refugees and recent arrivals from overseas value the solidarity that they enjoy when they gather with their own ethnic groups. For Christians that often means attendance at Eucharists, and for people of other faiths it can also be at their gatherings for prayer. These gatherings can play a vital role in the stability of our social fabrics. Every thread of different colour, the old and the new, is valued in the structure and the weaving of our social fabrics. And yet when people face persecution or oppression

they will always take huge risks to let go of their homes and communal networks in order to seek a new life, security and safety in other lands, especially for the sake of their families.

All of us seek life and love in many different ways because ultimately we are all reaching out for the life and love of God. That striving for life and love draws many of us into our Eucharistic communities. Such communities are built up and shaped by the stirring of the Holy Spirit within each of us. It is that same Spirit which draws us out from our dwellings to be nourished as we pray together and then sends us out again to hand on the Good News to others. It is those moments together where we can tap into the God-energy which can carry us quietly through our weeks of stress and busyness. Those experiences of being shaped by the Spirit can help us overcome the moments of doubts and inner darkness when they arrive.

During the Eucharists I attended at home I was also reminded of the different ways the Spirit was working through the variety of ministers, each with their different role and different charisms but all co-operating. There were readers, choirs, musicians and Eucharistic ministers as well as altar servers alongside the priest. Many of the Eucharistic ministers were sent out at the end of the gathering to carry the Eucharistic experience beyond to the sick at home.

I think the gift of this Christmas experience in my home town challenged me once again to be open to the multitude of ways in which the Holy Spirit is working and shaping our world. What did you get for Christmas?



Fr Brian Vale
director@columban.org.au





Human being or beast of burden

BETH SABADO

I first met Amy from the Philippines after she was brought to the Hope Workers' Centre in Taiwan. The Centre provides temporary shelter, assistance and counselling for exploited workers, victims of labour and/or sex trafficking.

When Amy spoke about her life in Taiwan, she made it sound amusing. However, when she was requested to document her story for transfer papers with the Council of Labor Affairs, we discovered that it was far from amusing.

Amy's reason for working abroad is the same story that we hear over and over again from migrant workers: marriage to an unemployed spouse, a need to provide a better life for family members, good education for children, food and accommodation.

Amy accepted a 'fly-now pay-later' arrangement with an agency to work as a caregiver in Taiwan.

Each month for 12 months, \$440.00 would be deducted from her salary, totalling \$5,280.00, which was the cost of her placement fee. According to the law, the legal placement fee should

only be a month's salary (\$700.00) plus other documentation, processing and miscellaneous charges not exceeding \$1,550.00.

Amy arrived in Taiwan on September 8, 2010, as caregiver to an elderly woman who passed away two months after she arrived. She was



then transferred to work for another employer and was again contracted to work as a caregiver. However, her new 'ward' was healthy and Amy was made to work on the farm. When anyone asked her employer what Amy's nationality was, the employer answered, *"ta hao ben, mei you yong, bu dong, ben dan de feilubin ren"* (she is so stupid, useless, doesn't understand anything, brainless Filipino).

Amy began work at 8:30 am taking pig and chicken manure, her ward's urine and faeces, leftover vegetables and leftover food to the compost fertilizer which was left to rot and produce worms. The smell was so overwhelmingly foul that Amy rarely ate lunch and developed migraines, dizziness and shortness of breath.

Each day at 2:30 pm she returned to her employer's house where other

chores awaited her. At 4:00 pm she returned to the farm where she carried out heavy manual work until 7:00 pm. Her day was still not over when she returned home.

Lack of rest, stress, exhaustion, and lack of sleep took a toll on Amy's health. Her hair began to fall out and her gums began to bleed. She was afraid to complain. Her thoughts were of her family and the obligation of repaying her loan gave Amy the strength and determination to see out her contract.

Amy said she was treated like a beast of burden. She said that her employer did not need a caregiver but a farmer and a *caribao* (a water buffalo).

Showing her very dry and calloused hands, she said, "I am a woman but they asked me to do a man's work. I work like a carabao."

Amy called her broker repeatedly to inform him about her situation but the broker replied that if she really wanted to change employer she would need to pay him almost \$900.00 and he would take her to China to work. Amy suffered in silence, endured one year of abuse and repaid her loan. The love of her family and trust in God gave her the strength to get through it.

While at the *Hope Workers Centre*, Amy had a medical check-up while waiting for her documents to be transferred to another employer. Hopefully a more compassionate one this time.

Beth Sabado is a Columban Lay Missionary and was the former Director of the Hope Worker's Centre in Taiwan. She is presently the Lay Missionary Co-ordinator in the Philippines.

A mosque in the area destroyed by the typhoon.



Philippines takes another hit

FR OLIVER MCCROSSAN

The villages of Pansur and Mindalano, in the municipality of Salvador, Lanao del Norte, Mindanao, were devastated by Typhoon Vinta last December 22, 2017. Heavy rains caused by the typhoon resulted in a flash flood. The river overflowed its banks and logs, huge boulders, uprooted trees and mud flowed down the mountains and destroyed everything in its path: people, houses, all their belongings, domestic animals and the crops in the fields.

A total of 39 bodies were recovered including those of children, adults and elderly. According to the reports six people are still missing.

Columban Missionaries have served the people in the parishes of Tubod and Salvador and other parishes in the diocese of Iligan for many years.

The villages of Pansur and Mindalano are situated in the mountains and access over rough roads is difficult. Most

of the residents are Muslims. The people in the village rely on agriculture, growing bananas, coconuts, corn and other root crops.

On January 5, 2018, the **Pedalling to Live and Green Shelter* staff, Virgenia Vidad, Program Manager and other volunteers, along with the *Department of Agriculture from the Municipality of Salvador*, organized a visit to Pansur and Mindalano, two villages that were devastated by typhoon Vinta. A total of 108 families have lost their properties, their farms and animals.

Many of them talked about the loss of members of their families and their homes and all their possessions in the flood. In the meantime they are living with their relatives. Some have started to rebuild their homes using the logs that have been carried down from the mountains by the flood.

Many are traumatized from the horrific experience, particularly the small children who have lost parents and siblings.

We spoke to the chairman of Pansur and the chairman of Mindalano, both of whom are survivors. They shared that this was the first tragedy of this kind in their area. It has destroyed their community. They are all in deep shock. All the families have horrific stories to tell.

After visiting the evacuation site, we visited the disaster area, a forty minute walk away. According to the people, the typhoon dumped a huge amount of rain in the mountains above the village causing landslides to destroy everything in the villages, taking many lives and destroying farmlands.

A major reason for the calamity is the lack of forest cover in the surrounding mountains. Indiscriminate logging of the forest without any replanting in the 1970's and 1980's is a major cause of this disaster. The logging companies are long gone, but the land and its people are still suffering from the effects of their destructive activities.

Typhoon Vinta has caused damage all over Mindanao. Hundreds of lives have been lost, thousands are homeless, crops and people's livelihoods suffered huge damage. Typhoons are more common now and more severe than before. The effects of climate change are clearly to be seen in the destruction caused by Typhoon Vinta and other typhoons.

The government services are doing what they can with limited resources. Help is still needed. Housing materials, food, clothes and farm implements are in short supply.

One thing is certain, it will take a long time for the people who survived to rebuild their shattered lives.

Columban Fr Oliver McCrossan worked in the Philippines for over 42 years and is now back in Ireland.

**The Pedalling to Live programme was founded by Columban Fr Oliver McCrossan.*



Virgenia Vidad (left) & Fr Oliver McCrossan (right) with beneficiaries of the aid.



The luck of the Irish

FR TIM MULROY

"What do you know about Ireland?" I asked the third grade class that was excited to have just learnt that I was from there. *"St Patrick was from there"* responded a girl in the front row. *"So did that mean that he was Irish?"* I inquired, my tone betraying an element of doubt. *"Yes!"* came back a chorus of voices, filled with disbelief that I would even pose such a question.

"So what did St Patrick do in Ireland?" I asked. *"He told the people about God. He was a missionary,"* responded a boy in the third row. *"And how was it that St Patrick knew about God, while the Irish people around him knew nothing?"* I inquired. *"Because God told him and God sent him"* replied a shy girl at the back of the class, unable to endure my frivolous questions any longer. *"Let me see if I can get this clear"* I dared to say, *"St Patrick, who was from Ireland, was sent by God as a missionary to the Irish?"* A sea of little heads bobbed vigorously in agreement.

It was clear to me by now that these third grade students were unimpressed by my questions about such obvious matters, so I tried to steer the conversation in a different direction. *"What else do you know about Ireland?"* I ventured to inquire. *"There are four-leaf clovers there and if you*

“

And how was it that St Patrick knew about God, while the Irish people around him knew nothing?"

find one it will bring you luck" responded a freckled boy, whose ancestors might well have been Irish. *"And why is it lucky to find a four-leaf clover?"* I mused aloud. *"Because one day when St Patrick was preaching to the people, he picked up a four-leaf clover and used it to explain the Trinity",* he responded enthusiastically. Unable to conceal my amusement, I asked, *"What was his explanation?"* After a brief silence, the students looked quizzically at one another, puzzled as to why an explanation was necessary!

While this conversation took place in a school near to where I now live, it reminded me of many other encounters I had as a missionary in other cultures. There were times when I

Photo: Kerdkanno/Bigstock.com

sensed that my concerns and questions mattered little to the local people. There were other times when I felt that my communication skills were inadequate, or that I lacked the patience and perseverance needed for a meeting of minds and hearts with those who saw the world from a different vantage point.

Just as I was leaving the classroom, the freckled boy raised his hand to get my attention and then proclaimed jubilantly, "The four-leaf clover is for the four Gospels that St Patrick used to tell the Irish about the Trinity that's why it's lucky and that's why there's the luck of the Irish!" Could it be that this boy will one day become a Columban missionary? I thought and with that I burst out laughing.

Columban Fr Tim Mulroy served in Japan for many years and is currently the Columban Director of the United States Region.



The four-leaf clover is for the four Gospels that St Patrick used to tell the Irish about the Trinity that's why it's lucky and that's why there's the luck of the Irish!" Could it be that this boy will one day become a Columban missionary?



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A tale of two brothers - Peru

Abject poverty and living in a flimsy two-room wooden house that clings to the side of a hill prevents a young paraplegic from ever leaving home.

Fr John Boles trekked up the steep and rocky hill to visit David after hearing that it was impossible for David to attend church, especially the Mass for the sick.

With your help, we hope to continue supporting those living on the barren upland slopes.



Photo: Fr Johns Boles SSC



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