

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

April 2018



Seminarians **spend**
time in Chile

A life-changing experience.



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Adelaide seminarians have a life-changing experience in Chile. (See story pages 20-21)

Photo: Fr Daniel Harding SSC

From the Editor

I'm sure that many of you will be as surprised as I am that Easter has come upon us so quickly once again. It is surely indicative of how busy our lives have become. Thinking about 'all things busy' jolted me into questioning the relevance of leading such a chaotic life. Who is it for? Why am I doing it? Is it helping anyone? Hopefully Easter will provide a time to reflect on the fact that Christ died so that we might no longer live for ourselves alone. In this edition of *The Far East* magazine you will read many fine examples of those living for others.

One such example is the work of Columban Fr Neil Magill from Myanmar who is assisting in providing education, housing, food and medical assistance to young men.

In Peru, Columbans are preparing to say farewell to their parishioners in the parish of *Our Lady of the Missions* where they have ministered for 22 years.

The reflection on Easter by Columban Fr Pat O'Shea points out that 'the devil is in the details'. A fascinating read.

Columban Fr Robert McCulloch is featured in the Centenary coverage of 'Where are they now?'. He has worked

in the Philippines, Pakistan and now in Rome as Procurator General for the Society of St Columban. 'Your Columban Story' featured in this section is another reminder of how faithful our Columban benefactors are.

It is heartening to receive articles of ordination to the priesthood and to the diaconate and of the diocesan seminarians from Adelaide who visited Chile recently.

In November, 2017, Fr Pat Visanti was ordained to the priesthood and was the first Columban priest from the island of Rotuma, nearly 600 kms north of Fiji.

In the Philippines a young Columban seminarian from China knelt before Bishop Honesto Ongtioco to be ordained a deacon.

Last year two Adelaide diocesan seminarians participated in a pastoral experience with Columban Fr Dan Harding in the parish of *San Columbano*, in Santiago, Chile.

In 'Mission World' we read of the Muslim faithful appealing for an end of spreading disinformation in Marawi, the Philippines, that could provoke discord between Christians and Muslims.

In his column, Fr Brian Vale reflects on Jesus' post-Resurrection experiences noted in John's Gospel. He quotes from well-known author, Fr Robert J. Schreiter, who reminds the reader that the shocked disciples had left Jerusalem behind after Jesus' arrest, torture and execution to try and return to a normal life in Galilee.

The previous Editor of *The Far East*, Fr Daniel Harding gives a detailed account of his return to Chile after spending six years in Australia.

We read that days after the joyous ordination of Fr Visanti in Fiji, former Columban Lay Missionary Losana Ve'ehala from Tonga died unexpectedly in the Columban Lay Mission house in Suva. She was a woman of great faith. May she rest in peace.

Janette Mentha
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A slim chance of education

FR NEIL MAGILL

Columban Fr Neil Magill founded the Mandalay Archdiocesan Higher Education Centre on the outskirts of Mandalay, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). The Centre aims to prepare some of the poorest but brightest Myanmar students by providing high quality tertiary education. The aim is to help them achieve their potential and become leaders in both their civil and church communities.

Fr Neil shares the stories of two of the students...

Patrick

Patrick, a first year student is from the war torn Kachin State in the northern part of the country.

While the Kachin State is rich in natural resources it has been exploited by the military and the Chinese but none of the profits have reached the people.

Patrick and his family are among the many thousands of victims. He and his parents and four siblings were forced to flee to a refugee camp when their simple home was burned down and their small piece of land was confiscated by the military. The few pigs they were rearing to generate some income for the family were killed and eaten by the military as they ravaged their village.

Patrick's mother leaves the refugee camp where the family now resides early in the morning to work outside doing 3 Ds work (dirty, dangerous and difficult) and returns in the evening. She earns \$75.00 for a month's work. How can she feed her family on this? Patrick's father suffered from poor health for many years and was unable to work.

Last year, Patrick, his mother and siblings suffered another blow. Their father went out one morning walking to visit a friend. He did not return to

the refugee camp that afternoon. When Patrick's mother returned from work at dusk she raised the alarm. Her children and others in the camp went searching for him but could not find him. At sunrise the next morning they found him among bushes beside the road. He was dead. He had been shot by the military. An innocent man.

Patrick shed many tears as he told me this story. He was concerned that his mother could not make the small contribution to the *Higher Education Center* that we ask for.

I assured him that he had enough problems and difficulties in his life and I would look for a scholarship for him as I do for many of our students.

Peter

Peter is a third year student and he wrote about Internally Displaced People (IDP).

My name is Peter and I am a third year student at the *Higher Education Center* (HEC) in Mandalay. We get two weeks holiday during the academic year but most of the 90 students at HEC cannot go home because our homes are so far away from Mandalay and it is too expensive to travel. It can take two days to reach our homes in remote villages.

Fr Neil discussed with us what we might do and we all agreed that we should spend the holiday time with children in orphanages and in the IDP camps in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. The purpose of our trip was to offer assistance to those in the camps and experience first-hand the mission of the church there.

At the orphanage in Myitkyina we spent half a day playing games with the children, teaching them songs and dance and just getting to know them. There were hundreds of children who didn't even know where they came from or who their parents were. Holiday time for them offered no break from the camp; they didn't have a home or parents to return to.

We visited other IDP camps that housed children and adults in small simple small houses which were built very close to each other. They had poor sanitation and up to eight people lived in one room. One old woman said, "Yes we can stay here under shelter and we don't need to worry about the guns shooting. But how can I feel happy here. This is not our real home and we just come here because we want to stay alive."

Reflecting on my visit to the IDP camps I consider myself fortunate



The cost to educate one student is \$700 per year. This covers food, accommodation, electricity, books and medicine.

in having the opportunity to study at the Higher Education Centre thanks to the Columbans and their benefactors. After graduating, I hope to show my gratitude by working as a teacher in the IDP camps.

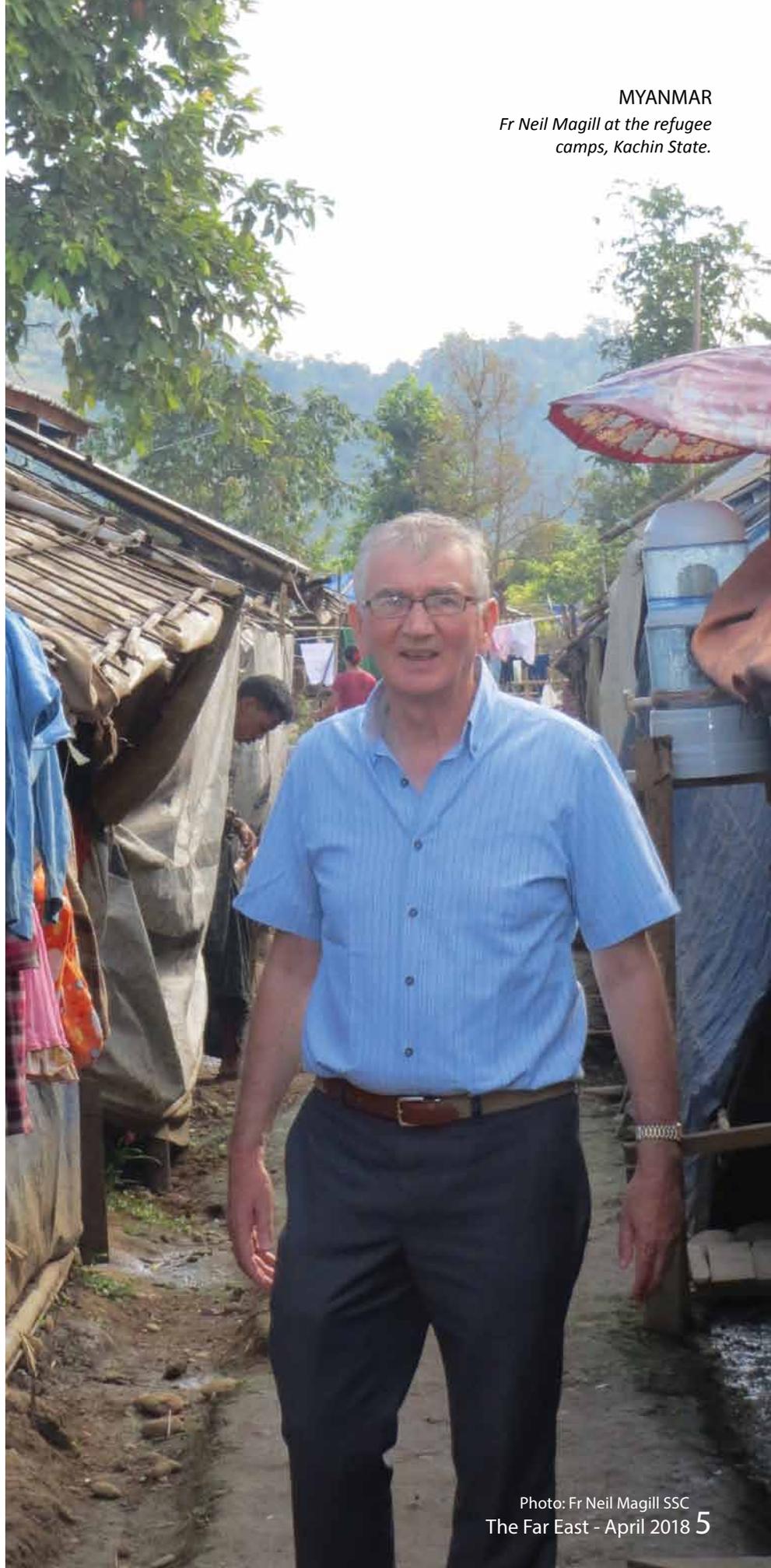
Fr Magill says, "I ask the students if their parents or relatives can make a contribution of \$100.00 for one year but many cannot. I do not turn anyone away because they cannot make a contribution."

The cost to educate one student is \$700 per year. This covers food, accommodation, electricity, books and medicine.

Columban Fr Neil Magill has worked in Korea, on the General Council in Ireland and now works in Myanmar.

MYANMAR

Fr Neil Magill at the refugee camps, Kachin State.



[Click here to listen to](#)

Passover then handover

FR JOHN HEGERTY



Fr John Hegerty conducting the course on the history of Israel.

The seven branch candlestick was made of plastic piping painted gold. This together with the bitter herbs, flat bread and roast lamb made up the ingredients for our final night of the annual bible course in *Our Lady of the Missions Parish* of over 50,000 people in the district of San Martin de Porres in north Lima, Peru.

Each year we celebrate a bible course on the gospel of the year. This helps

in the preparation of the Sunday Liturgy by offering fidelity to the text and an application to the daily lives of the community. It has proven to be of help to both the priests and the lay ministers who preside at the Sunday liturgies of the Word with Communion.

This year we broke with tradition and ran a course on the history of Israel. It consisted of two weeks on each of

the eight stages in the development of the Chosen People from Abram to Jesus, from nomads to the Kingdom.

Our parish is in the final stages of transition from being a Columban founded and established communion of twelve communities to being accompanied and administered by clergy of the local diocese. For this reason it has been most revealing to have studied the journey of the

Photo: Fr John Hegerty SSC



As Columban missionaries in Peru we will move out to the current existential fringe of the still expanding Lima. Together with the people of that area we will trudge in search of new communities of faith and love. We will be nomads again searching for and celebrating the presence of the Kingdom of God and our next Passover meal.

People of God from being a bunch of nomads following some crazy dream, to being slaves in a nervous and brutal Egypt, to being invaders of a land supposedly flowing with milk and honey, to finally becoming a rebellious nation under a series of conquerors.

Our Lady of The Missions parish began with 43 pastoral agents-cum-missionaries, wandering among the fifty incipient housing associations that made up a miniscule part of the rapidly and disorderly expanding megapolis that is Lima. The former cotton fields and vegetable patches had already been replaced by unoccupied building blocks marked out with chalk and a few new houses.

The 43 trudged through powder dust, dogs and the heat, enquiring into the needs, possibilities and resources. They then divided into eight groups, according to their parish of origin, and began to concentrate on one housing association each. Their plan was to convoke any faithful, and hopefuls, who might be living there, and bond them into a viable Christian community.

Some communities flourished, celebrated their faith together, deepened their faith lives and contributed to the local struggles for water, light and titles and some even to acquiring land for their future chapel. Others faded away for lack of

interest and support and had to be either abandoned or amalgamated with one nearby. Of the eighteen that were started, twelve now have their own chapel, celebrate every Sunday, reflect on the Word of God every week, have sacramental programs and exercise a prophetic voice in their neighbourhoods.

It reads somewhat like 'Mission Accomplished'. Unfortunately the Kingdom is here but not yet. Our people are plagued by corruption at all levels. Domestic and street violence create an atmosphere of fear. The church so often appears unaware of their real needs. There is still racism and an increasing number of society's 'disposables'. The trickle down theory remains a theory here. The twelve communities are constantly questioning their fidelity to the Person and Mission of Jesus, and their relevance as missionary disciples to their neighbourhoods.

The bible course finished with a fantastic improvised Passover meal. We had the bitter herbs, the flat bread, the roast lamb and plenty of good Peruvian red. We recalled the 43 nomads and their dream. Also the slaves who laboured against all odds. As well as those who acquired land, minus the milk and honey for the formation of a communion of twelve communities.

In June of 2018 we will be saying goodbye and thanks to the people of 'Misiones' who have accepted, embraced and journeyed with us for twenty two years. With a certain pride we will entrust their care to local priests for the next stage in the life and faith journey of 'Misiones'.

As Columban missionaries in Peru we will move out to the current existential fringe of the still expanding Lima. Together with the people of that area we will trudge in search of new communities of faith and love. We will be nomads again searching for and celebrating the presence of the Kingdom of God and our next Passover meal.

Columban Fr John Hegerty has been in Peru since 1971 and is the On-going Education Coordinator.

[Click here to listen to the reflection:](#)

The devil is in the detail

FR PATRICK O'SHEA

"How can you be thinking of something like that at a time like this?"

It is said that "the devil is in the details" and so we should carefully read the small print before signing any legal document or agreement so we know what we are getting into. However my experience this Easter when I have been focusing on the details that are part of the Resurrection narratives has been that great light and energy is also to be found in the small details that are included.

John's stories about the resurrection are full of fascinating and intriguing details. The details contained in the first section of chapter 21 suggest that a good title might be "How can you be thinking of something like that at a time like this?"

We have Peter saying "I am going fishing". In the midst of the tragedy that was the death of Jesus and the turmoil and rumour surrounding a sighting of him alive, how could they have been thinking about going fishing? Yet this is often what people do in times of upheaval. They return to the familiar. They seek for solid ground on which to stand in a world whose foundations have been rocked. The irony here is that what they might have imagined was an escape into the familiar was transformed into an experience that was to launch them into something completely new.

The text tells us that when Peter realised that it is Jesus he dresses himself and then jumps into the water. How could he have been thinking of how he was dressed at that moment? Again here, a deep value in the culture surfaces and is acted on in spite of all the other things that are happening. To be dressed appropriately to greet another was a deep value in Peter's culture. It is something we also know. If someone important or special to us arrives we don't want to be in night clothes or old work clothes when we greet them regardless of what might be going on. The deepest values we have can still surface in moments of crisis and provide a kind of stability.

We are then told in the text that the fish caught that morning numbered 153. Did someone actually count them? A man had been raised to life, an absolutely unprecedented and incredible event, and yet note was taken of the size of the catch.

There are many complex and convoluted explanations for the significance of the number 153, including one by

St Jerome which suggests that it is John's code for the universal nature of the church's mission, 153 being the number of different species of fish known at that time. On the other hand it might simply have been someone doing an ordinary task to allow some time for the extraordinary event he was confronted with to sink in.



We are then told in the text that the fish caught that morning numbered 153. Did someone actually count them? A man had been raised to life, an absolutely unprecedented and incredible event, and yet note was taken of the size of the catch.

Finally there is the invitation of Jesus to his disciples "Come and have breakfast". Again we might imagine someone saying "How can you be thinking about food at a time like this?" There is nothing more ordinary than sharing a meal. Jesus calls them into the familiar, an experience that they had shared at many points in their time together. In the process he dispels all notions that they are seeing a ghost, having a vision or experiencing an hallucination. He is risen and in the celebration of the ordinary their hearts are prepared to embrace the extraordinary.

Perhaps we will find a similar light and a door to the sacred when we attend to the small details of our own story.

Columban Fr Patrick O'Shea resides at St Columban's, Lower Hutt, New Zealand.





MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST. COLUMBAN

Sharing Gospel Joy

Where are they now?

Columban Centenary - Fr McCulloch

Columban Fr Robert McCulloch was ordained in 1970 and went to the Philippines in 1971. He was appointed to the parish of Talisayan where the parish priest was an alcoholic but dearly loved by his parishioners. On the priest's transfer Fr Robert became parish priest ministering to 25,000 Catholic people mostly in very high mountains. By 1974 when he left to go to Rome, six young men had joined the seminary to become diocesan priests.



Fr Robert McCulloch in the Philippines, 1973.

In 1978 Fr McCulloch was appointed to Pakistan where he remained for 34 years. On February 15, 2012 Fr McCulloch received the *Sitara-e-Quaid-e-Azam*, the highest civilian award that can be given to foreign nationals with the citation: '*For services to Health, Education, and Inter-Faith Relations*'.

In 2011 Fr Robert was appointed to Rome as the Procurator General of the Missionary Society of St Columban. Columbans have a residence there called *Collegio San Colombano* for priests who are studying in Rome, for those who have official business there and also for visitors.

The first and most important role in Rome of the Procurator General is to represent the Superior General and his Council at the various Vatican offices and facilitate any matters between the Vatican and the Society.

Fr Robert says, "One of the very good effects of the pontificate of Pope Francis has been a fresh commitment and readiness of the clerical and lay officials in the Vatican offices [called Dicasteries or the Curia] to deal quickly and efficiently with matters which are brought before them. This makes my work pleasant. It is good to collaborate with these officials in friendship and with a common vision to serve the needs of the Church throughout the world."

Photo: Fr M.Harrison



Your Columban story

Benefactors share with us...

Kath from New Zealand wrote:

In the early 1940s I attended a small Catholic boarding school north of Wellington, New Zealand. We did our homework under the eagle eye of one of the Sisters. If she thought we had worked well she would produce "The Far East" from which she would read us extracts of the work of the Columban Missions.

It was through this that we learnt of the New Zealand missionary Fr Frances Vernon Douglas who had lost his life at the hands of Japanese soldiers. Also each month was the adventures of a lad. I think his name was Mickey? His spelling and grammar were out of this world.

*By the 1970s I had two young sons. There were times when they jibbed on the food I served to them. I tried them with telling them there were starving children in other lands who would appreciate the food they spurned. Then one night a program on TV featured a Columban Missionary in Chile and the difficult life the children in Chile were experiencing. It hit home. How could they help them? **Pocket money for a time went into a jam jar. It was called 'The Chile Jar'. It soon filled up so I asked a priest friend what to do with it. He had a friend from Chile who would take care of it. This turned out to be Fr Sean O'Connor on leave from Chile. For many years after a 'Chile Jar' found its way to the Columbans to be sent to Chile.***

When the time came for my lads to go to secondary school once more there was a Columban influence. It was Frances Douglas Memorial College in New Plymouth, named after the Columban who lost his life at the hands of Japanese soldiers during World War II.

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

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





Mass celebrated on the boat by Frs Donal McIlraith (left) & Pat Visenti (right) on the way to Rotuma island.

[Click here to listen to:](#)

A boat ride to his first Mass

FR PATRICK COLGAN

There have been a steady number of Columban ordinations to priesthood over the past few years. They include Kurt Zion, a Filipino now on mission in Myanmar, in 2015; Gonzalo Borgez and Rafael Ramirez, Chileans now serving in Korea and Myanmar respectively, in 2016 and Ryu Sun-Jong and Seok Jin-Wook, Koreans, now in Taiwan, in 2017. Lastly, on November 31, 2017, Pat Visenti became the first Columban priest from the island of Rotuma.

Rotuma is an island nation nearly 600 kms north of Fiji. Though ethnically and linguistically different from Fiji, it has been politically joined to Fiji since colonial times. Pat Visenti was born and raised a Methodist, but when he was 12, his mother along with Pat, his brother and his sister, joined their father as Catholics. Pat finished his schooling in Suva and then joined the bank. After several years as a successful bank worker he decided to try his vocation and he joined the Columbans.

I happened to be the Rector of Columban Formation and also Vocations' Director at that time. Before he joined us I

remember being impressed when he bounced up to do a reading in the Cathedral at a lunchtime Mass when no-one else could be found. When he then started intoning the Alleluia in a confident voice, I thought 'we need people like this in the Columbans'. Now we have him.

The ordaining Fijian Archbishop Peter Loy Chong, during his homily, was generous in his praise of the Society's cutting-edge work in the Pacific and globally in the areas of justice, ecology and interreligious dialogue. At the time of Pat's ordination, Fiji had just relinquished the chairmanship of the *UN COP23 Climate Change Conference* in Bonn, Germany, and Archbishop Loy said it was the Columbans who most helped him develop the Catholic contribution to it.

After the ordination, we were treated to an extraordinary display of the customary feasting, dancing and singing by the large Rotuman community of Suva. The famous Rotuman communal dance which takes about an hour was included. This took place in the Hall of *St Joseph's High School*, run by the Cluny Sisters. Their Provincial, Sr Allison MacAlaster, who had helped Pat arrive at this day,

Photo: Fr Patrick Colgan SSC

was very happily in attendance. We were joined too by all seven major Rotuman chiefs (the majority of whom are not Catholic) and the President of the Republic of Fiji, Major General (Retired) Joji Konrote, himself a Rotuman. He, individually, and on behalf of the nation and Government of Fiji, spoke highly of the contribution of the Columban missionaries in Fiji since their arrival in 1952.

The choir for both Pat's ordination and first Masses was the Archdiocesan Liturgical Music Ministry. This is a valiant group of volunteers who made their way every night for two months to a hall to learn and practise hymns - in English, Fijian, Rotuman, Hindi and Spanish - to a perfection that made both ceremonies joyful and often tearfully solemn.

Pat spent 18 months in Pakistan as part of his formation and he will return there as a priest missionary later this year. Archbishop Loy expressed his joy at small Rotuma sending a missionary to Pakistan in the person of Pat, just as the island of Rabi is 'on mission' in Taiwan in the person of Columban Fr Taaremon Matauea. Now that we have seminarians from the Kiribati and Solomons, there is every reason to hope that they too will soon be representing their island nations in Columban locations throughout Asia, South America and elsewhere. With the ordination of Peruvian Salustino Villalobos (already appointed to Taiwan) on the same day as Pat Visanti, the Society has indeed much to celebrate and anticipate in this our 100th year.

Months of planning went into these events but especially the 'pilgrimage' to Rotuma which followed. The Columbans had hired a commercial boat called the Brianna so that up to 140 people could accompany Fr Pat to his home island for his First Mass there.

We left Suva on Wednesday, November 29, 2017. The sea was amazingly calm both going and coming. This was a blessing as the engine broke down half way there and when repaired, the boat could only travel at four knots and this meant we spent an extra day on the high seas.

Rotuma is a dream island, small with white sandy beaches and the 2000 Rotumans live in beautiful villages along the sand road that encircles the island. They had prepared a feast of fish for us but had to eat it themselves as we did not arrive that day. When we arrived on Saturday they had trucks ready to take us to the parish of *Our Lady of Victories* in Sumi, the district of Pepje. There they accommodated the 60 of us who comprised the Columban party. The other guests were Rotuman relatives and friends of Pat's, some returning home after many years.

The First Mass in Rotuma was held on the First Sunday of Advent at the beautiful Church of *St Michael*. The music and liturgical dancing were superb. It was scheduled for Saturday but our late arrival meant a quick change of plan. It was also an ecumenical event. The Methodists had planned to join us on the Saturday but with the change in schedule, they moved their Sunday services to 7:00am enabling them to join us. Their palpable joy at Pat's ordination was very moving to us.

The Mass went well. Fr Pat showed no signs of nervousness but then he did not have to preach. He had given me that task! After Mass we gathered outside and the first cultural event was the bringing of gifts by the Methodist community, a mountain of food and mats. After this there was the traditional welcome to all of us who were on the Island for the first time. This is called the Mamasa. We all sat on specially prepared mats and were formally welcomed.

The traditional dance came next. The Catholic community had offered to drop this, as generally the Methodists don't dance on Sundays. However, the main Methodist chief made an exception and the dance went ahead.

Then followed the traditional Rotuman banquet, a true feast and something we will never forget. A young lady served each of us food on a large banana leaf. It included taro (the local root crop), chicken, beef, pork and a tin of corned beef that took me back to my childhood in Macroom in County Cork, Ireland.

The evening was well on when the feast finished so we sat around, chatting. And, of course, there was some Kava consumed. It was truly a day to remember!

Columban Fr Patrick Colgan has been a member of the General Council in Hong Kong since 2012.



The Columbans had hired a commercial boat called the Brianna so that up to 140 people could accompany Fr Pat to his home island for his First Mass there.

A faith born in the shadows

FR JIM MULRONEY

A faith born in the shadows cast by a single candle in a tightly curtained room of a small farming village in a China emerging from the repression of the Cultural Revolution in the early 1980s blossomed on February 4, 2018 in the chapel of the Columban Seminary in Manila as Peter knelt before Bishop Honesto Ongtioco to be ordained a deacon, becoming a Minister of the Word of God that he had imbibed in the clandestine darkness of his home so many years before.

The ordination was also the fulfilment of a dream born in the imagination of an Irish priest working in China over 100 years ago.

As the bishop of Cubao laid hands on the first Chinese member of the Missionary Society of St Columban, the dream expressed by Bishop Edward Galvin in the 1920s, only to be shelved in the face of mounting instability and the pressure of founding a new mission, took a first, but tentative step.

Born on January 27, 1982, Peter and his older brother, along with their parents lived their Catholic faith behind the curtains. *"We could only attend Mass perhaps at Easter and Christmas, as the church was a long way away and we could not arouse suspicion about our religion among our neighbours by making the trip too often,"* he explained.

Life was hard on the family's small farm that produced only a subsistence living. *"But I do not remember being hungry,"* Peter said. However, he was about 15 years old before there was at least some charcoal to drive the freezing bite from the winter air in their simple rural home.

As the second son of a farmer, Peter, along with his brother learned about life on the land from his father, but in the darkened room the flicker of the candle awoke in him a flicker of faith and with it was born an awareness of the colour it could bring into his life.

"I remember the bright vestments at Mass," he reminisced, *"the green, the red and the gold embroidery,"* while explaining that in a society dominated by the drab of Communist grey and green, he secretly hoped that the day would come when his own life could be decorated with a similar splash of rainbow.

But the fancies of a child are not the matured faith of an adult and, although he was aware of the strange longing developing inside him as he made his way through middle and into high school, it was not until he moved to a seminary college for the completion of his basic education that he could begin to put words on it.

However, his first days in the seminary were not the smooth road of a growing vocation and after six months the rector told him he should go home for a while, as it appeared he was not enjoying the life.

At 17 years of age his dream was shattered, but his father encouraged him not to give up and he was later accepted into a seminary in another area. But what was to unfold was far from what he had imagined when he packed his bags to leave home for the second time.

An encounter with a foreign missionary who visited the seminary started him thinking of a different direction, prompting him to take learning English seriously and contemplating a life quite different

from the direction in which his classmates at the seminary were heading.

Then it was off to Manila for studies: language, philosophy, theology and many other subjects became his daily fare, culminating in a year of concentrated spirituality and then a plane ticket across the world to Chile.

"It was not just another language, but a whole new vision of life," Peter recalled. He explained that the highly sensate culture of Chile came as a huge shock to him as a young Chinese man with little sense of the importance of feelings.

***"I began to feel a God of warmth, a God who laughs and is close to his people, not distant as I had experienced in China. Everyone was the same in the Church - bishop, priest and people. In the Church we were all at home,"* he said.**

"Learning Spanish was like opening a window to equity in relationship among the people," he went on. *"Through this foreign culture I could see how I could be with people and it taught me so much about the beauty of my own Chinese culture that I had never noticed before."*

He learned to laugh at his own mistakes, at the humour of what does not work the way it is intended and to hear God laughing with the people.

"As a young boy I was taught that Jesus did not laugh and that life was a serious matter, but in Chile I learned that in fact, Jesus laughed a lot," he explained.

Peter added that he began to feel a deep gratitude to his parents for his very life. *"In a way they were refugees from hunger,"* he said, *"as they moved south in search of a place with food during the great famine and then paid*



Peter's father vesting him with the stole of the deacon.

a big fine in order to be allowed to give birth to a second child."

This taught him another great lesson. *"I also learned to cry. I cried unashamedly when my best friend died in a car accident. It was a lonely feeling, but I learned through the tears to understand how I felt."*

He added, *"I cried here in Cubao, Manila when an old missionary told me he wanted to die in The Philippines. Chinese people usually want to die at home, but in my tears I reflected that I will die somewhere and I came to realize I did not care where. It is in God's hands."*

His tears were somehow a solvent for the restlessness Bishop Ongtioco referred to at his ordination ceremony, as he spoke of the restless heart of Job that only settled when he placed his life in God's hands, and St Paul, whose desire to move on was frustrated by the people that continued to flock around him.

Peter was restless when he was asked to leave the seminary, but explained that God spoke to him through the people who encouraged him and enabled him to find another direction in his life, and the restless faith of his father was calmed as he clothed him, this time not in the shroud of secrecy, but the stole of a Minister of the Word of the God in whom he believes so strongly.

The gestures and mannerisms of Bishop Ongtioco showed Peter that life is more a melody to be danced to than prose to be walked with and once again tears moistened his eyes as he struggled to find words to thank those who supported him on his journeys across the expands of God's creation.

But what for Peter was a red letter day experienced by many before him, for the Missionary Society of St Columban was one that has taken around 100 years to dawn.

One chapter of its life in China closed with the expulsion of its last member in 1954, but Columban Fr Dan Troy commented that a decision made just five years later by the then Superior General, Fr Timothy Connolly, to send a young Fr Ned Kelly to the United States of America to study Chinese language and culture has become the prophetic opening of a new era.

But in one sense what was a day of fulfilment of many dreams, in another, was just a peep at the restless dawn of Bishop Galvin's dream of finding others to follow him.

Columban Fr Jim Mulrone is the former Editor of 'The Sunday Examiner' and resides in Hong Kong.

Mission World

We ask your prayers: *The prayers of our readers are requested for the repose of the souls of friends and benefactors of the Missionary Society of St Columban who died recently and for the spiritual and the temporal welfare of all our readers, their families and friends.*

Mission Intention for April

That economists may have the courage to reject any economy of exclusion and know how to open new paths.



Photo: sgame/bigstock.com

Muslims appeal for end to disinformation in Marawi

Spread of false information about war-torn city could stoke discord between Christians and Muslims

A group of Muslim leaders from the war-torn city of Marawi in the southern Philippines has appealed to Filipinos to stop posting disinformation on social media that might spark discord.

Social media posts in recent weeks claimed that the Catholic Cathedral would be the first structure to be rebuilt in the Muslim city reduced to rubble after a five-month conflict last year.

Samira Gutoc-Tomawis, a Muslim civil rights activist in Marawi, said Filipinos should focus on efforts to bridge unity instead of creating tension between Muslims and Christians.

"Let us not divide ourselves," said Gutoc-Tomawis, a former member of parliament in the autonomous Muslim region in Mindanao, at a recent forum in Manila.

Bishop Edwin de la Pena of Marawi has repeatedly said rebuilding the Catholic Cathedral is not his priority but the recovery and rehabilitation of communities is.

He said one of his priorities is to improve interfaith relations and to bring healing to people still traumatized by the violence.

Gutoc-Tomawis said there are many stories that can be shared of Muslims taking care of Christians whose lives were in danger during the attack by Islamic State gunmen.

The Muslim leader also cited the Catholic Church's program to help in peace-building efforts in Muslim communities.

"We thank the church for not abandoning us even during recent storms that hit Mindanao," said Gutoc-Tomawis.



Marawi, Southern Philippines.

She said church groups are often the first to help Muslim communities in Mindanao.

Abdul Hamidullah Atar, a sultan from Marawi, also welcomed efforts by Catholics in helping rebuild the predominantly Muslim city.

"We all need to uphold human dignity, and the way that we can contribute in peace-building is to avoid fake news to reduce hatred, biases and discrimination," said the Muslim leader.

The rebuilding of Marawi is yet to start, four months after its liberation from Islamic State-inspired gunmen.

UCA News - www.ucanews.com, February 27, 2018

Photo: ©iStock.com/acrylik

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From the Director

Post resurrection experiences

One amusing story from my childhood concerns the time I was fishing on the black sand beach at Oakura, near my hometown of New Plymouth, New Zealand. I managed to hook a small sole fish and took it back to our rented summer cottage to present to my mother. She cooked it that evening and presented one half to my father and the other half to me. My father's portion of the fish included the fish's small entrails as they had not been taken out before cooking. I scored the nicer half of the fish to the family's delight.

In this Easter season I am reminded of one of Jesus' post-Resurrection experiences in John's gospel. It is the story of Jesus inviting his fishermen-disciples to share a fish breakfast with him on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. (I hope someone cleaned his fish!) It is the only mention of Jesus as a cook and some writers suggest this meal may have had Eucharistic significance for early Christians as he shared bread and fish with the disciples as he had done in earlier miracles.

Fr Robert J. Schreiter writes about this story in his book *'The Ministry of Reconciliation, Spirituality & Strategies'* and for him this story "recapitulates the whole ministry of reconciliation." He reminds the reader that the shocked disciples had left Jerusalem behind after Jesus' arrest, torture and execution to try and return to a normal life in Galilee. For Peter and some of the others a normal life meant fishing. They would have hoped that returning to fishing would help them heal their recent traumatic experiences but it did not work as at first they caught nothing.

Many people throughout the world today are trying to escape trauma including after release from prison or escaping persecution as refugees or as victims of sexual or domestic violence. They too want to escape the pain they have endured and seek healing of those memories.

As we have been recently reminded from the victims' accounts of child sexual abuse and of sexual harassment, many have great difficulty overcoming the scars of their painful past. No matter how hard they try, like the disciples who went fishing, it may take a long time to succeed. Sometimes it takes an encounter with a stranger to try their 'fishing' or other forms of healing in another place in order to break the cycle they find themselves in.

Fr Robert J. Schreiter suggests in his book that: "It is only by being freed from the obsession with what they had hoped would be a familiar groove of routine, that they are able to recognize who has been standing on the shore." In this simple Gospel story I think Jesus presents us with a good role model for our Church today to reach out to victims of different traumas and to offer hospitality and companionship to those in need.

The front cover of Fr Schreiter's book features the painting by Piero della Francesca of Jesus rising from the dead. Jesus looks a little dazed or bewildered as though to say "What is happening here?" Fr Schreiter reminds the reader that the experience of rising from the dead would take some getting used to and the experience of resurrection life has nothing with which it can be compared. In the other appearance stories we note Jesus' body is glorified but the scars of his torture remain as though to link him forever to his passion and death.

Schreiter says: "In this, Jesus is like every survivor who must bear the burden of those wounds for the rest of his or her life." The difference may be that Jesus is able to talk freely about his wounds "because they are no longer a source of pain and painful memory but now wounds that heal" as in the case of the troubled soul of people like Thomas.



Fr Brian Vale
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Fruit and vegetable markets in Santiago, Chile.

My return to Chile

FR DANIEL HARDING

After a happy six year break back in Australia as Editor of *The Far East* magazine and working in Columban promotion in Adelaide, I have returned to Santiago, Chile, where I had previously worked for many years. While naturally missing friends and family back in Australia, at the same time it is good to be back as a Columban missionary in Chile.

Luckily I arrived back in Santiago on September 13, 2017, a few days after the blackouts, barricades of burning tyres, broken glass, tear gas and protests that each year mark the anniversary of the Military Coup, September 11, 1973.

One of the changes I notice in Chile is the large number of immigrants arriving here from countries such as Peru,

Venezuela, Haiti, Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. It is said 200 Haitians arrive each day in Chile. As the Chilean population continues to age and have smaller families, immigrants are needed to provide labour for economic growth.

This is the new Chile. Now Haitians as well as Chileans earn a meagre living selling chocolate bars, ice cream and soft drinks to motorists stopped at traffic lights, as well as cleaning their windscreens. Fruit and vegetable markets now have large numbers of Peruvians and Colombians offering tropical fruits and vegetables previously unavailable. Many of these immigrant communities bring a strong Catholic faith with them and are helping to revitalize local parishes.

Photo: Missionary Society of St Columban



I have been appointed to work in the parish of San Columbano, which is located 20 kilometres from Santiago CBD in the southern suburbs of Santiago.

I arrived just in time for the September 18 *Chilean Independence Day* celebrations. Chileans celebrate their independence from Spain in 1810 in a big way. At Sunday Masses parishioners wear their national costume and dance the Cueca, the national dance and eat traditional foods.

Cities throughout the country organize *Independence Day* celebrations with lots of food and drink, music and dancing. One lady I was speaking with after Mass told me that she hates this time of year, because it brings back bad memories from her childhood of a drunken father and domestic violence.

In order to combat domestic violence, some of Metropolitan Santiago's 37 municipal areas now promote family friendly Folk Festivals with a very limited and controlled consumption of alcohol. For three consecutive nights I went with friends to one of these Folk Festivals where several excellent bands and professional dance groups entertained thousands of people into the early hours of the morning.

Rodeos are traditionally held during the *Independence Day* celebrations. This year Animal Rights activists interrupted several rodeos, alleging cruelty to animals. They also broke into the laboratories of the University of Chile and set free all the rats and mice used there for experiments.

I have been appointed to work in the parish of *San Columbano*, which is located 20 kilometres from Santiago CBD in the southern suburbs of Santiago. Many Columbans have worked in this parish since the 1960s, when it was a part of a larger parish. The Parish Priest is a Korean Columban Diocesan Associate, Fr Pablo Park. There is also a permanent deacon and a community of religious sisters in the parish. Together we work in conjunction with all the lay women and men who for many years have faithfully served the parish community.

The parish is spread over a large mostly poor working class area. It has seven chapels that serve their local neighbourhoods. Like other areas in the poorer parts of Santiago, there are many social problems such as poverty, unemployment, robberies, assaults, overcrowded housing, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, poor health care, family breakdown and abandoned street dogs, often

with ticks, distemper and the mange. All of these areas can be quite dangerous late at night.

Also late at night fire crackers are lit or shots fired into the air by drug dealers to let their customers know that a fresh batch of illegal drugs has just arrived in the area. Sadly one gets used to anything.

Walking the streets of the parish and Santiago in general, one often finds colourful street art and murals, often commemorating a young gang member killed in a shootout with rival gangs. Two powerful murals at present commemorate the 50th anniversary of the execution of communist guerrilla fighter, Che Guevara, in Bolivia in 1967 and the suicide in 1967 of Chile's famous folk singer and composer, Violeta Parra.

The presbytery where Fr Park and I live is located in an ordinary street about five minutes walk from the main parish church. In a small garden area at the back, I have planted tomatoes, lettuce, capsicums and other vegetables. I mention this because it is very important for us missionary priests to find ways to relax and unwind, such as working in the garden.

Every year on the third Sunday in October around 80,000 young people walk 27 kilometres through the foothills of the Andes Mountains to the Carmelite Sanctuary where the Chilean saint, *St Teresa of the Andes*, is buried. This year around 200 pilgrims filling six buses left *St Columban's* Parish at 3:30 am to participate in the pilgrimage. As temperatures that day were 34 degrees it was good to start walking as early as possible.

In the garden area at the back of our presbytery is a small chapel. This is a very important place for me to spend time, to pray, reflect and discern as I re-enter missionary life back in Chile. Here I seek the Lord's strength and guidance on how we, as a parish community, can build up His Kingdom in our neighbourhoods.

Columban Fr Daniel Harding returned to Chile in 2017 and is working in the parish of San Columbano.

[Click here to listen](#)

Seminarians spend time in Chile

FR DANIEL HARDING

For the five weeks leading up to Christmas 2017, two Adelaide diocesan seminarians, Anthony Beltrame and Olek Stirrat, participated in a pastoral experience with Columban Fr Dan Harding in the parish of San Columbano, in Santiago, Chile. Here is their story...

"There are many things I will always remember about our amazing experience of the Church in Chile, Chilean culture and the Chilean people. I will always remember the Chilean people as truly beautiful people with warm hearts. They are very friendly and welcoming. They are passionate and expressive people, not afraid to show their emotions and beliefs," says Olek of his time in Chile.

Seminarians Anthony and Olek arrived in Chile just in time to celebrate the *Feast of St Columban* on November 23, and to meet the Columban community working in Chile. They also met the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Ricardo Ezzarti at the Columban celebration.

Over the next five weeks, Olek and Anthony lived in the parish of *San Columbano*, in a poor area, 20 kilometres from the city centre. Despite the initial language barrier, both Olek and Anthony managed to learn a lot of Spanish in their short time and to communicate well with the local people.

Anthony remembers, *"Living in a poor area, one has to get used to the somewhat rundown atmosphere of poverty, bad roads, stray mangy dogs, loud music, rubbish on the streets, shoddy housing, hotted up cars and the high level of crime. At night we frequently heard gunshots and fire crackers being let off to announce the*

arrival of a new fresh batch of drugs. Brightly coloured murals are painted with portraits of gang members killed in the local drug wars. One such mural is about 50 metres from our home."

Anthony and Olek participated in all the regular activities of the seven chapels that make up *San Columbano* Parish such as weekday and Sunday Masses, funerals, house blessings, baptisms, the anointing of the sick, penitential liturgies and the Parish Pastoral Council. They found the Christmas Eve Masses dynamic and interactive with children dressed up acting out the Nativity story.

Just before Christmas they helped organize and take part in a Christmas party of 70 children from poor families. At another time, they participated in a parish based organic gardening and recycle programme and workshop.

When asked to recall some highlights of the visit, Olek shared, *"The Church in Chile is alive. It is not unusual to see religious statues and crucifixes in public places. One of the highlights for me was the Month of Mary, with daily rosary, leading up to the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, December 8.*

On that day we processed through the streets carrying a statue of Our Lady, saying the rosary and singing hymns using a loud speaker, on the way to the parish Church.

What really made a very big impression on me at that Mass was the presence of a large troupe of traditional religious dancers, dressed in bright colourful costumes. Accompanied by loud trumpets, drums and whistles, they sang and danced up the main aisle of the church during the Mass for the Blessed Virgin."

"Yes, it was something amazing," recalls Anthony. ***"I also remember the times we went out at night with different parish groups to visit homeless people, mainly addicts, living in shanties alongside a busy highway and on the footpath behind a large public hospital."***

"Also our visit to the Communist Party enclave in the neighbourhood called 'La Victoria'," recalled both Anthony and Olek as a highlight.

"Yes," says Anthony, *"and all those surprising colourful murals of communist figures such as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro mixed with the local priests of the parish who participated in the struggle against Pinochet's dictatorship. One of the priests, Fr Andres Jarlan died in 1984, shot by the military."*

Both Olek and Anthony agree that another highlight of their visit, was the warmth and welcome of Chilean families. Olek says, *"Chilean culture is vibrant and animated. It is customary to kiss on the cheek when greeting a woman, even meeting for the first time."*

Olek (left) & Anthony (right) standing in front of Santuario de Santa Teresa de Los Andes, Chile.

"We were fortunate to get to know quite well some Chilean families" says Anthony. "We participated in birthday parties, including my own, a graduation party from primary school for one of the daughters, several soccer matches amongst family members, walks around the neighbourhood and even accompanied a family as they watched a play being performed by the local cultural centre.

And of course we had to do a lot of dancing at parties, including contemporary Latin style dancing and the traditional Chilean national dance, the Cueca. Wow, being able to get up and dance and enjoy oneself, is such a wonderful part of the culture."

Becoming friendly with local families was also an opportunity for both Olek and Anthony to see at close hand the overcrowded conditions under which many families live. ***"In one family three children share a bedroom which measured two metres wide and three long. Not to mention how small the living room is!" remembers Olek.***

"It was amazing to see how alive and highly appreciated the local parish and priests are by the people. The experience was very fruitful for myself and for my faith. I will always cherish it in my heart as well as the people I met," concludes Olek of the experience.

"I also will always cherish this wonderful opportunity to have encountered Christ in another culture, in another people and another place," says Anthony of his time in Chile.

Columban Fr Daniel Harding returned to Chile in 2017 and is working in the parish of San Columbano.





Always a Columban at heart

FR DONAL MCILRAITH

*F*ormer Columban Lay Missionary, Losana Ve'ehala from Tonga passed away unexpectedly at the Lay Missionary House in Suva on Sunday December 10, 2017.

We invited her to Suva for the opening of the Columban Centenary celebrations and for Fr Pat Visanti's ordination. A person bubbling over with joy, she brought light and laughter with her everywhere. Little did we know that Losana had come home to die.

She was scheduled to travel to Rotuma island for Fr Pat's first Mass there. However she felt unwell and stayed in Suva. She collapsed and was taken unconscious to hospital. After four days she was discharged with a diagnosis of asthma. It was an asthma attack that took her so suddenly.

A Mass was celebrated at the Lay Missionary house that day by Tongan Fr Taukei who was also visiting for the ordination of Fr Pat Visanti. In his homily Fr Taukei asked "*Why did she die in Suva; why did she die with the Columbans?*"

Losana was one of nine children and grew up on Tongatapu, the main island of Tonga. She was the third of the nine Ve'ehala children to pass away.

After primary schooling in Niutoa, her village, she attended *St John's College*, the oldest Catholic Secondary school in Tonga.

She worked for some years after school in the Ministry of Finance in Nuku'alofa, the capital. Losana then thought

she would try a religious vocation but finally joined the Columban Lay Missionary program in 1996.

Fr Charles Duster, a Columban from the USA was then in charge of the *Lay Mission program* and Losana spent a year under his tutelage as she prepared for mission.

On Mission Sunday 1996 she was missioned to the Philippines by then Archbishop Petero Mataka of Suva. There she had to go back to school again to learn the Tagalog language and become familiar with Philippine culture. For the next seven years she worked with the poor and downtrodden while being based in historic Malate, the large Columban parish in Manila

In 2004, she returned to Fiji and ran the *Lay Mission program* for three years, after which she decided it was time to return home to look after her father who is now 90 years of age.

Though she left the program, she never left the Columbans. She got a job in the Diocesan Office ministering to children and was our volunteer worker in Tonga. She did trojan work for us there, especially preparing candidates for the Columban seminary and *Lay Mission program*.

The Columbans have a small house in Tonga and she stayed there during the week and looked after Columban interests in Tonga. We will sorely miss her.

In answer to Fr Taukei's question, "Why did she die in Suva; why did she die with the Columbans?" She died in

the Columban Lay Missionary house in Suva because she was still a Columban at heart.

Accompanying her remains to Tonga for the funeral, together with her sister Maletina, it became clear how much she was appreciated. Her diocesan colleagues, priests and lay people were at the airport to greet her. Crowds, Catholic and Methodist, came to her home to pray and visit.

A funeral Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Mafi on Tuesday December 19, 2017.

May she rest in peace.



Losana Ve'ehala

Columban Fr Donal McIlraith is the Columban Director in Fiji.

Photo: Missionary Society of St Columban



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