

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

January/February 2019

Pilgrimage to China

Sisters Vinie and Emily
dress in traditional dress
to celebrate Fiji Day



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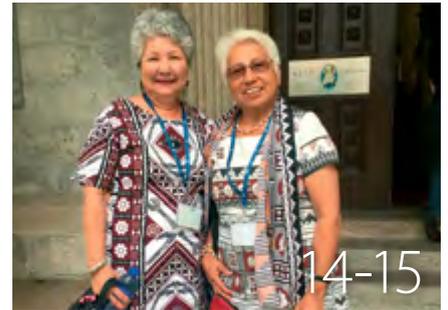
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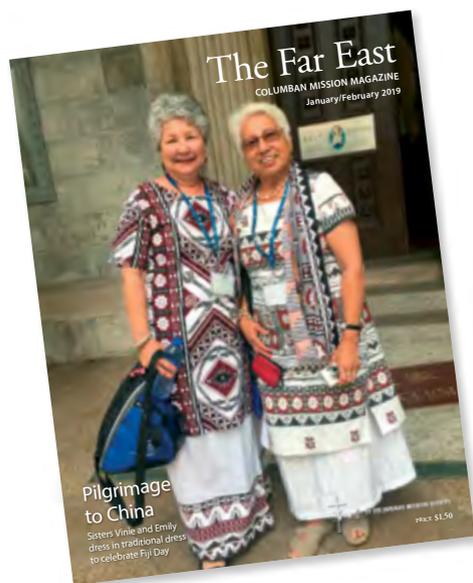
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On the first day of the Pilgrimage to China, sisters Vini and Emily dressed in traditional costume to celebrate Fiji Day.



From the Editor

Launching into the next century of Columban Mission offers many challenges to us, however we have made a promising start to the year with so many positive articles from those who dedicate their lives to Columban Mission.

Our first story is about a young Irishman who gave up a promising career with Microsoft to become a Columban Lay Missionary. Seven years on, he is now based in Hong Kong on their Leadership Team.

The *Tale of Three Missionaries* tells how nothing much has changed in the Philippines in the past 50 years with the recent deportation of Sister Patricia Fox.

Fr Patrick O'Shea offers a reflection on the New Zealand Social Justice Week theme "Enabling Communities: Everyone has a part to play". He says that finding ways to keep barriers down is a challenge in societies.

When Francis Vernon Douglas first thought of becoming a Columban priest, little did he know that he would die 'for the faith' and feature in a *Far East* article titled 'Cause for Canonisation'.

On pages 12 and 13 there is a wrap up

of Centenary events that took place in Australia and New Zealand in 2018. Following on is a personal account of the Columban Trip to China late last year by Ray Lowe who was one of the 23 pilgrims. He gives an insight into the hardships and challenges that Bishop Galvin and his band of young men faced during the early days in China and the ongoing missionary work that continues today.

Back to the Philippines yet again, on page 16, we read that President Rodrigo Duterte recently reported that all Bishops in the Philippines deserve to be killed.

Our Director, Fr Trevor Trotter, introduces us to the news of two black holes circling each other and heading towards a massive explosion. He challenges us to wonder at the immensity of God who holds and creates such a big Universe.

The growing trend to 'be inked' and some of the reasons why is revealed in the article 'What's in a tattoo?' A criticism and an unfair judgment on a Lay Missionary who sports some tattoos makes a good story.

I cannot tell you how heartening it was to edit the article about two brothers

in Peru and the astonishing response to their story published in the *Far East* last year.

After spending 40 years working in Chile, Brazil and Peru, Fr Donald Hornsey now works with Colombian refugees in New Zealand. During a visit to bless the home and pray for the health of a family from Myanmar, Fr Hornsey was delighted to find that they were from the Kachin area where Columbans had worked for 40 years. What followed was an unexpected surprise.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this edition of *The Far East*. Each one of them has left their homeland to serve amongst a different race, in a different country and to learn a different language. With such a display of courage and trust in God, we launch into the future by tackling the mission day-by-day through the grace of God.

Wishing you a Happy New Year

Janette Mentha
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Kevin Sheerin at the Family and Mission Open Day in Dalgan Park in July 2018. Photos: © Kevin Sheeran

From Microsoft to Mission

The editor of the Irish *Far East*, Sarah MacDonald speaks to Columban lay missionary, Kevin Sheerin, about his journey from Operations Account Manager with Microsoft to helping the marginalised of Valparaiso in Chile and Columban lay leadership in Hong Kong.

In 2010, Kevin Sheerin was working in Dublin for the high-profile computer software giant *Microsoft*, earning a good salary and living a comfortable life. That was the year he decided to do something about a thought which had been niggling away at him – he wanted to have a lay mission experience. Faith had always been part of his life, but he wanted to be something more than a Sunday Catholic.

“I’d heard that there were congregations that allowed lay people to participate as lay members, but I didn’t know who they were, so I did an internet search. The first congregation that came up was the Columbans. I had no knowledge of them – I just found them on the internet.”

Originally from Moate, Co Westmeath, the 47-year-old was educated by Carmelites and brought up in a family of “strong faith”.

“I’ve always had an interest in faith. I did a night course over two years in Milltown (Institute of Theology and Philosophy in Dublin) because I was interested in theology. As a practicing catholic, I went to Mass on Sundays, but I always felt that there was something more I could do. I wanted to try to put my faith into practice, but when you are in a place like *Microsoft*, it is a very secular environment and so most of my friends would be very secular in their outlook, they wouldn’t have much interest in religion or faith.”

His decision to become a Columban

lay missionary was not rushed, he took his time. Along the way, little indicators were making themselves felt. “I remember one of my reviews in *Microsoft* went OK but I was expecting it to be better. Afterwards I started asking myself if this was really what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I had a good job, I was very well paid, I used to travel the world – I remember going to a meeting in Dubai and I was staying in a hotel for five days and it cost \$4,000 – so it was a nice life. But I just felt there had to be more to life than this.”

He consulted a life coach who challenged him with the scenario, if you were on your deathbed, what would you like to have done with your life, regardless of how impossible it seems’.

Kevin told her he always wanted to go on mission to South America. 'Why don't you?' she challenged him and told him to research lay mission opportunities. That is when he 'found' the Columbans.

He took his time before he sent the Columbans an email to inquire about the possibility of becoming a lay missionary. "I think I had the email ready for about a year before I sent it. When I finally sent it on a Monday, I got a reply saying there was a discovery weekend on the following Friday and so I said I would go."

He attended discovery weekends to learn about who the Columbans are, what their charism is and why they are looking for lay people to work in partnership with them. "I was very impressed with what the Columbans stood for, particularly in the areas of justice, peace and ecology – they were areas that I was very interested in. I found that it was a congregation that was very progressive and was looking to reach out to lay people and that attracted me. Eventually I decided that this was what I would like to do before it was too late. By that stage I was 40; I felt that if I didn't do it now I would never do it. I signed up and joined the programme."

Having undertaken the orientation course, studying faith and mission and a Clinical Pastoral Education placement as a hospital chaplain, he was ready to hand in his resignation letter to his employers and as luck would have it, *Microsoft* was offering voluntary redundancy packages. "I managed to get a good redundancy and that took away the worry about money, because I was thinking if I didn't like it, that I'd have to start all over again."

He went to Chile in August 2011 for three years. The first thing he did was a language course in Spanish and then he was assigned to a parish in Valparaiso on the coast. The parish priest had just changed and so they

were both finding their feet. But it is easier for a priest to find a foothold in a new parish than a lay missionary because he has a readymade role in saying Mass and providing the sacraments. For a lay missionary, according to Kevin, it is more difficult. "What do you do? There is nobody there to tell you about projects or anything else. It took me a while."

But he did find a foothold, initially through providing catechism classes, which helped him to get to know people in the parish. Later he joined an ecology centre which had several affiliated groups with whom he linked up. He also ran a school club for kids on a Saturday at the ecology centre providing the children with breakfast and lunch and he was also involved in an outreach to the elderly and the poor, bringing food to their homes.

Last year, Kevin was elected to the Central Leadership Team during the Lay Mission International Meeting in the Philippines in October. "I took up my role in August 2018 when I moved to Hong Kong." There are three people on the leadership team. Vida Amor Hequilan from the Philippines who worked for many years in Taiwan and Catharina Son from Korea who worked in various mission areas including the Philippines, Peru and Myanmar. "My role is to support over 50 lay missionaries who

I wanted to try to put my faith into practice, but when you are in a place like Microsoft, it is a very secular environment and so most of my friends would be very secular in their outlook, they wouldn't have much interest in religion or faith."

are on mission with the Columbans, deal with any issues they have, as well as implement and revise policies." Kevin and Catharina also have a part-time pastoral ministry in Hong Kong. "I am looking into prison ministry as there are many Spanish and French speaking prisoners in various prisons in Hong Kong and there is a lack of people who speak those languages to visit them."

Sarah MacDonald
Editor – *The Far East, Ireland*



Vocation promotion with fellow lay missionaries in Santiago, Chile.



A tale of three missionaries

They were different people and times but all went to the Philippines and faced the same challenges, issues and obstacles.

They went to different places in the Philippines and during different periods in the country's history, but they encountered very similar situations and challenges.

In the news recently was the departure of Australian missionary Sister Patricia Fox who was declared an undesirable alien by the government for joining the cause of poor farmers and workers.



Sister Patricia Fox

Sister Fox had made the Philippines her home for 27 years. She said she has fond memories of the people, especially those on the periphery, the people living on the edge.

She said she got involved in projects geared to bring livelihoods to farmers and help them in their advocacy for rights to their lands, livelihoods, peace, justice and security.

"All these are universal human rights which the church sees as integral," she said.

For her efforts, the government did not renew her missionary visa and forced her to leave the country.

Going to jail for the poor

In 1969, another Australian missionary also went to the Philippines.

Columban Fr Brian Gore, who was then only 25-years-old, arrived in the country with no idea what was waiting for him.

It was before former dictator Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law across the archipelago.

Little did the young priest know that what awaited him were poor farm workers in sugar plantations of Negros Occidental province where he later became chaplain to the Federation of Free Farmers.



Fr Brian Gore

"I'd been told they had no money to buy medicine," Fr Gore recalled. They even considered themselves as the property of the landowners.

He went on to organize Basic Christian Communities, which were later accused by the Philippine military of being "fronts" for communist guerrillas.

Fr Gore said that during those years, church people who worked in poor communities were always suspected of being rebel organizers.

"But we could not just tell people that their priests were with them in prayers," he said.

Fr Gore said missionaries get into trouble because they come from a different background. "When you see poverty, see people dying without medicine, it's entirely a different thing," he said.

Fr Gore could not help but challenge the 'status quo'.

Churchgoers, those who attended Mass on Sundays, warned the priest that the poor would use the church to further their cause.

"I told them it's about time for farmers to benefit from the church as the rich had made use of the institution for so many years," he said.

The church in Negros province during that time was caught between the rebels and the military in a conflict that has continued for almost five decades now.

For taking a stand, Fr Gore and two other missionaries, Irish Columban Fr Niall O'Brien and Filipino Fr Vicente Dangan, and six lay workers were put in jail.

They were only released after international pressure on the Marcos government.

Today Fr Gore continues to work with the poor in Negros.

"I did not come to change the Philippines, the Philippines changed me," said the 75-year old missionary.

Surviving Mindanao

Fr Michel de Gigord of the Paris Foreign Mission used to be the chaplain at Mindanao State University in a war-torn city in the southern Philippines.

Now 78-years-old, the priest has been abducted twice while working in Mindanao.

While working in the predominantly Muslim university, Fr Gigord visited almost every home on the campus.

It was during these visits that he learned of people's fears.

"We created communities inside the campus and called on

"If you tell me that you should not be involved in politics, then you cannot do anything because everything is politics, ..."

You cannot take away politics from human rights and you cannot simply say 'we have to pray...'"

people to stand and fight for their rights," recalled the priest.

For his advocacy, Fr Gigord received his share of death threats.

A top government official threatened to have him killed. He was kidnapped for 21 days but was released after being told to leave the country for good.

After 21 days in France, the priest returned but was again abducted with his niece who was over for a visit.

"They wanted to rape my niece but I said they would have to kill me," he said.

They were released after signing a document that states he would pay 50,000 pesos (about \$1,000 USA today) a month for protection.

Fr Gigord left Marawi and worked in the nearby city of Iligan for ten years where another attempt to kidnap him failed.

He said those in power hated him because he was "meddling" in the political affairs of the region.

"If you tell me that you should not be involved in politics, then you cannot do anything because everything is politics," he said.

"You cannot take away politics from human rights and you cannot simply say 'we have to pray,'" he said.

"Even studying the Bible is political," added the priest.



Fr Michel de Gigord. Photos: © Ucan

A case of snow breaking 'the ice'

Last year in New Zealand the theme for Social Justice Week was "Enabling Communities: Everyone has a part to play". It placed a special focus on the disabled.



While I was pondering this focus I came across this quote from Sebastian Junger, a former war correspondent, about his book, *Tribe: Homecoming and Belonging*.

"It's about why, for many people, war feels better than peace and can turn out to be a great blessing, and disasters are sometimes remembered more fondly than weddings or tropical vacations. Humans don't mind hardship, in fact they thrive on it; what they mind is not feeling necessary".

This quote really caught my attention and left me somewhat stunned. I struggled to accept that war could feel better than peace. I know that not everyone thrives on hardship; in fact many are crushed by it. But I do understand that people often respond positively to crisis situations and I very much resonated with the final statement that what people mind is not feeling necessary.

It's about why, for many people, war feels better than peace and hardship can turn out to be a great blessing, and disasters are sometimes remembered more fondly than weddings or tropical vacations. Humans don't mind hardship, in fact they thrive on it...

It is true that people often come together when faced with a crisis situation. I remember a friend in Ireland talking about moving to a new area and finding it hard to connect with neighbours. Then a heavy fall of snow trapped everyone in her estate. Suddenly people are out working together to clear a way out. When the task was done they all went round to one house for tea. A case of snow breaking the ice. There are a host of similar stories of how in the face of tragedy barriers between people come down and, at least for a time, they work collectively to deal with a situation that they all share. However, once the threat has passed, once the collective need is taken care of, the barriers go back up.

Finding ways to keep the barriers down is a challenge especially in societies where a high value is placed on the individual and on independence. With this comes a sense that we can go it alone and do not really need other people. This kind of society is about the survival of the fittest where the strong will do well but the weak will be left increasingly vulnerable. Never have we had so many ways to connect and yet so many feel disconnected. Technology enables us to be in touch 24/7 with other people, with events local and international and almost any information we desire. Yet it would appear that the number of those who feel lonely, anxious and isolated is increasing.

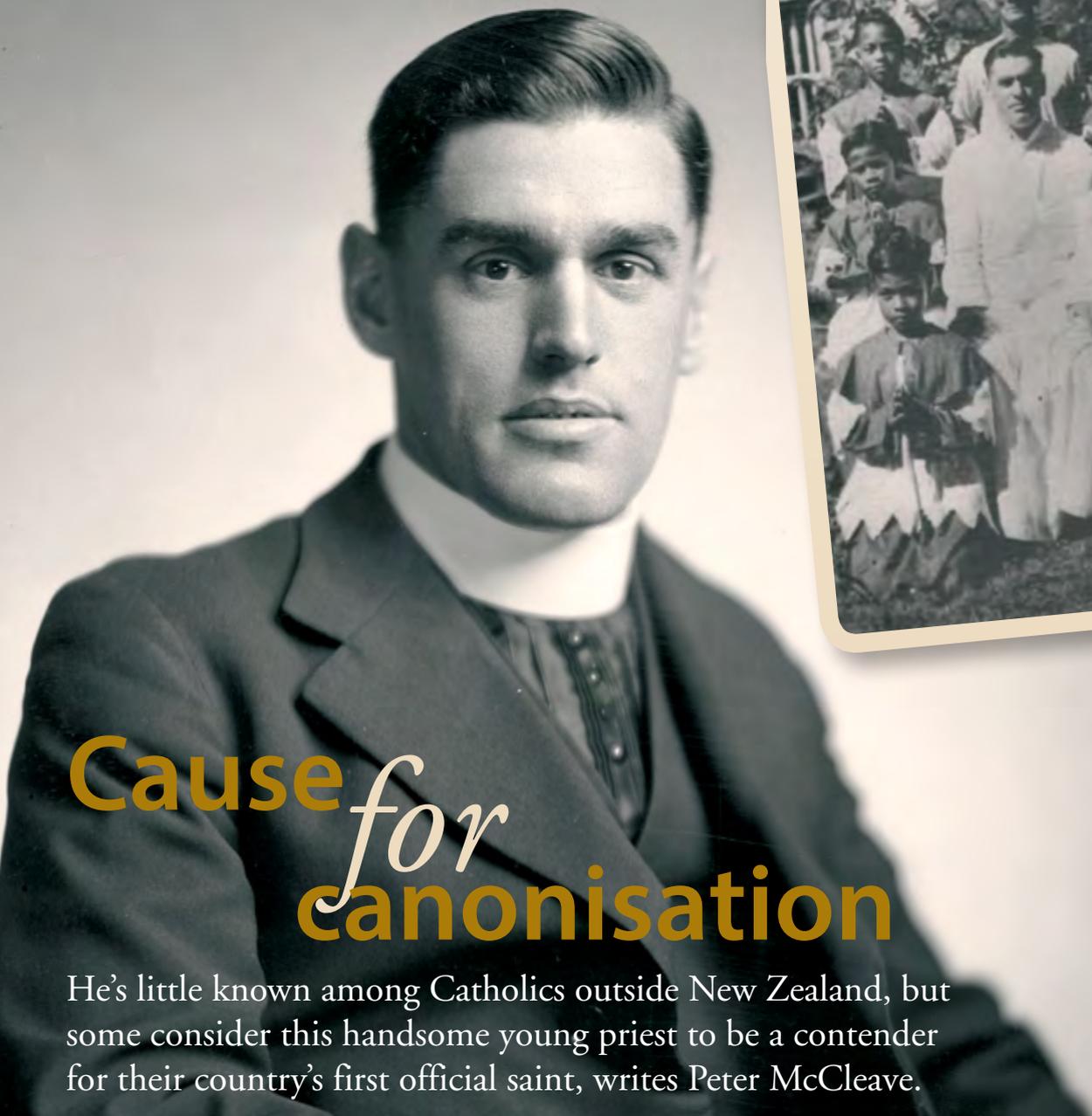
There is little recognition that people need a "tribe" in order to survive. There is something special and necessary about face to face contact that technology cannot replace and this is what a "tribe", be it family, neighbourhood, an organisation or religious community, can provide. However these days, family bonds are weaker than they once were, people do not know their neighbours so well, individual agreements have in

Finding ways to keep the barriers down is a challenge especially in societies where a high value is placed on the individual and on independence. With this comes a sense that we can go it alone and do not really need other people.

some measure replaced collective bargaining in the work place and the number of those joining various organisations and church communities is dropping. It would seem that we are trying to go it alone and we have not evolved in a way that supports this. The isolated individual cut adrift from the herd or tribe is more likely to perish. Those who apply the notion of natural selection to society are fine with that as only the genes of the strong will be passed on. Those who have compassion as a core value are not fine with that and seek to help people find their place and their contribution which may be in a form that is often unseen and unappreciated.

So the message of this year's Social Justice Week is an important one for our times. We need others and they need us. Everyone has a part to play.

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



Cause *for* canonisation

He's little known among Catholics outside New Zealand, but some consider this handsome young priest to be a contender for their country's first official saint, writes Peter McCleave.

Francis Vernon Douglas is a name largely unrecognised in Australia. He was born in New Zealand, of an Australian father and Sligo (Irish) mother. He was part of a large Catholic family that, like many before and during the Great Depression, struggled to survive.

He finished school at 14 in 1924, and in 1925 began work with the Post and Telegraph Department as a messenger boy. He subsequently entered the-

then National Seminary, Holy Cross, at Mosgiel – a cold and isolated, but picturesque, town on the Taieri Plains of the original Otago Province in the lower South Island of New Zealand.

Douglas was ordained priest at St Joseph's Church, Buckle Street, Wellington, on October 29, 1934 by Archbishop Thomas O'Shea. His eldest brother had already entered religious life by joining the Marist Brothers, and an elder sister was a nun at the

Convent of the Sacred Heart in Rose Bay, Sydney.

Following ordination, he worked as a curate in several parishes, but his aspirations lay elsewhere.

From 1933, when two of its priests had visited New Zealand and an open letter appealing for recruits had been distributed, Douglas had felt drawn to St Columban's Foreign Mission Society – popularly known as the 'Columbans'.

The congregation had been founded a mere 17 years earlier in Ireland in 1916 to evangelise China. In 1936 Douglas went to Australia to join them and train for a year at their seminary in Melbourne.

On completion he was posted to the Philippines and worked in a remote area some distance from Manila.

Late in 1938 Douglas was appointed to Pililla, a fishing town near Manila in the Philippines.

Conditions were harsh, and he struggled to combat religious indifference among his parishioners, for the most part nominal Catholics.

His difficulties increased after the Japanese occupied Manila in January 1942. The Japanese onslaught was initially intense and the Philippines was quickly overrun.

Still, the conquerors were, at first, half-heartedly tolerant of the expatriate Christian missionaries who stayed at their posts.

But they became less patient after the Allied counter-attack on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands in August 1942.

As opposition slowly built up, local groups acted as guerrilla units against the occupying Japanese who treated the conquered with little if any regard. Starvation, torture and execution became common.

As the war progressed and the Japanese themselves came under threat, the atrocities increased, together with their suspicions of the non-native occupants.

Douglas reluctantly obeyed the restrictive rules imposed by the Japanese until July 1943.

In that year, he felt obliged to visit some American guerrillas in the nearby mountains who claimed to need his priestly services.

To his anger he discovered that they merely wanted fresh company; he had

been a victim of what proved to be a tragic hoax.

The trip aroused suspicions that he was spying for the resistance forces, and on July 24, 1943 Japanese soldiers took Douglas from Pililla to Paete to interrogate him.

Unwilling to divulge confidences or to break the seal of the confessional, he refused to answer questions. For three days he was tortured and beaten, then on 27 July he was taken away. He was never seen again. A Captain Shikioka subsequently charged with mistreating Douglas was never apprehended.

This is where, for me, the story becomes personal.

His last parish appointment before the Columbans was to St Joseph's in New Plymouth, NZ. St Joseph's occupied an amazing site in the town. On a high land mass at the top end of the town was the weatherboard church, church hall, presbytery and large convent.

Usually in early Australia and NZ, the prime site was where the Church of England stood but here it was different. However one does not distract from the fine beauty of the historic Anglican Church of St Mary in New Plymouth (now a Cathedral), which is worth a visit.

Sadly the old Catholic church buildings have now gone, replaced by what some call modern architecture.

At St Joseph's, Fr Douglas was curate to

the incumbent Fr Minogue. Vernon, as he was and still is commonly known, was responsible for the Boy Scouts: St Joseph's Scout Group. My father was Vernon's scout master and closely associated with him and Fr Minogue

The death of Vernon was extremely felt in New Plymouth, especially among the Catholic community. His torture whilst tied to a baptistry was a horror.

I learned of this from my father soon after the end of the War. Other Catholics knew it as well and came to regard it as an example of the meaning of holding office as a Catholic priest.

At this time and distance, so much is unknown – especially where the body of Fr Vernon Douglas now lies.

The prospect of launching Vernon's cause for beatification and canonisation has arisen among New Zealand Catholics from time to time but it awaits more intense interest and awareness.

In 1959 his name was given to a new boys' secondary school at New Plymouth, Francis Douglas Memorial College, and thus serves as an ongoing expression of what he stood for and did.

Further information exists for those who seek more details. A book on his life *'With no regrets'* was reprinted in 2018.

Peter McCleave is a retired Medical Practitioner and Administrator. This article includes information from NZ Government sources.





Fr Paul Carey, Fr Kelvin Barrett, Fr Peter O'Neill, former Superior General Fr Kevin O'Neill, Fr Peter Toohey, and Como Parish Priest Fr Ossie Lewis celebrate a centenary Mass on November 3. Photo: © Matthew Lau

Centennial year draws to a close

Now we prepare to embark on a new century of mission

As we reflect on the Centennial Masses in Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland, Adelaide, Brisbane and finally in Perth, we give thanks to God for the last 100 years and pray that we will continue to “listen and heed the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (*Laudato Si*, Pope Francis) for the next 100 years.

The church was packed to overflowing at Holy Family Parish in Como W.A. to celebrate the centenary of the Missionary Society of St Columban on November 3, 2018.

The principal celebrant of the Mass was former Superior General Fr Kevin O'Neill. Concelebrating were Columban Frs Paul Carey, Peter Toohey, Kelvin Barrett, and Peter O'Neill, along with various other diocesan and religious priests.

In 1962, after 30 years of having Columbans from Perth participating as missionaries across the globe, the

Society decided to establish a residence in the WA capital, with the permission of then-Archbishop Redmond Prendiville.

Fr Kevin O'Neill gave a reflection on 100 years of Missionary life in his sermon and showed his gratitude toward the Perth Archdiocese for its ongoing support of the Columbans.

“This Eucharist of thanksgiving to celebrate the centenary of the Missionary Society of St Columban is a joyful occasion for all of us to give thanks to God for His steadfast love and fidelity, for the many blessings received over the past 100 years,” the former Superior General said.

“Those I have singled out are only the tip of the iceberg of this great spiritual venture. Driving this iceberg is all of you here and all the families you represent...”

“You who live out your baptismal call to mission, sometimes unheralded, are the core of Columban mission. The Columbans as a society do not exist without you. You are our strength, you are our hope.”



Former Superior General Fr Kevin O’Neill (back row, third from left) and Como Parish Priest Fr Ossie Lewis (back row, third from right) with the Kachin people (Burmese community) after Mass. Photo: © Matthew Lau

“We gather, united across the world, with all those engaged in Columban mission, with our benefactors and friends, with those among whom Columban missionaries live and serve.

“During this centenary year, in a spirit of gratitude, we give thanks for what has been, with passion we celebrate

our mission today, and with hope look forward to our unfolding participation in God’s mission into the future,” Fr O’Neill said.

Perth Superior Fr Kelvin Barrett, during the reception after Mass, thanked those who have partaken in the Columban Society’s journey over the past century.

He paid particular homage to Fr Frank Chapman, Fr Peter O’Sullivan, Fr Kevin O’Mahony, Fr Patrick Hickey, Fr Lynn Whitely, Fr Paul Carey, and Fr Brian Gore, who each played an integral role in the WA Columban story.

Fr Barrett also emphasised the prominence of three WA Columban lay missionaries: Kevin and Jo Bell, and Julie Williams.

“Those I have singled out are only the tip of the iceberg of this great spiritual venture. Driving this iceberg is all of you here and all the families you represent,” Fr Barrett added.

“You who live out your baptismal call to mission, sometimes unheralded, are the core of Columban mission. The Columbans as a society do not exist without you. You are our strength, you are our hope.”

While the Columbans foresee an uncertain future ahead, he said, its Society will continue to tackle the mission day-by-day through the grace of God.



Music for the Saturday morning Mass was provided by the Holy Family Parish Choir and Perth Korean Catholic Community (pictured).

Photo: © Matthew Lau

Matthew Lau
The Record, Perth

Sisters, Vinie and Emily in traditional dress to celebrate Fiji day.



The Church of the Trinity Church band.



Pilgrims on the steps on the newly built church of the Trinity.

Pilgrimage to China

Recently I was privileged to join a party of 23 pilgrims on a trip to China to celebrate 100 years of Columban Mission.

Our tour was put together by Dr. Jeremy Clarke PhD, CEO of *Sino Immersions*, Manly, NSW in conjunction with the Editor of the Australian *Far East* magazine, Mrs Janette Mentha. The tour was led by Columban Frs Tommy Murphy and Dan Troy.

As with any holy pilgrimage, God's grace goes with the group. In our case, just prior to the start of our journey, the Holy Spirit set the agenda with a message from Pope Francis to the Catholics of China and to the Universal Church announcing the first formal agreement between the Vatican and the current Government in Beijing on the appointment of bishops in China.

With his letter the Pope has reunited all Catholics, both those practising in the underground Church in China and those practicing under the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association with the Universal Church.

During a reflection session, Fr Tommy said that as pilgrims we joined Columbans in their mission work in China. So the pilgrimage began.

On our first day in Hong Kong a small

group of us visited Macau which was originally a Portuguese trading post. This became an important base for early Christian missionaries like St. Francis Xavier who stayed there on his way to Japan and the Italian Jesuit, Fr. Matteo Ricci, the founder of the Church in China, who studied Chinese there before embarking on his mission activity in Beijing in 1582.

The next day we visited the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Hong Kong. Local guides took us on an hour-long tour through the Cathedral. These women were dedicated volunteers who conduct regular tours for visitors to the cathedral. What was outstanding: the tour was an actual catechesis of our faith.

The afternoon was spent at the Columban Headquarters which is located in the mountains outside Hong Kong where we met with the General Council Members who spoke to our group and answered questions about the Columbans and their current mission work.

We then met with the Columban Lay Mission Leadership Group who inspired

us with their stories of why they joined the Lay Missionaries and the work that they were doing.

Our final guest speaker was Jackie Hung, Director of the Justice and Peace Commission for the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese. This inspiring young woman told of her work in social justice in Hong Kong and the difficulties she encounters in this work. She had been arrested on a number of occasions in her support of social justice issues and is undaunted in her quest.

From Hong Kong we flew to Wuhan, where Fr. Galvin and his 14 companion Columbans arrived in 1923 to commence the China Mission. Bishop Galvin remained in the Hanyang Diocese, Wuhan until his expulsion by the Communists in 1952.

Our visit to St. Columban's Cathedral in Wuhan was a memorable one; when taken over by the Communists the building was turned into a factory. It was later returned to the Church and was restored and reopened in 1990.

Here we were joined by nine sisters of the Order of Our Lady of, Hanyang

originally founded by Bishop Galvin, and still maintaining their good works in the diocese. The Sisters live in a convent at the rear of the cathedral. Following Mass which was attended by some local parishioners, we enjoyed a Chinese lunch provided by the local parishioners.

The next day took us into the surrounding countryside, to the town of Xianto where the Columbans had worked. Arrangements had been made for Mass to be celebrated in the local church. Fr Dan Troy said that there may be a few locals coming to Mass – well it was more than a few. On arrival we were greeted by the sounds of singing coming from the church; we entered into a church full of local people, old, young, middle-aged, women and men all singing hymns. Mass said in English was a truly universal celebration, with Columban Fr Antonio Seok Jin-Wook from Korea now working in Taiwan as main concelebrant, with Fr. Bernard Dennehy, a Kiwi from our group and Irish born Fr Dan Troy from Taiwan, assisted by Deacon Peter Dong, a Chinese Columban to be ordained in January for work in Pakistan. They were assisted by four local acolytes.

While the Mass was in English, Fr Antonio addressed the congregation in Chinese and invited our Chinese hosts to sing the *Our Father* in Chinese. At the conclusion of Mass, it was moving to see the local people coming forward to receive individual blessings from the

priests. Many of them were elderly and had suffered during the times of the persecution. We were then escorted to a nearby hall for lunch where we enjoyed the local cuisine provided by the parishioners.

In the afternoon we visited the new diocesan centre where the new Church of The Trinity was in its final stages of completion. While partaking of afternoon tea in the grounds, the parish band arrived, back from playing at a funeral; they gave us an impromptu performance to which we responded with *Waltzing Matilda*.

Next we took a train to Nangfeng. It was in Nangfeng in 1929 that young Columban, Fr Timothy Leonard, was taken from his church by bandits and shot in a nearby bush. We attended Mass in that same Church and visited Fr Leonard's grave and tomb, which now stands on a hill in a local mandarin orchard. It has been lovingly restored and is cared for by local Catholics; here we gathered in prayer.

After an overnight stop in Shanghai we travelled some 1200 kilometres to Beijing by bullet train at speeds of up to 300kph. Our hotel was located next door to St. Joseph's Cathedral which offered us the opportunity for 6.30am Mass which I attended with about 60 local people. It was here in this Church that we celebrated our farewell Mass.

The next day was sight-seeing to

the Great Wall. The bus ride was an opportunity for Fr Tommy Murphy to address the group and remind us of what Bishop Galvin had said when he went to China – *"We are here to do the will of God."* He then asked us to reflect on what our role was on this trip and what it might be when we returned home.

Fr Tommy Murphy then took us to visit the tomb of Fr Matteo Ricci and some 69 early European missionaries after which we had a brief visit to Tiananmen Square and the Ancient Observatory where Jesuit missionaries worked in the 17th century.

On the final day of the pilgrimage Fr Tommy arranged for a visit to the Beijing seminary, where he works as a Spiritual Director to ten seminarians. The President of the seminary, Bishop Joseph Li Shan, newly joined to the Universal Church by Pope Francis, invited our party to celebrate Mass in the college chapel. Here we were joined by the 69 seminarians for fifteen minutes of prayer prior to lunch.

This celebration of Mass with the future of the Chinese Church was a fitting end to what had been a packed and spiritually enriching pilgrimage.

Please remember the Church in China as it moves forward.

Ray Lowe
Member of the Bunbury
Diocesan Social Justice Committee



Monica at the tomb of Fr Timothy Leonard.



Celebrant Fr Antonio Seok Jin-Wook with Deacon Peter Dong.



Fr Brian Glasheen and Fr Tommy Murphy. Photos: © J Mentha

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 Intentions for January

Evangelization:

That young people, especially in Latin America, follow the example of Mary and respond to the call of the Lord to communicate the joy of the Gospel to the world.

Mission Intentions for February

Universal:

For a generous welcome of the victims of human trafficking, of enforced prostitution, and of violence.



Philippines' Duterte says bishops should be killed

Catholic bishops in the Philippines have hit back at President Rodrigo Duterte for saying they deserve to be killed, with one bishop branding him a murderous madman.

In a speech on December 5 at the Presidential Palace in Manila, Duterte accused bishops in the overwhelmingly Catholic nation of being useless for criticizing his administration, which came to power in June 2016.

"These bishops of bishops, kill them," Duterte said. "This stupid bunch serve no purpose – all they do is criticize."

In another speech later in the day, Duterte reiterated previous attacks on the Catholic Church, describing it as a hypocritical institution.

The president also clarified that while he is not an atheist, he does not have the "same God" as Catholics.



President Rodrigo Duterte renews his attack against Catholic Church leaders in a speech at the presidential palace December 5. (Photo courtesy of the Presidential Communications Office)

"I never said I do not believe in God," Duterte said. "What I said is your God is stupid, mine has a lot of common sense. That's what I told the bishops; I never said I was an atheist."

Duterte added that he could not have made it in life without God.

Several bishops reacted to what they described as the president's dangerous call for them to be killed.

"This is worrisome coming from a psychotic mind," said Bishop Arturo Bastes of Sorsogon, adding that such provocation should not be taken lightly.

"This should no longer be taken as joke," the prelate said, adding that political aides would have warned Duterte against stirring violence.

Bishop Bastes said President Duterte has become "a murderous madman."

Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo said anyone who asks for others to be killed was not a real leader.

"He is instigating people to go against the law," said the Manila prelate. "I hope he is joking or he is really out of his mind."

Bishop Ruperto Santos of Balanga said the president lost moral authority with his heartless, hateful and harmful call for the killing of bishops.

"The President disgraced himself with the statement and is a disappointment to all God-fearing citizens of our country," Bishop Santos said.

The president's incendiary remarks came in the wake of the first anniversary of the still unsolved killing of Catholic priest Fr Marcelito Paez on December 4, 2017 in the province of Nueva Ecija.

Early this year, two other Catholic priests – Frs Mark Ventura and Richmond Nilo were also killed by still unidentified gunmen.

Duterte has repeatedly attacked Catholic leaders, especially those who have been vocal against the government's anti-narcotics campaign amid claims that up to 20,000 people have been victims of extrajudicial killings.

www.ucanews.com

Joe Torres, Manila, December 6, 2018

From the Director

Black holes

Recently I have been fascinated by the news of two black holes circling each other and heading towards a massive explosion.

All the physics of it is beyond me but that this happened nine billion years ago is amazing to me. I do not know what I thought about the size of the Universe but that it has taken nine billion years for the light to come from there to earth means that the Universe is very, very big!



When I put this amazing phenomenon together with my belief that we all live in God and that God lives in the whole Universe, then that makes God very, very big also. I can only stand still in wonder. As a priest, as a missionary, I have been talking about God all my life. I was once warned not to domesticate God. I was being told that I was making God too small. I guess we do this because the immensity of God is hard to imagine. I think I have been guilty of not respecting the wonderful mystery of God. Not only is God so big, God is also close to me, to us. That such a big God wants to be so close to us is also awesome.

By talking about starting a New Year we are acknowledging our cosmic connections. On New Year the earth starts another circle of the sun. So we are participating in all sorts of travel and movements. We are moving with the earth and the sun, other galaxies and eventually we are connected to those ancient, black holes.

Contemplating this reality I am truly amazed. There is a deep truth about the maxim that “we are our relationships”. In this we are in the image of the Trinity which is constituted by the relationships between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So in contrast to the way many of us think of ourselves as just a small person with a few close friends, we need to look at the bigger picture. We need to see ourselves in the mirror of the Universe. We need to see ourselves as God sees us.

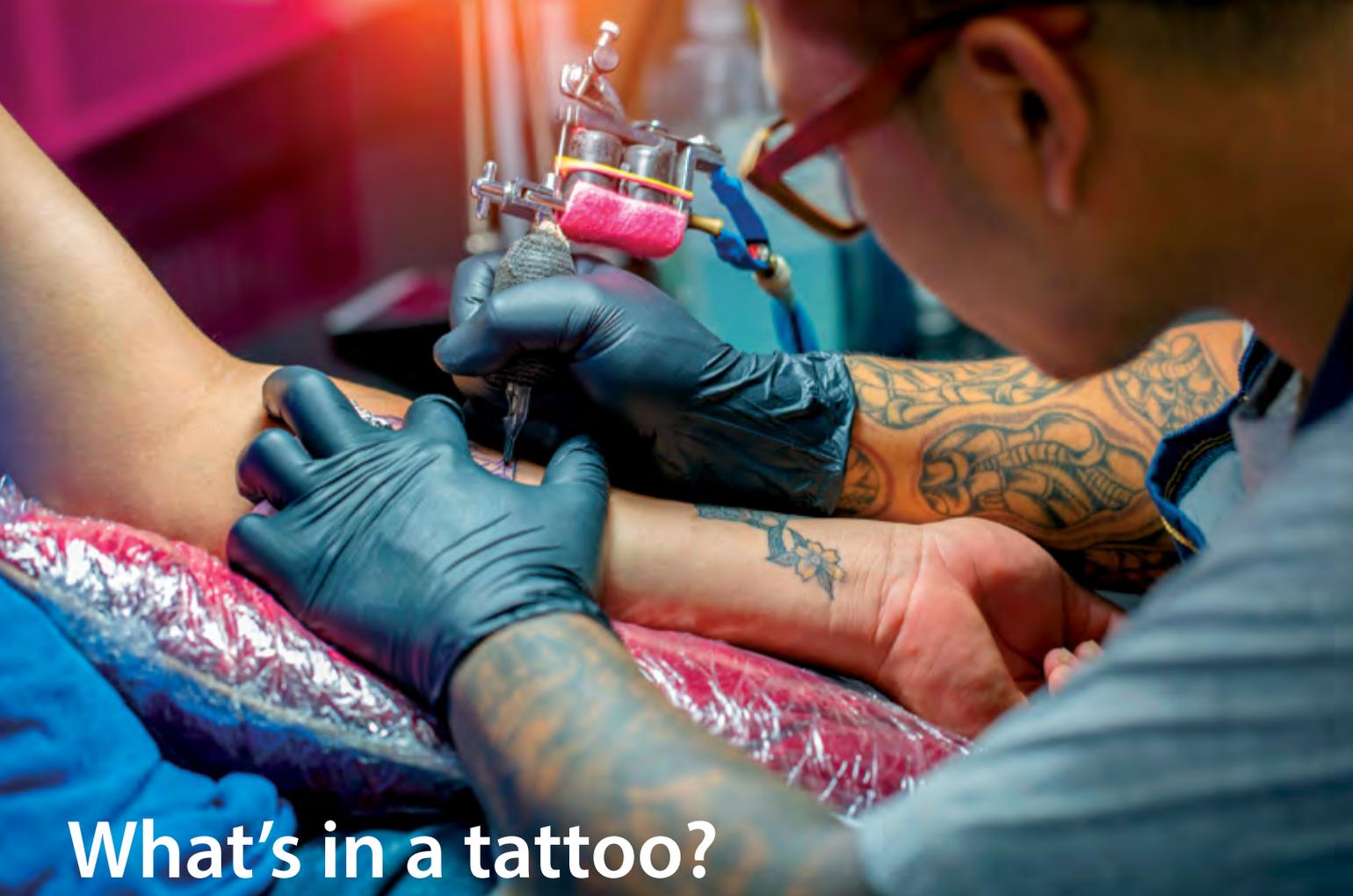
When I put this amazing phenomenon together with my belief that we all live in God and that God lives in the whole Universe, then that makes God very, very big also.

We have amazing connections. We are connected to a huge Universe and to a God who continues to create it out of love. As we become more and more conscious of our relationships, or our connections, we can stand in awe of what our God has done. We think of the bigness of creation, but we are connected to all of it and especially we are connected to the One who is making us daily into his image and likeness. God’s work is not going to stop. This year God will continue to work on us, our world and our Universe. He will continue to love us into fullness.

As we commence this new year let us spend time in wonder. Let us wonder at the immensity of God who holds and creates such a big Universe. Let this love poured out by God be the basis of our hope for a better world. Let our prayer be aligned with God’s desire for us and the Universe – that 2019 will be an even better year than 2018.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Trevor J. Trotter".

Fr Trevor Trotter
director@columban.org.au



What's in a tattoo?

One of my roles in the Columban Lay Missionary office is to accompany Lay missionaries to medical check-ups. During our time together many stories are shared. Last year, Columban Lay Missionary, Liliani Maafu, shared the story of what happened while travelling to work in a jeepney.

Originally from the Kingdom of Tonga, Liliani was assigned to the Philippines in 2015 where she began a six month course studying the Cebuano language. Finishing her course, Liliani was assigned to a small chapel and to Women's Ministry for the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro.

Three years on Liliani is still working in the Philippines. This is her story...

One morning Liliani travelled to her ministry in a jeepney (bus). When she paid her fare, the driver asked her if she was a foreigner. She said she was a local but he did not believe her because of her accent. She told him she had been away for quite a while, hence, the accent.

The jeepney ride continued and

he noticed her T-shirt with the Columban logo on it. "Are you a missionary?" he asked, and with quiet pride she said yes. "Why do you serve the Lord?" he asked. She was taken aback and kept quiet for a while to gather her thoughts and then she said "because this is the right thing to do".

After a few minutes of silence, he

noticed and pointed at her right wrist and asked, "Is that a tattoo?" She nodded. He looked surprised and incredulous and asked, "Why does a nice lady like you have a tattoo?" She looked at him perplexed and said, "Why not?"

The driver went on to say that he had always had a bad impression of girls sporting tattoos. In his opinion

women with tattoos were loose and not supposed to serve the Lord. "Yet here you are, a nice lady with a tattoo serving the Lord."

And when she looked at him, she saw that he was also sporting tattoos on his arms up to his shoulders. She asked him "Why do you say women with tattoos are loose when you yourself have tattoos?" He said, "Ooh, this is different. I can have tattoos because I do not serve the Lord." "That is not true," said she. "We can serve the Lord in many ways."

"What difference does a tattoo make to a person?"

What is important to the Lord is the heart – what is in one's heart, not how one looks like on the outside.

The Lord doesn't see things the way we see them.

After a very long pause he said "Now, I will never look at women with tattoos the way I used to. Thank you."

Liliani's heart rejoiced with this enlightenment.

Back in Tonga, tattoos are quite common among men. It is a cultural thing. But tattoos are not common among girls and women. When Liliani was in high school, she met a girl from another island who was in the same class as her. They became close and as a sign of their new found friendship they vowed to have their names tattooed on each other. Young and foolish, the promise was just a half-hearted one but when classes ended, and just before going back home, her friend dragged her along to see a tattoo artist to have the tattoo they had promised each other.

Her friend went under the needle first and she had *Liliani* tattooed on her back. Still unsure that she really did want a tattoo, and afraid that her father may see it, Liliani had *Melania Waqa* inked on her right wrist. Today she sees the tattoo as a piece of art and symbol of their friendship.

After the death of her father a few years back, four of her brothers had their father's name *Sikifi* tattooed on their bodies and Liliani followed soon after.

The driver went on to say that he had always had a bad impression of girls sporting tattoos. In his opinion women with tattoos were loose and not supposed to serve the Lord. "Yet here you are, a nice lady with a tattoo serving the Lord."

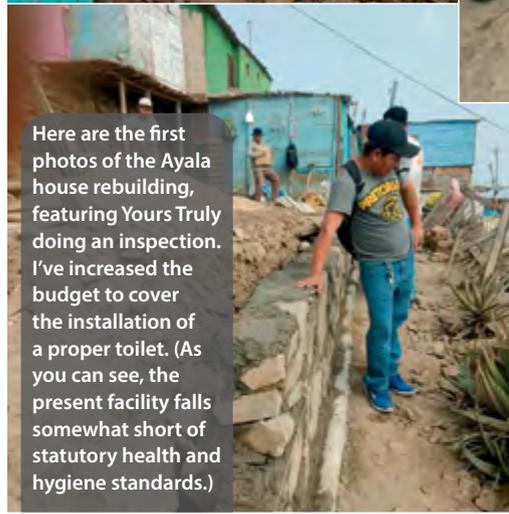
Putting her father's name on her wrist was to honour him and to let him know that he may be gone but he will never be forgotten.

That's what's in a tattoo.

Mavic Mercene.
Columban Lay Missionary Office



Photos: © bigstockphoto.com



All the materials have to be carried up manually along the mountain goat-track. Our architect has contracted half a dozen Venezuelan refugees to do the donkey work. (Poor devils. I've authorised him to double their wages for this part of the job.)

Here are the first photos of the Ayala house rebuilding, featuring Yours Truly doing an inspection. I've increased the budget to cover the installation of a proper toilet. (As you can see, the present facility falls somewhat short of statutory health and hygiene standards.)

Tale of two brothers continues

In the March 2018 edition of *The Far East* we published an article “*A tale of two brothers*” by Columban Fr John Boles.

It was in the parish of Saints Columban and Francis Xavier on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, that Fr John met José and eventually his brother David who has been confined to a wheelchair for almost all of his life. Note: José is David’s full time carer.

When asked why José and his parents never wheeled David to church, especially when they had their annual Mass for the sick, José said “*Come and see why.*”

It soon became clear why David was never brought to church. The family was desperately poor, but more to the point, their flimsy two-room wooden

house clung precariously to the side of a hill.

The article subsequently ran in the Irish *Far East* and the USA *Columban Mission Magazine* and resulted in a renovated home and much more.

Fr John Boles recently wrote ...

You might recall that earlier this year an article of mine entitled, “*A tale of two brothers*” was published in *The Far East* describing how José Ayala dedicated much of his time to caring for his severely disabled brother David.

To my surprise, this resulted in an outpouring of generosity from many

of our readers, which allowed us to put together a scheme to help José and David, and their parents, Apolonio and Yolanda.

Assessment by professional staff at Manuel Duato Special Needs School

Some of you will already know that the Columbans have been heavily involved in Manuel Duato Special Needs School in Peru since its foundation more than 40 years ago. Through this connection, they were able to arrange for staff at the school – a social worker and physiotherapist to visit David and his family and to assess his needs.



Here are the final photos of the Ayalas' new house, featuring David and his Mum, Yolanda, as they move into their new home. The family were apparently fulsome in their gratitude to all concerned in the money-raising campaign. Photos: © Fr John Boles

They reported that David lives in extreme poverty and suffers from multiple disabilities (some of which are so severe that it is remarkable that he has survived so long). David requires various medical examinations and courses of treatment, the most urgent being for his epilepsy. To receive the treatment David needed a 'state identity card' which was addressed and approved. A new orthopaedic bed was sourced and a new purpose-built wheelchair too. Regrettably, it was not feasible for David to attend an 'afternoon club' organised by the school, but the staff pay regular visits to the family to help bring continuing improvements to David's care.

Moving David and his family to a new home on flat ground

This was what many of you wished to achieve for the family, so that David can leave the house and participate in the parish and wider community. After

investigations, the Columbans began working with an architect to re-build their house using a 'pre-fabricated' construction that, if the family were to move in the future, it could be taken with them.

About the house – Fr John said *"nearly there with the house. I was hoping it'd be finished before I left Lima for my sabbatical but the final touches still need to be done.*

Nevertheless, the near-finished product is impressive. The floor is laid, walls built and roof installed. We've done them a nice bathroom, laundry area and kitchen sink. There'll be two bedrooms. Doorways have been made wide enough to let David's wheelchair get through them alright.

José and Mum Yolanda came over to inspect the premises and have their photos taken with me. They were effusive in their gratitude to all concerned. David was sleeping so we didn't wheel him down for the occasion."

Supporting Josè education

David's brother Josè has been keen to pursue third-level education and has decided to build on his experience as a catechist by becoming a Religious Education teacher. He has been accepted by a local Catholic university on a half scholarship. This is excellent news and he has the full support of his parents.

The donations towards this are being managed by a 'foundation' set up by Columban Fr Ed O'Connell and managed by the Director of Manuel Duato School, which has many years' experience of supporting young people who are also parish catechists through third-level education.

With many thanks.

Columban Fr John Boles has worked in South America for over 20 years and is currently on sabbatical.



Fr Donald Hornsey with Ah Ling, Maria and family members.

Still remembered

Porirua, North of Wellington, on the west coast, has a high density of migrants and refugees. This is especially true in Cannons Creek and Waitangirua where Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity live.

Every Wednesday, I have the rewarding experience of accompanying the Sisters as we visit Colombian refugees. However, the other day, they asked if I could go with them to bless the home and pray for the health of a family from Myanmar.

I was delighted to find that Ah Ling and her family were from the Kachin area where Columbans had worked for 40 years up to the time when the government forced them to leave in 1979.

But greater was my surprise when Ah

Ling's Kachin friend, Maria, arrived. She pulled out a piece of paper from her pocket and said *"I have been waiting to meet a Columban for many years because I want to find out where New Zealand Columbans, Frs Tom Rillstone and Lawrence Hickey, are buried."*



Ah Ling and Maria visit the grave of Fr Lawrence Hickey at the Taita Cemetery in Lower Hutt. Photos: © Fr Donald Hornsey

I was able to tell her that Fr Tom Rillstone was buried in Invercargill at the bottom of the South Island, but that Fr Lawrence Hickey's grave was in the Taita Cemetery in Lower Hutt where the Columban Centre is located.

It was touching to see how Columbans who were forced to leave Burma nearly 40 years ago are still remembered.

Maria said that when she was a young girl, Fr Tom Rillstone would travel the 25 kilometres from Myitkyina to visit her village and celebrate Mass.

Maria also maintains internet contact with Archbishop Paul Grawng Emeritus, the first Kachin priest, ordained by Columban Bishop Howe in 1965 and ordained Bishop 11 years later. He is now Archbishop in Mandalay.

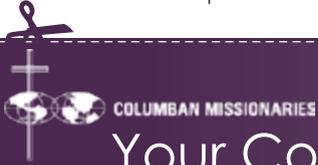
Ah Ling, Maria and their families dressed up in typical Kachin costume to gather with many other Columban friends to celebrate the Columban Centenary in a wonderful ceremony in the Lower Hutt parish church.

They continue with their memories of the Columban presence in Myanmar, so much so that they are now planning to make the 730 kilometre trip to Invercargill to pray at the lasting resting place of Fr Thomas Rillstone who made Burma his home for nearly 40 years.

Columban Fr Donald Hornsey spent 40 years working in Chile, Brazil and Peru. He now lives at St Columbans in Lower Hutt, New Zealand and works with Colombian refugees there.

It was touching to see how Columbans who were forced to leave Burma nearly 40 years ago are still remembered.

Maria said that when she was a young girl, Fr Tom Rillstone would travel the 25 kilometres from Myitkyina to visit her village and celebrate Mass.



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"Do what you can" Bishop Edward J Galvin

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We cannot take our earthly possessions with us, but we can so dispose of them that our good works will continue after we are gone.

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Why not speak to your lawyer about it?

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