

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

June 2019

A South Pacific celebration

The ordination of Fr Martin Koroiciri in Fiji.



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A South Pacific celebration

Fr Martin Koroiciri speaking after his ordination in Fiji.

Photo: Missionary Society of St Columban

From the Editor

There seems to be a common thread running through many of the articles in this issue of *The Far East magazine*. It is the significant events that have impacted on people's lives.

In Chile, Columban Fr Dan Harding writes about a parish activity for those preparing for First Communion and Reconciliation. Children and youth were invited to visit a shantytown to experience solidarity with those in need.

Many of us are praying that the *Plenary Council 2020* will be a significant event for Catholics in Australia. In his article, Columban Fr Noel Connolly affirms Pope Francis' message that encourages us to have a voice, to speak up and to listen carefully.

In the reflection - '*The road to prayer*', Columban Fr Joseph Joyce takes us through his struggles in prayer and the breakthrough when he experienced a new closeness with God and himself.

Columban Sr Ann Gray writes of her time in Hong Kong getting to know the women who worked on the streets. She was instrumental in setting up an organisation that assisted the women in times of crisis. Although Sr Ann is no longer in Hong Kong, the organisation continues to flourish.

Thirty years after being deported, Columban Fr Neil Magill returned to Taiwan in April this year. He speaks about the warm welcome he received and also about the heartbreak of his deportation. It took many years for Fr Magill to recover from this event.

Jorge Taborda's family has been ripped apart in the U.S after his wife and son were deported to Colombia. They had been in the U.S for 20 years and he was not even given the opportunity to say goodbye to them. Broken hearted, he waits patiently for their return.

The theme of Columban Regional Director, Fr Trevor Trotter's column is Pentecost. He discusses how the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and transformed them from the frightened men they had become after the crucifixion into courageous apostles who fearlessly faced martyrdom. Now that is a significant event to remember.

What a great way to conclude the *Columban Centenary* celebrations with the ordination of Fr Martin Koroiciri in Fiji. As Columban Fr Donal McIlraith said, "*it is an enormous joy to be able to put another lifelong priest missionary in the field*".

From the Philippines, Columban Lay Missionary, Gertrude, tells us about attending the ballet and catching up with a former work colleague who also happened to be the *1973 Miss Universe*. Gertrude says that she not only admired her beauty but her heart for service to humanity.

And finally, Columban Fr Barry Cairns gives a short and inspiring account of a small incident that influenced his missionary road in Japan. An excellent story.

When I read the articles in *The Far East* each month I am continually surprised and inspired by the dedication and commitment of Columbans. As our Mid-Year Appeal states, "*It is your support that drives everything we do as Columban Missionaries. Thank you.*"

Janette Mentha
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What a weekend!

FR DAN HARDING

Columban Fr Dan Harding writes of life in the parish of San Columbano, Santiago, Chile.



Youth Group preparing to visit the shantytown in El Pino.

Saturday morning and afternoon in the shantytown

"I felt really sad when I saw what their houses were like." "They are made of cardboard and tin." "The children have nowhere to play." "It is not fair for those children living in those houses. My house is so much better." "There are babies living there."

These were some of the reactions of children and youth from *San Columbano* parish after a visit to a shantytown. In Chile, children preparing to receive the sacraments of First Communion and First Reconciliation are invited to show solidarity with those in need through some concrete activity. Likewise, youth over 15 years, preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation, are also invited to concretely show solidarity with the poor.

On the last Saturday of August, 2018, 22 girls and boys, 12 young adults, ten parents, eight catechists and myself, the

parish priest, headed off in a hired bus, to spend the day in a shantytown called, "El Pino" - The Pine.

The El Pino shantytown began six years ago when 50 families illegally moved onto Government land and set up their shacks of scrap tin, cardboard and timber pieces. There is no running water nor electricity and a high level of unemployment. Around 40 children now live in El Pino. An elected committee of El Pino residents is working with the *Housing Ministry* to hopefully one day obtain decent public housing for the 50 families living there.

In Chile, like elsewhere, there are many prejudices against people who live in shantytowns. They have illegally occupied land. Some people say the residents are lazy and do not go out to look for work. They say that the residents just look for handouts and will not do anything to help themselves. Others say that shantytowns harbour criminals, drug addicts and alcoholics.

In order to help overcome these prejudices, we as a parish felt that a visit to a shantytown for our children and youth in sacramental programmes would be very beneficial for them. Even though the families of the parish are poor themselves and live in a drug and gang ridden environment, the families in the shantytown are still far worse off than they are.

As a parish, we wanted the children and youth to realize that if they are to have an encounter with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and in Reconciliation and with the Holy Spirit in Confirmation, then they must make a commitment to be in solidarity with those in greater need.

Prior to the visit to El Pino, special collections of food, clothing and toys were taken up at Sunday Masses for several weeks. Letters were written to a large company that produces yoghurt and ice cream asking for donations. Bakeries were also approached to donate bread. We received positive responses from all.

A breakfast of sandwiches, tea and coffee and yoghurt, was offered upon arrival in El Pino to the 40 children and some of the parents who wanted to participate. Then fun and games were enjoyed until lunch. Face painting for the small children was very popular as was manicuring nails for the girls.

A lunch of spaghetti bolognese was prepared by the adults from the parish on a gas stove used for camping which we brought on the bus. After lunch, it was back to all kinds of fun and games until it was time to leave around 4.00pm.

What were some of the results from the visit?

- The parish made a strong connection with the residents of El Pino shantytown.
- We learnt that we can offer some material support, but more importantly, through our social worker and legal contacts, we can support them in advocating with them for their right to decent housing, work, health care and education.
- We can also offer them our pastoral care.
- The residents of El Pino shantytown will continue to help us from the parish overcome our own prejudices and help us to learn to take risks in reaching out in friendship and solidarity to others in need, as the Gospel calls us to do.

Saturday evening and night

Later that evening, after the Saturday night Vigil Mass at 6.00pm, I celebrated another Mass at 7.30pm for a large family and their friends, to mark one month since the death of a beloved grandmother, mother, aunt and friend.

What was particularly moving at this Mass was when the nephew of the deceased lady danced the traditional Chilean *Cueca* dance before a large photo of her. He was dressed in the traditional Chilean costume of a *Huaso*, a Chilean cowboy.

The nephew danced in honour of, and gratitude for, the life of his deceased aunt.

Sunday morning and midday Centenary Mass

After the two Sunday morning Masses, I drove to the other side of Santiago for a special Mass at midday in an ex-Columban parish, in another church of *San Columbano*. This special Mass was celebrated to commemorate the *Centenary of the Founding of the Columbans in 1918*. The Church was full with current and former parishioners.

The Mass began with a power point presentation of the history of the *Missionary Society of St Columban*. After the Mass, another power point presentation showed photos of all Columban priests, associates, seminarians and lay missionaries who had worked in that parish including Irish Columban Bernard Martin, Diocesan Associate Jack Peard from Toowoomba, Seminarian Kevin Bell from Sydney, Dublin Diocesan Associate Enda Lloyd and Irish lay missionary Noranne Hessian.

The occasion finished with an opportunity to share our friendship with sandwiches, tea and coffee. We were then all provided with refrigerator magnets with the image of St Columban.

Sunday afternoon and evening

A family with whom I am friendly had invited me to Sunday lunch, which in Chile can begin from about 2.00pm and go for several hours until the evening.

This is how I spent a most enjoyable and worthwhile weekend.

Columban Fr Daniel Harding is the parish priest of San Columbano parish, Santiago, Chile.

To speak boldly, but to listen humbly



"The last time the Catholic Church in Australia held a *Plenary Council* was in 1937. It has been more than 80 years since we gathered all of the Church together and much has changed. In 2020, we will have a *Plenary Council* about the future of the Catholic Church in Australia. What are we called to do? Who are we called to be? How do we need to change?" Bishop Mark Coleridge.

Pope Francis, talking to the Bishops before the first session of the *Synod on the Family* told them, "*You need to say all that you feel with parrhesia*" (boldly, candidly and without fear). He encouraged them to speak up even if they thought he would not want to hear what they wanted to say.

However he also exhorted them, "*And at the same time, you should listen with humility and accept with an open heart what your brothers say.*"

Parrhesia or speaking boldly, listening humbly and always with an open trusting heart is Francis' prescription for synodality and discernment.

To a certain extent, we have been in speaking boldly stage for more than a year. More than 40,000 people had contributed to the *Plenary Council* by the end of 2018. On Ash Wednesday of this year, all that has been said will be analysed by the *National Centre for Pastoral Research* to identify the major themes or topics and then fed back to the people of the Australian Church.

Naturally, people have spoken boldly. It is the first Council for more than eighty years and the first at which the lay people have been invited to speak up as is their baptismal right. Now we are entering the second phase and the emphasis will be more on listening and discernment.

Pope Francis uses the word "dialogue" 59 times in *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Apostolic Exhortation, 'Evangelii Gaudium'*) and the word "listen" 31 times. Listening is key to discernment for Francis. "*We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur.*" (EG 171)

In his message on *World Communications Day 2014*, he challenges us to "*be people of depth, attentive to what is happening around us and spiritually alert.*" Always believing that the people we are talking with or about are genuine and have something worthwhile to say. "*Group discernment requires a commitment to listen attentively and to trust the intentions of others, together with a willingness*



The goal of the Plenary Council is not to end up with a church with perfect structures, good as that might be, but to become more of a joyous, missionary church, and a poor church, with and for the poor. Only then will we be Christlike and convincing to our secular brothers and sisters in Australia.



Fr Noel Connolly

to share our own experience and insights, and let go of our assumptions or biases. The question at the heart of a pastoral planning process is not 'What will we do?' but 'What is the Holy Spirit leading us to do?'" Synod Outcomes: Archdiocese of Wellington Synod 2017.

The *Plenary Council* is not like a parliamentary debate of theological opinions. Although we are to speak boldly, we are also to listen humbly and that requires personal freedom, open-mindedness, trust and patience. It is the only way we can hear what the Spirit is saying through others and even deep in our own hearts.

Finally, Pope Francis invites us to listen to a group that probably has not received sufficient emphasis in our preparations for the *Plenary Council* so far, namely, the poor. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, he reminds us, "They have much to teach us... We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way." (EG 198)

The goal of the *Plenary Council* is not to end up with a church with perfect structures, good as that might be, but to become more of a joyous, missionary church, and a poor church, with and for the poor. Only then will we be Christlike and convincing to our secular brothers and sisters in Australia.

Columban Fr Noel Connolly SSC is a member of the Adult Formation Team with Catholic Mission Australia and is a member of the Facilitation Team for the Plenary Council 2020.

However he also exhorted them, "And at the same time, you should listen with humility and accept with an open heart what your brothers say."



The road to prayer

What impresses me most in my journey of prayer is how I have been guided by God through the goodness of other people. When I worked in Chile many years ago, I realized that I was travelling in a parallel line with the Lord and not having much personal sharing with Him. Then, without warning, I was asked by my Superior to go for studies in spirituality and spiritual direction. I was shocked. I could not believe that I was being chosen to do this, because I never considered myself either worthy or capable of such a calling. However, when I expressed my surprise and resistance, I got another shock. I was told that my community leaders had been watching me for a long time and they could see my suitability for such studies!

After I got over these shocks, I decided to apply for admission to a school of theology. To do this, I needed a recommendation, and so I approached a former professor of mine who happened to be working with me in the same parish. He had been helpful to me in my struggles with studies in the seminary and I felt he would have a good knowledge of my ability to face the challenges to come. He gave me a letter stating that he always considered me to be a person of above-average intelligence and that he had no doubt about my ability to do well in studies. I jokingly told him that he should not tell lies! However, he proved to be correct and later on, when I started studying a year's spirituality program in Berkeley, California, I found that, not only could I pass my exams, but I could even excel in some of the courses.

While at Berkeley, I met a religious sister who was on sabbatical. She had come from Cambridge, Massachusetts,

where she was working as a staff member in an institute for the training of spiritual directors called *The Center for Religious Development* (CRD). She encouraged me to apply for a place, and, after being interviewed by the staff, I was accepted, and spent three years studying and working there. It was through all those studies and the practice of spiritual direction that I could deepen my journey in prayer as a conscious relationship. This deepening had several stages. Firstly, I came to experience the great love and mercy of God for me a sinner. Then, I came to know Jesus as my faithful companion, friend, and teacher. This led me on to discovering, through my relationship with Him, the true meaning of friendship, of ministry, of commitment, of compassion, of suffering, and even of death. I came to understand and appreciate each of these areas of experience as opportunities for greater love and life, and, as I prayed about them, I found myself being healed of several painful memories that I had been carrying for many years, such as punishment, deprivation, exploitation and abuse.

All of this involved learning to be myself with God, and letting Him be Himself with me. For a long time I had been hesitant to let God into some areas of my life, and therefore could not be truly open with Him. Also, I wanted God to be as I desired Him to be, not as He might choose to be in Himself, and, as a result, I often got frustrated and angry with Him. This controlling attitude of mine placed what seemed like a thick glass wall between God and myself. I could look at Him, but I could not get to Him. How could I remove this wall?

The breakthrough came during a retreat when I told my director about my struggle in prayer. He listened to my



complaints, and then simply said, "You know, in His great love for you, God leaves you free to be as you are. Could you not, in your great love for God, let Him be free to be as He is?" To hear the word "free" made all the difference for me, and, in the resulting atmosphere of mutual freedom, I found that the glass wall was gone and there was a new closeness between God and myself.

When I had completed my studies in the USA, I was assigned to Pakistan. There I became involved in the ministry of retreat-giving and spiritual direction. I also worked in a rural parish where there was lots of work to be done visiting and meeting many people who had all kinds of struggles with poverty, injustice and oppression. I was accompanied by another priest who was actively involved in justice and peace work, and I got involved too. This had a marked impact on my experience in prayer. Previously, I used to like spending time alone with God trying to get closer to Him, but now it was not working. There were too many "distractions!" Then, one day, as I was praying in my room and complaining in frustration, I heard some children playing loudly outside my window. I grumbled to God about the noise, and suddenly an answer came in my mind: "You are looking for me inside, and I am outside!" From that day onwards, I found balance in my prayer and could experience God's presence both alone and with the people.

Now, it is from Pakistan that I am writing this article. These days I am being guided by God in my journey of prayer by a little book that I have found most enriching. It is called *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* by a French Jesuit named Jean Pierre de Caussade. In it, he says things like, "Ah! You are searching for God... You seek perfection, and it

lies in everything that happens to you - your suffering, your actions, your impulses are the mysteries under which God reveals Himself to you" (p.18). And, "Everything that happens each moment bears the stamp of God's will... No moment is trivial since each contains a divine kingdom and heavenly sustenance" (p.79).

Let me conclude my writing with a recommendation of this book to all you who, like me, are making your journey of conscious relationship with God. I hope that it will help you as much as it is helping me.

Columban Fr Joseph Joyce has spent most of his missionary life in Pakistan.

To hear the word "free" made all the difference for me, and, in the resulting atmosphere of mutual freedom, I found that the glass wall was gone and there was a new closeness between God and myself.

A seed is sown

SR ANN GRAY

Columban missionary Sr Ann Gray recalls her pioneering work with Hong Kong's marginalised sex workers.

In 1986, when I was in the process of learning Cantonese, a Hong Kong friend took me to Mong Kok on the Kowloon side of Hong Kong where, for the first time, I saw sex workers waiting on the streets for clients. It was clear that the residents in this area preferred not to acknowledge the existence of this group of women in their midst. **To the men, these women were obviously no more than objects to be stared at and commodities to be used for pleasure.** For some reason, I realised that this was the group of women that I wanted to work with.

Research into the prevalent needs in Hong Kong society consequently showed that women who worked in the sex industry were being sadly neglected and this became our focus. It was clear that nobody wanted to know women who worked in this industry or make contact with them, they were considered to be the lowest of the low and there were no services at all specifically designed with their needs in mind.

I volunteered for this project, with the aim of endeavoring to give women involved in Hong Kong's sex industry an experience of being treated as persons and, in particular, as women. I began by walking around the areas which were known as unofficial 'Red Light' districts. As a Westerner in a predominantly Chinese area, I seemed to be considered a tourist and no attention was paid to me.

After many weeks of wandering around and no sight of any 'working women', it seemed that this was the wrong place until one night I happened to be there during a police raid. Many young women of various Asian nationalities had been arrested and were being herded into the police truck. While the pimps used their mobile phones to warn the minders to move other girls from the area, I walked up and down and listened in to the telephone conversations. None of the pimps suspected I understood what was being said. It was clear that many women were working in this area but invisibly and obviously under the control of this group of pimps.

The Hong Kong Women's Christian Council soon began to express interest in working with me and a Concern for Prostitutes group was set up. Gradually another team was formed and the services of REACH



Expelled Columban back in Taiwan

Returning to Taiwan in April this year, thirty years after being deported, I was deeply impressed with how the country has developed. I had spent ten years in Taiwan helping to educate factory workers about their rights and promoting a safe working environment in factories where so many young workers were seriously injured. That was the time of martial law and Taiwan was a police state. The country had been under martial law for more than 38 years which qualified as the longest imposition of martial law by a regime anywhere in the world at that time.

Due to the sacrifices, brutal deaths, imprisonment of political activists and the formation of the *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP) in 1986, Taiwan has now become a democratic and highly developed country with an excellent

health care system for all of its 23 million people. The first democratically elected president was Chen Sui-Bian from the *DPP* [2000-2008]

There are many aspects I would like to talk about but I will limit myself to Education and Religious Freedom.

Taiwan has been a centre for technical excellence for the past number of decades with consistently high standards in the fields of technology and the sciences. General standards of schooling are comparable with other developed nations in the region such as Japan and South Korea. Levels of literacy in the country have been calculated at 98.2% of citizens aged 15 and older. Around 95% of all students continue in some form of education, be it academic or vocational.

Fr Neil Magill (centre) with a co-worker's children in Taiwan.



In 2016 Tsai Ing-Wen from the *DPP* was elected President and she has worked hard with her Vice President Chen Chien-jen, a Catholic, in building up the country and easing tensions between China and Taiwan. She is committed to working with like-minded partners on safeguarding freedom of religion and ending intolerance and persecution. In March at a large international gathering in Taipei she had the following to say: *"Religious freedom is under threat around the world amid growing suppression of democracy and human rights and in the face of this challenge, Taiwan stands with those who suffer oppression at the hands of authoritarian regimes"*. No doubt it was a veiled reference to China.

Speaking at this same Forum she said *"Freedom of religion is central to Taiwan's democratic way of life and as a melting pot of people, cultures and faiths, our nation is evidence that diversity and mutual acceptance bind and strengthen societies"*. According to Tsai, history has shown that when people live free from fear, countries enjoy peace, stability and prosperity, adding, *"Whatever your religion, whatever your tradition, whatever your identity we are called to bring religious freedom to the oppressed, hope where there is despair and light where there is darkness"*. She also cited the increasing number of Muslims, Catholic and Hindu residents who have immigrated to Taiwan over the past several years and who, she noted, *"Have enriched the nation with their culture, food and religions and demonstrated that anyone can contribute a chapter to the story of Taiwan"*.

Taiwan serves as an example of a religious free society for China. Religion is not a threat to governments.

In recent weeks China has been threatening to attack Taiwan and make it part of China. This was the big fear I heard from so many friends when I returned last month. China wants to make it a 'one country, two systems' but Taiwan doesn't want to be a second Hong Kong or Tibet. Tsai has been a trailblazer and well liked abroad for her reluctance to pick fights with China. However, some think Tsai, the first woman president in Taiwan, is not doing enough to ensure Taiwan's independence and so her former prime minister (Lai Ching Te) has declared he will challenge Tsai for the presidential nomination of the *Democratic Progressive Party* for the election in January 2020.

I was heartbroken when I was deported from Taiwan as I loved the people and the mission work was challenging. It took a long time to recover from that ordeal. But now I see God works in mysterious and wonderful ways. If I had

not been deported I would not now have the privilege of working in Myanmar/Burma. I would still be in Taiwan.

Returning to Taiwan for a week has left a lasting impression on me. The welcome, hospitality and generosity was out of this world and I had the opportunity to meet many old friends, people I had worked with and some who spent years in prison for their commitment to making Taiwan a democratic country. They gave me almost US \$7000 for my *Higher Education Centre* (HEC) in Myanmar. They said it was a token of appreciation for what I did for Taiwan's people more than 30 years ago.

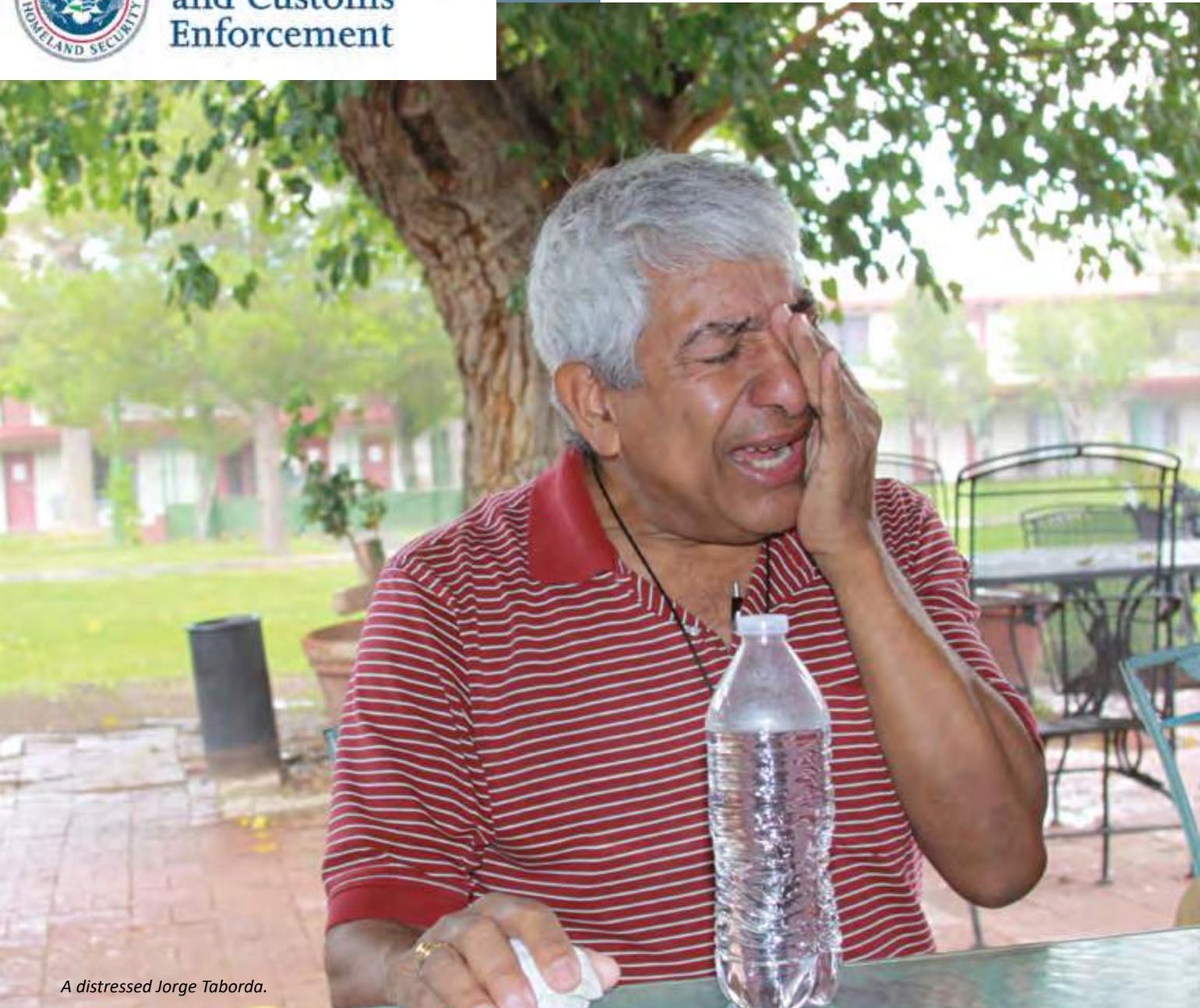
There were so many highlights but the big one was meeting the Vice President at the Presidential Palace at his request for lunch. Even though he and I were the only two Catholics among the 20 friends, he started by making an apology to me for the way the previous government had treated me 30 years ago. Before lunch he said a prayer for all of us, for the poor in the world, for God's creation and for mother earth that produces the food. After a two hour lunch and photographs it was time to go and he asked me to give him a blessing. He is a man who attends daily morning Mass. He is not afraid to openly show his faith. What a blessing in our politically correct world today!

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

According to Tsai, history has shown that when people live free from fear, countries enjoy peace, stability and prosperity, adding, *"Whatever your religion, whatever your tradition, whatever your identity we are called to bring religious freedom to the oppressed, hope where there is despair and light where there is darkness"*.



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement



A distressed Jorge Taborda.

"Come, we have an order to deport you. We have your wife and your son." they said. He demanded to see the deportation order, but was denied.

Family ripped apart

MARÍA EUGENIA CARDONA USA

In the *Holy Cross Retreat Center* in Las Cruces, New Mexico, I met an illegal immigrant named Jorge Taborda. This is his story:

Searching for a better life, Jorge moved to the United States from Colombia with his wife, Francia, and son 20 years ago. They settled into the community of Las Cruces and established deep ties with *Our Lady of Health* Catholic Church. Since their arrival in the U.S they've sought asylum, but after 9/11 this became an impossible dream.

Undocumented, but with a strong desire to get ahead, his family stayed in the country and they had another son, who by birthright, is an American citizen.

Jorge and his wife worked honestly. Jorge as a self-employed computer technician and an active *Red Cross* volunteer who has served on 13 different relief missions including hurricanes Katrina, Wilma, Harry, Sandy and tornado disasters in Texas and Arkansas. Francia worked for a local family as a housekeeper for ten years. Jefferson, their eldest son, graduated in 2018 with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from *New Mexico State University*. The family lived without benefits or debts.

In April their lives changed and the nightmare began. Francia was detained just two blocks from their home by undercover *Immigration and Customs Enforcements* (ICE) agents. In exchange for her release they pressed her to tell them the whereabouts of her 23 year old son, Jefferson.

Jorge was at a doctor's appointment with their 15 year old son when his wife called him and warned him not to come home as Immigration was there to deport them. Jorge felt as if the world had come crashing down.

The agents, who remained unidentified, found Jorge and his son at the hospital. *"Come, we have an order to deport you. We have your wife and your son."* they said. He demanded to see the deportation order, but was denied.

Claiming they would release his wife if he came with them to El Paso, the agents followed Jorge to his son's school. After dropping his son off at school, afraid and still being followed by an unmarked car, Jorge decided to go to the nearby Catholic Church.

When the agents noticed he wasn't heading to El Paso they began to chase him. They tried to cut him off and run him off the road by slamming into the back of the vehicle. They

continued to do this until Jorge pulled into the parish *Holy Cross Retreat Centre*, where he gave his keys to the parish priest, Fr Tom. That's when he heard the agents talking over the radio: *"we lost him, he found sanctuary."* He was calm knowing his wife and oldest son knew he was safe.

Jorge says that *"Since that day I have lived in the Lord's house, doing His will. But my youngest son, an American citizen, is stuck here, away from his friends and with no place to go. But it's okay, I'm in the house of the Lord. I have a roof, food, and I work fixing computers. I work to send money to Colombia since my wife can't work. They consider her too old to work."*

Recently, Fr Tom invited the new congresswoman in charge of the border region to visit the Centre where Jorge and his son spoke with her. They only ask that she do what she can to reunite his family.

Update on Francia

While Francia was being detained, her church and community hosted a public action and multi-faith vigil on May 18 calling on Deputy Director Fierro of the *Department of Homeland Security* to grant her a Stay of Removal. On May 31 Deputy Director Fierro issued a decision denying Francia's application.

She was deported on June 7 to Colombia without any opportunity to say goodbye to her family and without speaking with her attorney.

Francia was picked up from the airport by an extended relative and is staying with them now in Colombia, a country she hadn't been to for 20 years.

María Eugenia Cardona is the Editor of the Columban Spanish publication Misión Columbana.

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 June

That priests, through the modesty and humility of their lives, commit themselves actively to a solidarity with those who are most poor.



Christians and Muslims of India offer joint aid to the people of Sri Lanka

A joint statement from Christian and Muslim leaders reads: *"As Sri Lanka is a country very close to us, together we intend to offer practical help to allow the victims of the Easter attacks to overcome the unprecedented crisis that has devastated their lives.*

We are sending a high-level inter-religious delegation, composed of members of our faith communities to explore the possibilities of cooperation and to offer our sincere condolences to the people of Sri Lanka."

Christians and Muslims in India together express shock and unequivocal condemnation of the barbarous attacks in Sri Lanka, reads the statement. *"The people and groups responsible for the massacres are against humanity, against civilization and against God. They are the embodiment of the most atrocious forces on earth",* the two religious leaders affirmed in the statement.

"Associating terrorists with any faith is a sacrilegious act", the two say, urging the followers of all religions to *"deny and condemn these barbarous individuals and groups",* and inviting the government to ban them from society.

The message points out that "terrorist attacks become more gruesome if executed under the pretext of religious faith: in addition to causing the loss of innocent lives, they destroy peace and harmony". It is the duty of all religious leaders to stand up and use all our resources to repudiate this evil from society, the leaders repeated. For this reason, they continued, "it is necessary to remain close to our Christian brothers and sisters to share their sorrows and express our solidarity with them".

The two religious leaders asked the government and the police *"to be more vigilant and to take precautionary measures*



The Cardinal (left) and the Maulana.

that prevent terrorist groups from devastating civil society", expressing our determination to continue our fight against terrorism, for global peace, and inviting all citizens, of any faith, *"to collaborate with their personal efforts".*

The statement concluded by appealing to *"all people of good will, regardless of religion, caste or creed, to work to save humanity and maintain social harmony and peace".*

The joint declaration was signed by Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay and President of the *Indian Bishops' Conference (CBCI)*, and of Maulana Mahmood A. Madani, Secretary General of *"Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind"*, the Council of Muslim theologians in India.

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic nation of 22 million inhabitants that are mostly Buddhists but include minorities: Christians, Muslims and Hindus.

India is a nation of 1.3 billion inhabitants of which 80% are Hindus, about 14% Muslims while Christians represent 2.5%.

From the Director

What is our mission from God?

One of the toughest jobs at Mass on Pentecost Sunday is to get someone to read the first reading from the *Acts of the Apostles*. Many people are afraid of stumbling over the unfamiliar place names that we find there. By the time they get to “Phrygia and Pamphylia” most readers are pleased that the end is in sight.

On that day of Pentecost the people from all over the Mediterranean world heard the apostles preaching in their own language. This is amazing to everybody. How did this happen? Because of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowers the apostles with the gifts they need to tell the story of Jesus.

When Jesus started his preaching in Nazareth he chose to read the piece from Isaiah that says “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me*”. Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry on his mission.

Today the Spirit is empowering us in the Church to tell the story of Jesus to everyone.

After the apostles told the story of Jesus, many people believed and came together as a community.

It is not surprising that the Spirit continues the same work here on earth to bring us together to build communion irrespective of the difficulties.

Just as the barrier of language was overcome on Pentecost Sunday so too will other differences of background, culture, religion and history be overcome with the help of the Holy Spirit.

As we strengthen our faith by listening to the reading from the Scriptures, we are in a better position to view our world situation. We can look at the big pictures of migration, economic imbalance, ecological devastation, greed and corruption through a more hopeful lens.

Faced with these problems we can wonder about the future of the human race and our world. However our belief in God, our belief in the Holy Spirit, is a firm basis for hope. Empowered by the Spirit we can go on and work with the Spirit to make the world a better place. We can see migrants not just as strangers. We can hope that the world will wake up to climate change and we can work to overcome the gap between the rich and the poor.

Today people are wondering about the future of the church here in Australia and New Zealand. In Australia, many people have participated in the early phases of the Plenary Council process. Some are hopeful of a positive outcome and others are wondering what can possibly come out of it. From a purely human perspective there are good reasons not to expect too much. However we are talking about the Church and the Holy Spirit!

I am sure there were plenty of ‘wise people’ at the time of the *Acts of the Apostles* who were confident that this small bunch of people from Galilee were not going to go anywhere. However, we have a Church today because they allowed themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. God has not changed. God still loves every human being on this planet. God still wants to use this band of followers of Jesus that we call the Church, to carry on the mission.

So, what is our mission from God? Our job as Church is to tell the story of God’s love.

Our mission as a Columban family is the same. To tell the story of God’s love to the people in the countries where the Spirit has led us.

May all of us be blessed and gifted by the Spirit in this season of Pentecost.

When Jesus started his preaching in Nazareth he chose to read the piece from Isaiah that says “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me*”. Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry on his mission.



Fr Trevor Trotter
director@columban.org.au





A South Pacific celebration

The new Columban century brought us a new Columban priest in Fiji. Deacon Martin Koroiciri was ordained priest at the *Sacred Heart Cathedral* in Suva by Archbishop Chong on the vigil of *St Columbans Day, 2018*.

A particularly joyful note for us was the presence of some 80 priests at the ordination. Not only were our Fiji priests in attendance but many were here from Tonga, the two Samoas and even the Cook Islands.

The ordination coincided with a retreat at *Pacific Regional Seminary (PRS)* for the English speaking priests of *CEPAC*. *CEPAC* is the Episcopal Conference that takes in all the islands of the South Pacific from Guam to Tahiti. So the ordination was a real South Pacific celebration and this was reflected in the magnificent music by the Archdiocesan Choir.

The new Columban priest is from a Catholic family that originated in Lakeba, capital of the *Lau Group* here in Fiji. Martin was born in Suva and his early childhood and teens were spent in the Columban parish of Labasa.

After high school Martin went to work for a computer company.

Ten years ago he joined the Columbans. After a Spiritual Year in Manila, he asked for some time off, to assist his family. He worked as an insurance agent for two years and then re-joined the Columban programme.

CEPAC is the Episcopal Conference that takes in all the islands of the South Pacific from Guam to Tahiti. So the ordination was a real South Pacific celebration and this was reflected in the magnificent music by the Archdiocesan Choir.

Fr Martin will minister in Suva for a few months before returning to his mission in Chile mid-year. We invite you all to support him most especially with your prayers.

His first mission assignment as a seminarian was to various Columban parishes in Chile where he served the people there and improved his Spanish.

Back in Suva he completed his theology studies and graduated on November 9, 2018 from the *Pacific Regional Seminary* with a BTheol from the *Urbaniana University* in Rome to which *PRS* is affiliated. The *Urbaniana* is a pontifical university and universally recognized so that Fr Martin can pick up his studies virtually anywhere should he and the Columbans wish.

As in every Columban country, this centenary year has been one of celebration and commitment to mission.

With Fr Martin's ordination, we have a happy conclusion to our Centenary year and a great opening for our second century.

It is an enormous joy to us to be able to put another lifelong priest missionary in the field.

Fr Martin will minister in Suva for a few months before returning to his mission in Chile mid-year.

We invite you all to support him most especially with your prayers.

Columban Fr Donal McIlraith, Mission Awareness and Education, Fiji.



Photo: Fr Martin Koroiciri after his ordination.

Miss Universe and the missionary

GERTRUDES C SAMSON

In December 2017, a generous Malate parishioner gave the Columbans complimentary tickets to watch the Ballet Philippines perform 'The Nutcracker' at the *Cultural Center of the Philippines*.

It was just a few days after I arrived from Mindanao to help out with mission promotion on the *2018 Columban Centenary Celebration* and on the relief operation at the resettlement site of the internal refugees from Marawi.

Upon hearing about the ballet, I said to myself, "Great! Thanks be to God, I really need a break!" And I love the ballet.

Arriving at the theatre lobby, I was delighted to see someone I knew. It was the *1973 Miss Universe, Margie Moran*.

After some persuasion from my fellow lay missionaries, I gathered up enough courage to say hello. Miss Margie recognized me from a time when we worked together at *Habitat for Humanity*, an ecumenical Christian housing ministry. I was working as an architect and she was a member of the board of trustees.

Habitat for Humanity built simple, decent and affordable houses for the poor and marginalized of society. The construction team, volunteers, the future home owners, donors and other partners work together on the actual build.

I remember Miss Margie visiting us at the construction sites and literally working with us on the construction. Whatever volunteer task she was given, she did her best to make it nice and neat. I recall a particular home partner proudly saying whenever someone visits her house, she says "Look at that wall, the joint finish is nicely done and neat. It was done by Miss Margie Moran".

It was really nice to see Miss Margie again after so many years. I admire her not only for her beauty but also for her heart for service to humanity. I learned that she works in advocacy for peace in Mindanao and was the President of Ballet Philippines for a number of years and her aim is to bring art through ballet to the communities. This is the reason *Columban Lay Missionaries* and some indigenous women from the *Subanen community* were given the opportunity to attend the 'The Nutcracker'. It was their first time to see ballet live! It was a special treat for all of us.

Looking back on happy memories of the past I realize that although I am not a Miss Universe like Miss Margie Moran, I feel blessed and thank God that I got the chance to become a Columban lay missionary.

Columban Lay Missionary Gertrudes C Samson lives and works in Britain.







Theological shorthand

FR BARRY CAIRNS

My missionary road has been influenced by a small incident many years ago.

I was missioned to Sakitsu community on the off shore island of Amakusa in southern Japan. To many from the mainland it seemed a quaint fishing village so tourists visited.

One such tourist saw me in the street and asked a local, "Who is that foreigner?" (The word for 'foreigner' in Japan is literally 'an outside person' - and often not used as a compliment). The answer came back to me before the day was out. "He is not a foreigner, he is our priest."

This answer gave me family feeling with our community. This answer, over many years of pondering, has influenced my missionary road.

I as a priest am not way up there on a pedestal. Yes, I come from New Zealand with a different culture, language and way of thinking. But baptism has given us all the same Father, so we are truly one family, brothers and sisters.

I have been called by Christ, as his gift, to be a priest. No big deal!

Others in our community have their gifts. I try to elicit those gifts, encourage them in their use and delegate.

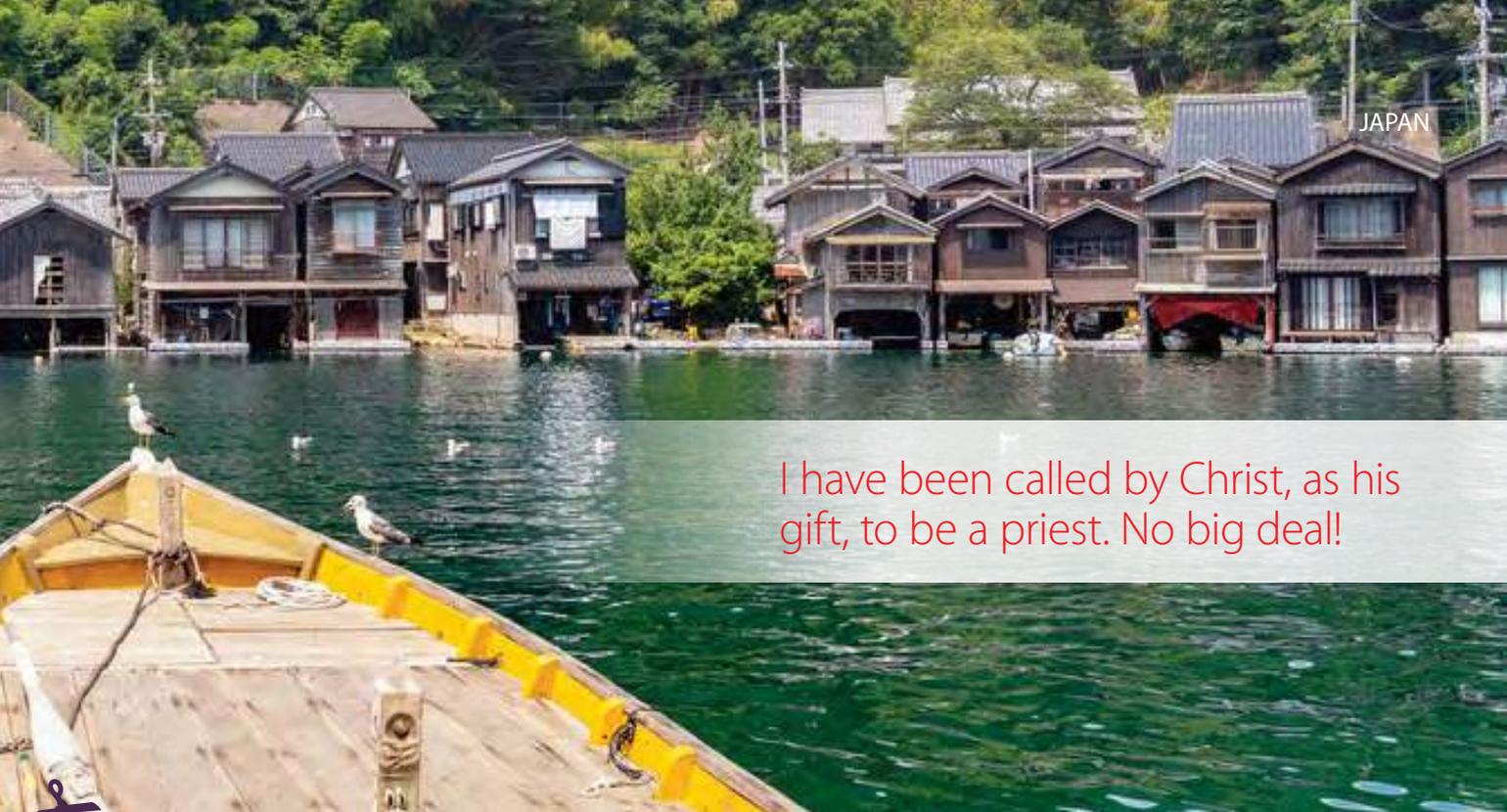
My calling is to unite all, especially in our Eucharist. Now, much later, I find that this is called in theological shorthand: 'subsidiarity'.

I feel at home with my people and I have a sense that they feel at home with me.

I do urge them every Sunday to be missionaries in their own milieu. I am not a foreigner, I am their priest.

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

But baptism has given us all the same Father, so we are truly one family, brothers and sisters.



I have been called by Christ, as his gift, to be a priest. No big deal!



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What a weekend! - Chile



Photo: Fr Dan Harding SSC

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