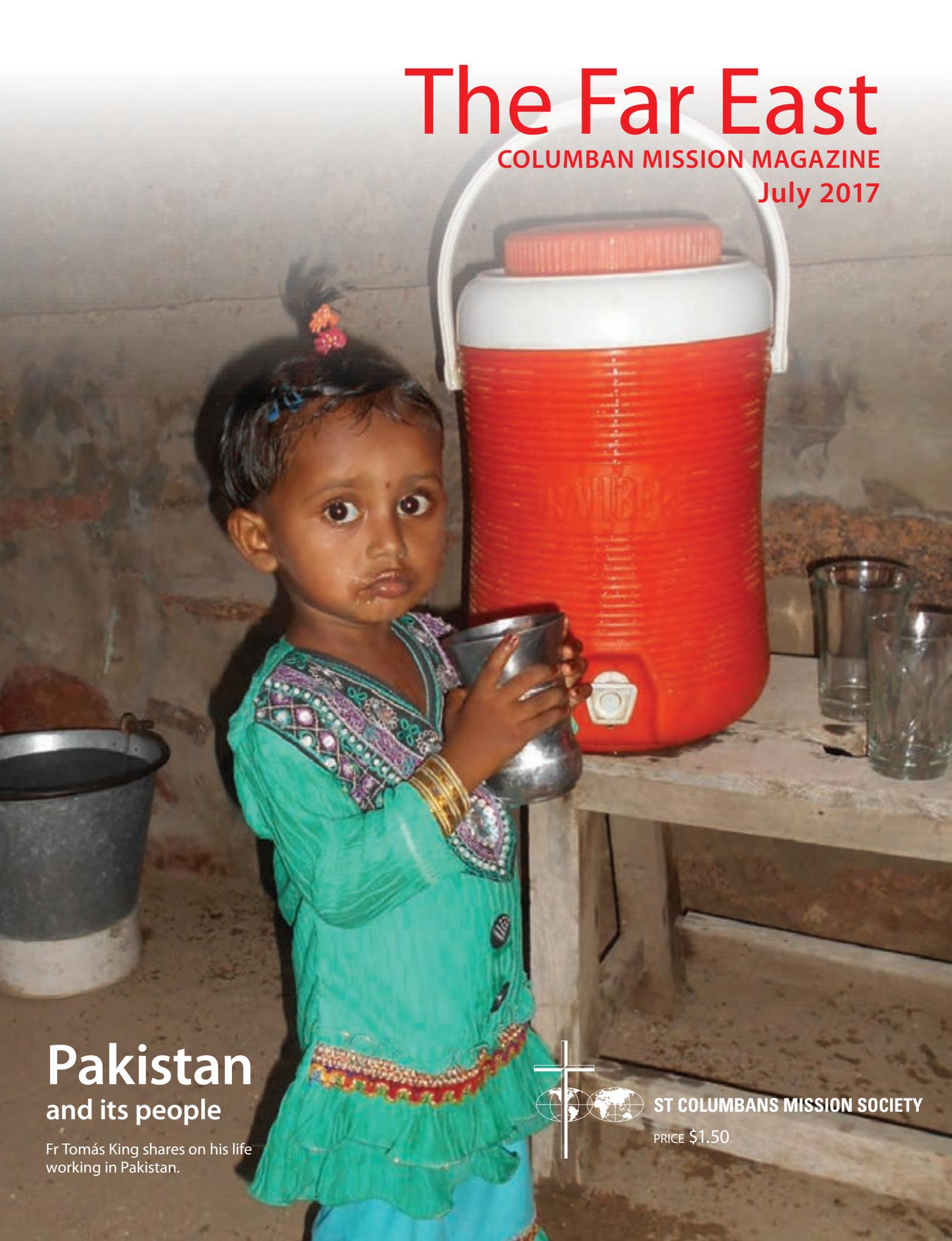


# The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

July 2017



## Pakistan and its people

Fr Tomás King shares on his life  
working in Pakistan.



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

PRICE \$1.50

# The Far East

July 2017  
Vol 99, No. 5

THE FAR EAST is devoted to furthering the missionary apostolate of the church and has been published by the Missionary Society of St Columban since November/December 15, 1920.

THE SOCIETY was founded in 1918 as a society of secular priests dedicated to the evangelisation of the Chinese and other overseas people. It is an exclusively missionary society.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$15 per year (AUSTRALIA)

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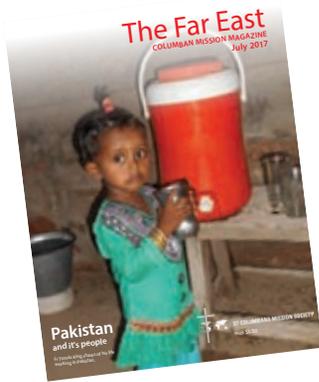
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A child from a community in Sindh province, Pakistan, where Fr Tomás King is working on mission.  
(See story pages 6-7)

Photo: Fr Tomás King SSC

# From the Editor

## Now and then

As I write this column, fighting is still continuing in Marawi City on the island on Mindanao in the Philippines. Columban Fr Paul Glynn who has been involved in Interfaith Dialogue with Muslims for many years expresses a feeling of heartbreak over what has happened there and wonders if 40 years of work is now lost?

Fr Tomás King who was recently in Fiji and Australia reflects on the tough mission and challenges that Pakistan presents to missionaries. But after many years there he believes it is worthwhile to be present with the Christian people.

Columban Sr Redempta Twomey writes so well about the sins that God forgets. How wonderful to be like God in our dealings with ourselves and other people. As we move towards our centenary of missionary service there are two disparate articles. One is a well-known and often told story of Columban Fr Francis Vernon Douglas who was killed in the Philippines during World War II and the other is the closure of the *Columban Mission*

*Institute* in North Sydney later this year. Over the next few editions of *The Far East* different areas of the *Columban Mission Institute* will be featured. In this issue we focus on the *Centre of Christian Muslim Relations*. This involves inter-faith activities and dialogue.

As Columban missionaries we expect our work to take us into the lives of people in remarkable and surprising ways. Fr Tim Mulroy's reflection on the homeless men who committed suicide when their lives improved is a shock to the system. How complex people are!

Pope Francis reminds missionaries to never tire of bringing comfort to people. Columbans have returned as missionaries in Myanmar after being forced out in 1979 by the government. We are supporting families who are refugees from the civil wars especially waged against the Christian people, the Chin, Kachin and Karen tribes.

It is a challenging edition, we are involved in the struggles of people as Jesus Christ wanted us to be.

The author of the final article is a young Fijian Columban seminarian who was on his first missionary assignment in Peru. A faith shared does not require great knowledge but is a gift from the heart.

Finally two Columbans priests share anniversaries of ordination to the priesthood this month, Fr Peter Woodruff who worked in Peru for many years before retiring to Australia and Fr Kevin O'Neill our present international leader who directs the work of the Society from Hong Kong.

*This editorial was written on behalf of Janette Mentha who has been on bereavement leave.*

Fr Gary Walker  
director@columban.org.au

# “Profound heartbreak” at cathedral destruction and abductions in southern Philippines



*Columban Fr Paul Glynn greeting Aina and Nathaniel of the Muslim community in the Philippines.*

Church leaders in the Philippines, including the Columban Director in the country have expressed “profound heartbreak” at a flare up of violence in the southern island of Mindanao over the past few weeks which has seen a cathedral torched and church people, including a priest, taken hostage by Muslim extremists.

Violence erupted in the region of Marawi after the Philippine army raided the hideout of a commander of the

Abu Sayyaf jihadist group, which has declared allegiance to Islamic State. Abu Sayyaf has its roots in the separatist insurgency in the southern Philippines, an impoverished region where Muslims make up a majority of the population in contrast to the rest of the country, which is mainly Catholic. Maute, another militant group, was soon involved and dozens of gunmen managed to enter the city of Marawi, home to about 200,000 people. Clashes between

Photo: Fr Paul Glynn SSC



security forces and about 100 fighters ensued, leaving at least three members of the security forces and some civilians dead. The attackers burned the Catholic cathedral, the city jail, and two schools, as well as occupying the main streets and two bridges leading to the city.

The Director of the Columbans in the Philippines, Fr Paul Glynn, who is based in Manila, said recently, *"I feel the profound heartbreak of knowing that St Mary's cathedral, Marawi, the hub of Marawi Prelature for so long, has been burned by ISIS inspired terrorists"*. It occurred on the eve of the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians *"and the Vicar General of Marawi, Fr Teresito (Chito) Suganob, and other Catholics were abducted during the last Novena Mass"*. Photos of them alive were posted on Facebook by the captors. Fr Glynn added that nearby Dansalan College of the United Church of Christ was also burned and **Christian staff taken as captives; "and we are praying that the abductors will not kill any of them"**.

Bishop Edwin De la Pena, who is at the head of the territorial prelature of Marawi, reported that the terrorists broke into the church, took the hostages and led them to an unknown location. Then they set fire to the cathedral and the bishop's residence. *"Everything is destroyed"* he said; *"we are dismayed"*. He was saved because he was on a pastoral visit to a parish outside Marawi at the time. His latest report states: *"The terrorists have occupied the city and people are terrified and locked in their houses. We are waiting for the army's reaction. The mayor of Marawi has asked the military not to bomb the city where about 200,000 civilians, mostly Muslims live. We have activated our channels, the Church and Islamic leaders and we hope to be able to negotiate soon so that our people are released safe and sound."* He has appealed to Pope Francis to ask the terrorists to release the hostages, adding that, *"We ask the faithful all over the world to pray together with us for peace"*.

Archbishop Socrates Villegas, president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, said: *"They have threatened to kill the hostages if the government forces unleashed against them are not recalled. The priest was not a combatant. He was not bearing arms. He was a threat to none. His capture and that of his companions violates every norm of civilised conflict. The husband of a woman being held hostage said he was worried about his wife, a secretary at the cathedral, because she does not have her medicines for a heart problem."*

As thousands of Marawi residents fled the fighting, President Rodrigo Duterte returned hastily from a trip to

Russia and declared martial law in the southern region for 60 days. Duterte said on Wednesday that he will consider expanding his martial law order throughout the country "in order to protect the people" if violence continues. He assured the public he will not allow abuses under military rule, even as he has repeatedly said he will deal with "terrorism" harshly. However, for many locals, the situation is reminiscent of the martial law imposed four decades ago under President Ferdinand Marcos and they are worried. Marawi City is known as the Philippines' Islamic City, but it is home to people of diverse cultures and faiths, who generally have a shared commitment to peace and tolerance.

Fr Glynn is now concerned about the future of interfaith dialogue in Mindanao. *"Those of us involved in Muslim-Christian Dialogue are tempted to feel as if all the efforts since Bishop Benny Tutud to the present have been razed to the ground in the attack"*. However, he reported seeing small signs of hope happening on Facebook and sms texts, where Christian and Muslim friends are expressing real concern for one another, for Marawi, for the future of PEACE in Mindanao and are offering messages of solidarity and support to one another. *"It is a time of deep grief"* he reflected, *"but at least Muslims and Christians of goodwill are grieving together"*.

He also reported that the effects are not just being felt in Mindanao. A Muslim partner in Interfaith Dialogue was given hospitality in the Columban house in Manila on Wednesday night after he found that the predominantly Muslim part of Manila, where he was planning to stay, was surrounded by military.

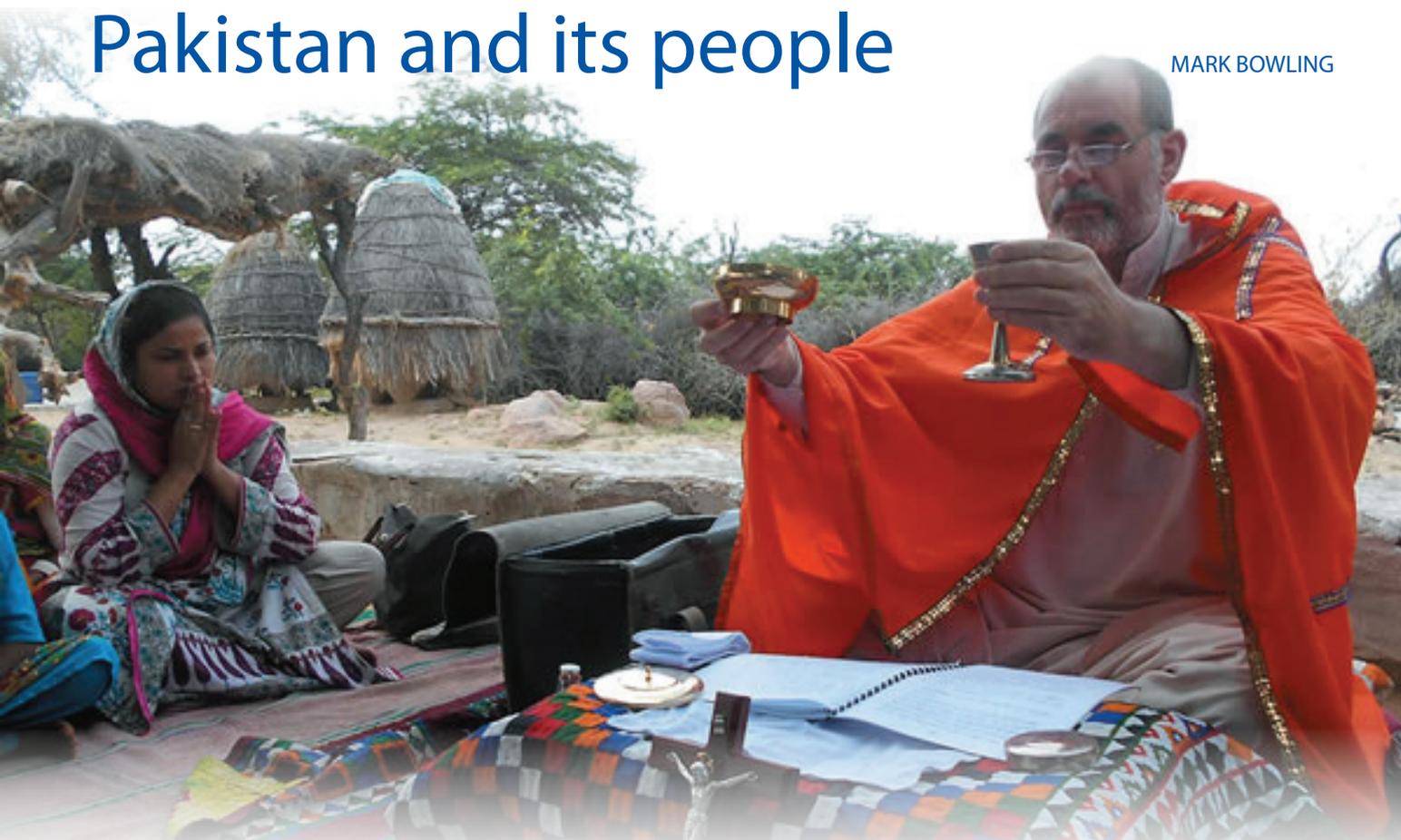
Fr Glynn has remembered deceased Columban Frs Des Hartford and Rufus Halley who both worked in Mindanao. The former was a kidnap victim in 1997 and the second was murdered in 2001 after two decades promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The Columban Director said: *"It is a tense time for everyone. I am asking the intercession of Charles de Foucauld and also asking Des Hartford and Rufus Halley (whom I believe are in heaven) to pray for us and for St Patrick (who knew what it was to be kidnapped) to pray for Fr Chito Suganob and the other hostages. Please join us in praying for the hostages, and for peace in Marawi and for the Philippines at this time."*

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*Ellen Teague is the Media Coordinator for the Columban Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation (JPIC) team in London.*

# Pakistan and its people

MARK BOWLING



*Columban Fr Tomás King has spent the last quarter century in Pakistan, witnessing the ravages of war, discrimination and man-made drought, yet he maintains a steadfast passion for the people he serves.*

*"I have presided at as many funerals for children as for adults," Fr King said. **"You see a lot of pain because of the suffering of the people and that can be hard. But you know that it is still a relevant place to be present; where the Church should be, with people in difficult times."***

Fr King, 54, came to Pakistan, from the lush green hills of Galway, Ireland, first during his formation, and then as a newly ordained Missionary Society of St Columban priest in 1992.

He still has his strong Irish lilt and a pastoral heart for the downtrodden. In Ireland he had worked with the persecuted Travellers, an ethnic people commonly known as gypsies in Europe and elsewhere, who are often ill-treated and resigned to the lowest socio-economic class.

Today, he finds himself serving the poor in Sindh province, including the vast Thar Pakar desert, in Pakistan's

south-east, bordering with India. It is a place of beauty, especially after the monsoon rains, but when the rain doesn't come, crops fail, there is not enough drinking water and the desert becomes a place of suffering for tribal people like the Parkari Kohlis.

Fr King has witnessed the impact of global warming on everyday life. *"Unfortunately, for the last ten years there has been drought conditions,"* Fr King said. *"The summers are getting hotter and longer. It doesn't rain every year. It makes water more difficult to collect,"* Fr King said.

A heat wave in the summer of 2015 killed thousands of people, mostly children. Thousands of livestock, vital to the economy of the desert people – also died. *"The impact is that people migrate to become labourers in the interior Sindh where they can find work, food and water,"* Fr King said.

Usually about twice a month, Fr King drives across the desert between the 15 villages that make up the Parkari

Kohlis homeland, celebrating Mass and delivering support for the small but vibrant Catholic community, administrated by Columbans since the mid-1980s.

There are less than 100 Catholic families scattered over a vast geographical area half the size of his native Ireland.

The Columbans in Pakistan, including five ordained priests and three sisters, concentrate their efforts on providing schooling and mother and child outreach clinics for the poor, not just Christians, Fr King said.

Overall in Pakistan, Muslims make up 96% of the population, with the remaining four per cent made up of mainly Christians and Hindus. In Sindh province, close to India, there are a higher proportion of minorities, including Christian and Hindus. Fr King found his work amongst low-caste workers and their families, farm labourers, brick kiln workers and street sweepers.

*"In the town of Badin we have a high school of around 400 children, 35% would be Christian, 30% Muslim and the rest would be Hindu and the staff would be made up of different denominations."*

Fr King has quietly become an advocate for interfaith dialogue, trying to build relationships of trust and respect that seldom exists among the religions. His parish work and catechesis focus on human rights awareness and promoting better healthcare and education.

He is fluent in Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, and was appointed Coordinator of the Columbans' Pakistan Mission Unit in March 2008. *"We see the importance in today's world of working with people of goodwill from all faiths to make a better world, because it's the only world we have,"* Fr King said.

*"The big human rights issue in the Sindh is bonded labour... rehabilitating people who have broken out of bonded work on the land of landlords. "We have done a lot of work with the Human Rights Commission, and that work is still on-going. The Church plays a big role in that."*

Fr King said the writings and teachings of Pope Francis have affirmed the Columbans work in Pakistan over many years. *"Especially making the Gospel present in the rituals, the flavor and the culture of the people"* he said. *"Laudato Si has a strong emphasis on interfaith dialogue, so we feel strong support from that."*

In the Thar Pakar desert, Fr King said big, new environmental and economic challenges are taking shape. Underneath the desert sands massive amounts of coal have been found, one of the largest untapped coal sources in the world. It's a significant discovery since Pakistan produces insufficient power to provide electricity for all its peoples' needs.

Electricity cuts, often for hours on end are a part of daily life, particularly during the hot summer months when there's high demand, particularly from running air conditioners. In such a context, coal in the Thar Parkar Desert has the potential to end blackouts and provide for Pakistan's energy needs for generations to come.

The Pakistan government and some mining companies, including a Chinese company, have already started coal extraction, as well as upgrading roads and infrastructure to support a massive mining expansion.

Fr King said China's presence, part of a grander 'One Belt, One Road' economic expansion, reinforced its policy of seeking out natural resources from virtually anywhere in the world to feed its own domestic needs. *"The direct impact has still not been seen. What will be the cost to the desert environment, its people today, and to future generations?"* he said. *"Coal extraction will increase climate change. Extraction will also contaminate water."*

Despite the struggles and the challenges ahead, Fr King said there is a beauty about Pakistan and its people. *"It can be difficult but it holds you,"* Fr King said, recalling the 1989 Irish/UK movie 'My Left Foot', which is a tribute to the overwhelming sense of the miraculousness of life. Mrs Brown speaking lovingly to her son with cerebral palsy says: *"You break my heart Christy Brown. Sometimes I think you ARE my heart!"*

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



“

*We are his followers today.  
Let us, with the grace and  
the power of the Holy  
Spirit, forgive our enemies,  
our friends, ourselves.*

# Forgive and find freedom

REFLECTION  
SR REDEMPTA TWOMEY

The story is told of a good and prayerful woman who claimed to have had a vision of Christ. She went to see the bishop. "Did you talk to him?" he asked. "Yes," she replied, "I did." "Well," said the bishop, "the next time he appears to you ask the Lord this question: 'What was the bishop's greatest sin before he became a bishop?'" About three months later she returned. When she came in the bishop asked her, "Did you see the Lord again?" "Yes," she replied. "Did you ask him the question about my sin?" "Yes, I did." "And what did he say?" She smiled as she answered, "The Lord said, 'I don't remember any more.'"

Like the story of the prodigal son, embraced by his Father, the bishop's sins were not held against him. Nor are ours. So often it is we ourselves who hold on to the memory of our transgressions and lacerate ourselves, refusing to trust the mercy of the Father. Worse still, we harshly bind others, clutching the hurt they caused us, subtly or overtly reminding them of their offence.

How much pain there is in life from this accusatory, unforgiving attitude. How much pain when we refuse to let go and forgive ourselves, when we stop short of forgiving others. Some hurts alas, go back generations and are nursed and kept alive through the years. It is often seen as a matter of family honour not to forget, not to forgive but to fuel the resentment by retelling the story.

Today, in an era of visual overloads, we are fed a daily diet of violence with stories that invite our harsh condemnation. How seldom we hear the stories of grace and forgiveness! But when we do, and hear of the parents who forgive the motorist who killed their little child, or the people who hold no grudge against those who bombed their community are we not touched to the heart? They are not saying the injustice done is all right; it is not, they know it is wrong. But by refusing to be caught in a cycle of bitterness, they have let go and forgiven. They are free.

The Dalai Lama tells a story of a Tibetan monk who had spent eighteen years in a Chinese prison. When he escaped and eventually met the Dalai Lama he asked him what he felt was his biggest threat or danger while in prison. And the monk, who had suffered so much, gave an astonishing answer. What he feared most, he said was losing his compassion for the Chinese.

Forgiveness is at the core of Jesus' message. He cuts through the 'eye for an eye' mentality and tells his (shocked) followers that they must forgive and forgive and forgive. We are his followers today. Let us, with the grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, forgive our enemies, our friends, ourselves.

---

*Columban Sr Redempta Twomey is the Congregational Archivist at the Missionary Sisters of St Columban, Ireland.*

# A Columban who died violently on mission

## Preparing for the Columban Centenary



*Fr Francis Vernon Douglas*

*F*r John Keenan was part of a pilgrimage group of Columban priests, lay missionaries and co-workers, who joined four relatives of Fr Francis Vernon Douglas in visiting places associated with the missionary's death.

Pope Francis has said that there are more martyrs for the faith in modern times than in the early Church. One such martyr is Fr Francis Vernon Douglas who was martyred by Japanese soldiers in July 1943 in Paete, Philippines.

Born in Johnsonville, Wellington, New Zealand on May 22, 1910 to Catherine Gaffney from Ireland and George Douglas from Australia, Francis Vernon Douglas was the fifth of eight children.

In his youth he excelled at rugby and cricket, and later he studied for the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Wellington. He was ordained on October 29, 1934. After an enjoyable and successful year as an assistant priest in New Plymouth, he felt God wanted him to become a missionary. He joined the Society of St Columban and arrived in Manila in 1938.

His first assignment was as parish priest of Pililla, where he struggled with the Tagalog language. The parish was run-down having been 40 years without a resident priest. With the local people, he gradually renovated the church and through liturgies, and catechesis, they gradually built a loving Christian community.

During World War II, many of the people in the hills resisted the Japanese military police known as the Kempeitai. Fr Douglas tried to remain neutral between the Kempeitai and the Filipino-American guerrillas. But in the eyes of the Japanese he was 'an enemy alien' and was suspected of collaborating and spying for the guerrillas.

On July 25, 1943, the people were looking forward to their annual fiesta in honour of St James the Apostle. However, this was abruptly interrupted when the Japanese Army decided to zone off the area. No one was allowed to

leave. All males from 14 upwards were rounded up and incarcerated. For several days, some 250 men were interrogated and tortured, deprived of sleep and mercilessly beaten until they gave information or died.

Fr Douglas was abducted from his parish on July 24, 1943 and brought by truck to the parish Church of Paete, Laguna, some 30km away. It was used as a concentration camp for some 1,700 men and youths held in atrocious conditions.

The sacristy was used as a torture chamber and many prisoners died there. Here Fr Douglas was severely tortured. He was given the dreaded water-cure but still refused to give any information. Later he was tied to the altar rails and further beaten.

Later he was manacled to a post under the choir loft. He was left to stand for two days and two nights and allowed neither food nor drinks even though the people had brought some for him. His eyes, swollen and bloody were fixed on the tabernacle while he fingered his rosary beads. Realising that the end was near he asked to see the local parish priest, Fr Nicomedes Rosal, to whom he made his last confession.

As night was falling, he was bundled into the back of a truck and driven off into the night in the direction of Sta Cruz (capital of Rizal Province). He was never seen again. ***The speculation is he died from the effects of the beatings and torture, or that he was killed and buried in an unmarked grave in a rice-field in the vicinity of Sta Cruz town.***

Fr Vernon's faith, courage, commitment and fidelity to the end are an inspiration and example for all of us. Devotion to him is growing in his home parish in New Zealand and especially in Paete where he suffered so much before being killed.

---

*Columban Fr John Keenan is currently in Ireland. He has worked on mission in Manila, Philippines since 1966, apart from 10 years spent in Ireland, England and Scotland.*



# CMI

## Columban Mission Institute closure

### History of the Columban Mission Institute

FR PATRICK MCINERNEY

*The Columban Mission Institute* is closing in October 2017. This will bring an end to the 'institutional' presence of the Columbans in Sydney. Columban priests will continue to live and work here, contributing our missionary perspective to the church and society from other bases. In the following pages, and in subsequent issues of *The Far East* magazine, the staff of the *Columban Mission Institute* share some of the highlights of our story.

Over the years, the Columban Mission Institute has changed in response to changing needs:

- St Columbans College opened at North Turramurra in 1959 as a seminary for training young men for missionary priesthood. From then until 2001, over 300 Australian and New Zealand seminarians were formed, of whom 96 were ordained as Columban priests and served in 11 countries around the world, plus some order priests.
- From 1973 the College opened its doors to train religious and laity in the new post-Vatican II understandings of church and mission. In 1979 this became a residential program named the Pacific Mission Institute and from 1992 the Columban Mission Institute. During 20 years, more than 900 people completed the residential programme and hundreds of external students availed of courses on mission.
- In 1997 the Columban Mission Institute formed Centres to respond to the emerging missionary priorities from our Columban global perspective, the Church in China; Christian-Muslim Relations; Peace, Ecology & Justice; and Mission Studies, first at North Turramurra until 2003, then Strathfield until 2014, and then North Sydney.

In each of these phases, the staff of the Columban Mission Institute showed exemplary missionary commitment, having done their job, they moved on. Like Abraham in the book of Genesis, who followed God's command to leave and go to a new place, like Paul of Tarsus, who founded churches and then handed them on to elders while he went



*PMI staff & participants, North Turramurra.*

on to other cities, having contributed new ways of being church, the staff of Columban Mission Institute moved on to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ in other ways.

Now it is again time for us to move on. Some of the missionary concerns of the Columban Mission Institute's Centres have become a regular part of church life; some will be handed over to other church agencies; some that operate through other institutes will continue, and some will inevitably come to an end.

***The Columbans will continue the Christian-Muslim apostolate, building on the friendships and reputation we have established over the past 20 years. For this purpose, we will move to the Institute for Mission in Blacktown in the Diocese of Parramatta to make a new beginning.***

As we look back, we acknowledge the staff and students of the Columban Mission Institute who have contributed to the mission of the church in Sydney and beyond. We thank the partners who collaborated with us and without whom we would not have been able to achieve so much. We ask God to bless the benefactors whose generosity made it all possible. We look forward in hope to what the future holds.

---

*Columban Fr Patrick McInerney is the Director of the Columban Mission Institute in Sydney and the Coordinator of its Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations.*

Photo: Columban Mission Institute

### The Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

FRS PATRICK MCINERNEY & BRIAN VALE

#### Beginnings

The *Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations* was founded in 1979 in response to one of the Society's global missionary priorities, the impact of Islam in the world. Muslims comprise one fifth of the world's population; Christians and Muslims together make up over half of the world's population; the Muslim-majority nations of the Middle East, North Africa and South-East Asia have enormous economic and political significance; and the scandal of terrorist violence falsely committed in the name of Islam.

Sr Pauline Rae SSM was Coordinator of the Centre for 15 years, laying a solid foundation. Sr Kathleen Collins SSPS joined the following year and served until 2005. Fr Patrick McInerney came from Pakistan in 2001 and succeeded Sr Pauline as Coordinator in 2009. Fr Brian Vale was appointed to the Centre in 2009. Others also served at different times in various capacities.

Given the widespread ignorance about Islam and prejudice against Muslims in society, the first task was to get to know Islam and Muslims. Given Sr Pauline's expertise in Women's Studies, it was only natural for her to build relations with Muslim women. Other natural allies were the diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Commissions.

#### Early growth

Srs Pauline, Kathleen and Trish Madigan took the initiative of inviting Christian women to an ecumenical event focussed on interfaith relations. This led to the formation of the *Women's Dialogue Network* (WDN) which lasted from 1998 to 2003 and proved seminal in Christian outreach to women from other faiths. The *Women's Interfaith Network* (WIN) was launched in 2001 and has been meeting monthly ever since.

After attending a talk at the Centre, in response to a need for Muslim speakers at interfaith events, Mr Mehmet Ozalp and other young Muslims established the *Affinity*

*Intercultural Foundation*, becoming major dialogue partners.

The organization grew substantially and in

2009 divided its efforts: *Affinity* continue the interreligious dialogue to the present day, while the *Islamic Sciences & Research Academy* (ISRA), undertook the educational efforts and is now offering tertiary degrees in Islamic Studies through Charles Sturt University.

We thank them and the many other Christian, Muslim, Jewish and leaders of other religions who have partnered with us in interfaith events over the years and have become our friends.

#### Development

The tragic events of 9/11 in the USA in 2001 triggered a frenzy in Christian-Muslim relations here and around the world. People seeking understanding called the Centre for talks giving information and background on Islam to

counter negative stereotypes. With the Centre's contacts among Muslim groups, it soon became possible to arrange a Muslim co-speaker, where the very fact of a Christian and a Muslim sharing a platform, very rare at that time was already a powerful witness of cooperation. As reputations grew, people contacted the Centre asking for a Muslim to come and speak to them. Later, they contacted the Muslim organisations directly without any reference to the Centre. Finally, Muslims began hosting and promoting their own interfaith events.



Fr Patrick McInerney SSC



Fr Brian Vale SSC



## CMR Publications

Talks require personal presence, but written media reaches a wider audience. Accordingly, the Centre began publishing newsletters, resources and occasional papers. More recently, we have also developed a strong online presence in social media.

**Bridges** is the Centre's quarterly newsletter. As the name implies, it builds bridges of mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims. It has over 2,500 subscribers.

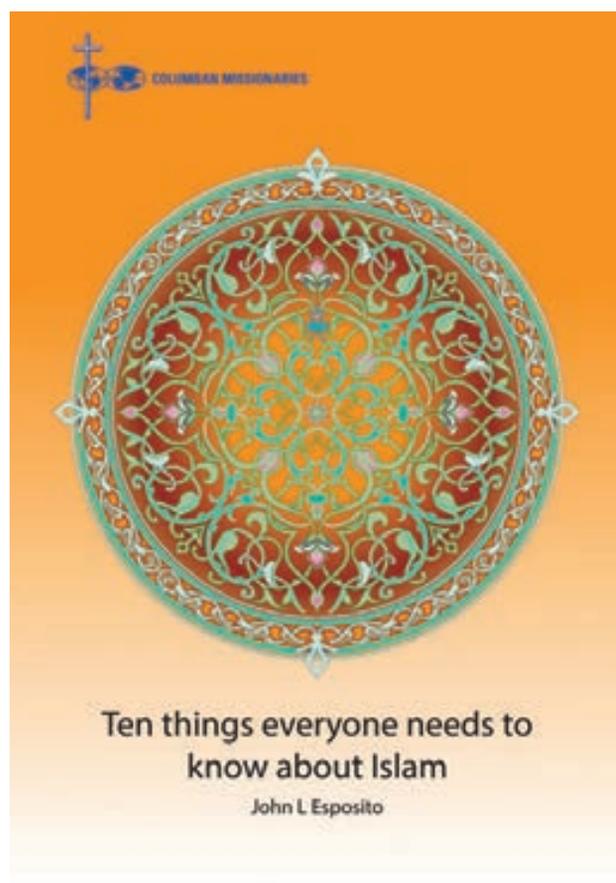
**Church documents:** To promote the Catholic Church's teaching on interreligious dialogue, we published three key teaching documents: Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*: The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (1965); *Dialogue and Mission* (1984), from the Secretariate for Non-Christians; and *Dialogue & Proclamation* (1991) a joint publication of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. The texts are now on the Columban Interreligious Dialogue website.

**A common word:** In October 2007, 138 Muslim scholars issued an open letter to Pope Benedict XVI and heads of Christian churches. They proposed that since love of God and love of neighbour are foundational to both Islam and Christianity, these two commands form a solid, scriptural basis for Christian-Muslim Relations. To promote its message, the Centre published the letter in 2008 and participated in a number of Christian-Muslim seminars discussing its contents.

**The Golden Rule poster** has the ethic of reciprocity; '*treat others as you want to be treated*', in the scriptures of 13 different religions. This shared value fosters mutual respect and dialogue between believers from different religions. The poster was published by the Centre and launched in the NSW Parliament in 2013.

**Ten things everyone needs to know about Islam** is an excerpt from a book by Professor John Esposito from Georgetown University. Published by the Centre in 2010, it provides short, readable and authoritative answers to the questions about Islam that are on most people's minds.

**Social media:** In recent years, to reach a younger and a wider audience, to counter negative stereotypes, to promote positive stories about Islam and Muslims, and to promote our and others' interfaith events, we have developed a strong online presence on Facebook, with pages for the Centre and its major activities.



## Other major activities

**Abraham conference:** Judaism, Christianity and Islam all claim a special relationship to Abraham so are commonly called the Abrahamic religions. From 2002 to the present, in partnership with other Christian and Muslim organisations, fifteen Abraham Conferences have addressed contemporary issues and it has become one of the premier interfaith events in Sydney.

**Peace Forums:** In 2002 war was threatening in Iraq. The staff of the *Columban Mission Institute* was convinced that war does not solve but only exacerbates problems. To promote this message we organised *Peace Forums* with local councils. Two Christians and two Muslims, a man and a woman, thus embodying both religious and gender equality and providing a powerful witness of Christian-Muslim collaboration spoke about peace and nonviolence from their respective religions, followed by Q & A. This format proved so successful that in the four years from 2003 to 2006 a *Peace Forum* was held in 18 different Council areas.

**The Imam and the Pastor:** is a documentary set in Nigeria recounting the dramatic reconciliation between Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye. From 2007 the Centre held several screenings of the DVD followed by responses from a local Imam and Pastor.

**Of Gods and Men:** In March 2011 the Centre helped promote this award-winning film about the Cistercian monks of Tibherine in Algeria. It tells the remarkable story of the monks and their double fidelity, to God and to the local people, all caught in the violent conflict between Islamist insurgents and the army. The film is a powerful meditation on the Christian relation to and presence among Muslims.

## Teaching tertiary courses

**Islam:** Since 2004, with the collaboration of Muslim scholars, Fr Patrick McInerney has offered an introductory course on Islam at the *Catholic Institute of Sydney*. He also teaches a similar course online with the *Broken Bay Institute*.

**Interreligious Dialogue:** Fr Patrick also offers a course, *Interreligious Dialogue*, treating the history and development of interreligious dialogue, the key teaching documents of the Catholic Church and of the World Council of Churches, the scriptural and theological foundations of dialogue, the different types of dialogue, the spirituality of dialogue. Again, a similar course is offered online through the *Broken Bay Institute*.

## Hospitality and social relations

Some of the best examples of interreligious dialogue are the relationships that grow out of the hospitality offered and the respect shown during sacred times and visiting each other's places of worship.

**Ramadan:** During Ramadan Muslims fast from dawn till dusk. Friends and family gather in the evening to break the fast and share an *iftar* meal. It has become custom to invite people from other religions to share this meal. Some are hosted by Muslim organizations in civic halls; some by Muslims in private homes; some by politicians in the state or federal Parliament; some by Christians eg. the bishop of a diocese. This giving and receiving of hospitality cements friendships and is an excellent way for building relations.

**'Eid:** The end of Ramadan brings *'Eid al-Fitr*, the Feast of the Breaking (of the Fast). It is a happy and joyous occasion which extends over three days. At the Centre we send *'Eid* cards to our Muslim friends and they send Christmas cards



*Youth PoWR event Sydney, September 2016.*

to us. We attend the *'Eid* prayers in the mosque and are often invited to attend *'Eid* celebrations.

**Youth PoWR:** Mindful that many interfaith activists are 'senior citizens', we wanted to ensure that young people also take up this challenge. We came up with *Youth PoWR* (Parliament of the World's Religions). It is prepared, promoted and hosted by a team of young people from different religions and all the speakers and performers are young people. It is the largest multi-faith youth event in Australia.

## The future

Islam and Muslims continue to be prominent in media and in people's consciousness, far out of proportion to their actual numbers. While there have been many wonderful developments in the past twenty years, there is still much ignorance, fear and suspicion of Islam and Muslims. There is much more to be done in breaking down barriers and building bridges. The Centre is moving to a new office at the *Institute for Mission* in the Diocese of Parramatta. **We look forward to continuing and developing this work, building on the friendships we have already established.**

## CMI staff over the years

Sr Kathleen Collins SSpS, Ms Steff Fenton, Ms Carole Gan, Ms Ashleigh Green, Ms Jane Favotto, Fr Patrick McInerney, Mr Matthew Ng, Sr Pauline Rae smsm, Sr Suporna Rosario smsm, Sr Trish Madigan op and Fr Brian Vale.

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*Columban Fr Brian Vale works at the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations at the Columban Mission Institute, Sydney NSW.*

## We think we know but...

FR TIM MULROY

*'Nothing is ever as it seems' is an observation of life. This story demonstrates the truth of it in Japan.*

Listen to: We think we know but...

Since the St Joseph church compound was close to the central bus station, many homeless men came there. Some requested food, while others slept under the verandahs. When winter came and work on construction sites halted, their numbers increased significantly. The parish council became concerned about their welfare. Consequently, a committee was set up to respond to their needs. A short time later, its members began to distribute hot drinks, food and blankets, all of which were gratefully received by those destitute men.

During the following few years, as the committee members came to know the men and developed a deeper understanding of their plight and their pain, they began to wonder if they could do something more to assist them. Then, after consulting local government welfare agencies, they found ways to collaborate together to find low rent apartments and provide a small, fixed income for those men who were the most vulnerable.

Thanks to the genuine concern and persistence of the church committee, some months later, one of the homeless men moved into a small, but neat apartment. Having spent more than a decade sleeping under the verandah of the church, he was jubilant at having a room to call his home, a place where he could lay down his head and feel safe and warm. During the months that followed, a small number of other homeless men were equally joyful when they were told that the church committee had also found apartments for them. The members of the church committee were indeed very pleased that their efforts were bearing fruit.

**However, a month later, one of the men was found dead in his apartment. The cause was suicide.** Then, some weeks later, another man died in similar circumstances. Everyone went into deep shock. How could this happen?

There seemed to have been enough reasons for these men to despair when they had been homeless, but not now when they had a home and a reasonably secure life.

During the weeks that followed members of the church committee visited the other men who had moved into apartments in order to discover what was going on. Over and over again, they listened to stories about how these men struggled to adapt to their new life. While they had been homeless they had several things to strive after each day, making sure that their meagre belongings were not discarded by someone who considered them garbage; waiting at the back of a particular restaurant for the food bins to be put out; returning to the church on time to secure their preferred place under the verandah for the night. In contrast, after they moved into an apartment, they no longer had a daily sense of purpose and quickly became depressed. Furthermore, their new neighbours ignored them because they despised them for having been homeless. On the other hand, due to their changed circumstances, they themselves no longer felt that close bond they once had with the other homeless men at the bus station and the church. In short, since they did not belong anywhere, they felt isolated and lonely.

What a surprise learning this was for the members of the church committee! They had responded generously to the physical poverty of those homeless men by providing them with food, clothing and accommodation. Now, however, they felt a new calling to respond in the same generous manner to their emotional and spiritual poverty.

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



# 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.*

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**VATICAN - Consolata Missionaries:**  
*"never tire of bringing comfort"*

*V*atican City (Agenzia Fides) - *"In the effort of the re-qualification of the style of missionary service, it will be necessary to favor certain significant elements, such as the sensitivity to the inculturation of the Gospel, and the choice of simple and poor forms of presence among the people. Special attention is due to the dialogue with Islam, commitment to the promotion of the dignity of women and family values, and sensitivity to the issues of justice and peace".* This is what Pope Francis said to the Consolata Missionaries who were gathered for their General Chapter yesterday.

The Holy Father greeted all the Consolata missionaries who *"often operate in difficult conditions in different continents"* encouraging them *"to continue with generous fidelity in their ad gentes mission"*. On the occasion of the General Chapter, the Pope urged them to carry out a careful discernment on the situation of the peoples among whom they perform

their evangelizing work: *"Never tire of bringing comfort to populations who are often marked by great poverty and acute suffering, as in much of Africa and Latin America for example. Let yourselves be continually challenged by the concrete realities with which you come in contact and seek to offer in appropriate ways the witness of charity that the Spirit infuses in your hearts"*.

After recalling the missionaries *"who loved the Gospel of Charity more than themselves and carried out their missionary service with the sacrifice of life"*, the Pope emphasized the importance of communion with God to pursue this peculiar mission in the Church: *"we should consider first of all this priority of the gratuitous and merciful love of God, and to feel our commitment experiencing our effort as a response"*.

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Agenzia Fides - June 6, 2017  
Photo: SeregaYu/Bigstock.com

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## Mission Intention for July

That our brothers and sisters who have strayed from the faith, through our prayer and witness to the Gospel, may rediscover the merciful closeness of the Lord and the beauty of the Christian life.



## From the Director

### Christian persecution in the world

The article in the May edition of *The Far East* entitled 'Countering Islamophobia' with the photograph of a woman holding a sign "We are all Muslims" drew quite a lot of criticism as well as praise. One disgruntled reader suggested that I write about Christian victims of persecution who never seem to get mentioned anywhere. He made a good point.

Fortunately, I had read recently a book by John L Allen Jr who is a well-regarded and authoritative journalist on Vatican matters and the Catholic Church in general. It is entitled, *'The Global War on Christians'*. His statistics in this book are at least four years old but in the light of what has happened in the ensuing time, nothing would seem to have changed.

It is John Allen Jr's contention that the popular stereotype of Christianity in the West is as an oppressive force, but in fact Christians today are the most persecuted identifiable body of people in the world. His overview of the world has five headings: Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Columbans have never worked in Africa or the Middle East or Eastern Europe. But people are well aware, I hope that the Christian people of the Middle East are leaving their homes and countries for safety elsewhere. Their presence in Iraq is dwindling, the Coptic Christians in Egypt are targeted and attacked regularly.

*It is John Allen Jr's contention that the popular stereotype of Christianity in the West is as an oppressive force, but in fact Christians today are the most persecuted identifiable body of people in the world.*

Regarding Asia, we have Columban priests, sisters and lay missionaries in Myanmar and China. In Myanmar the army still regards Christian people of the Chin, Kachin and Karen tribes as dissidents and attack their territories. A significant amount of our benefactor's money is sent for displaced people and for continuing education of youth and children there. The *'Sunday Examiner'* newspaper published in English in Hong Kong by Columban Fr Jim Mulroney carries stories of the tussles between the government in China and the Catholic Church, of the incredible faith of the Chinese people who have endured persecution and harassment in the past and who still struggle in the present.

Pope Francis says that the Christian martyrs of today are more numerous than those of the first centuries. This may surprise people because we don't know what is going on around the world outside of the usual media outlets.

A question is: what can we do? I was moved by a story that John Allen relates of meeting in 2012 a Syrian family in Beirut where Pope Benedict XVI was celebrating Mass after a three day trip to Lebanon. They told a harrowing story of persecution. **He asked the usual question – what can we do? They responded, 'Don't forget us.'**

Fr Gary Walker  
director@columban.org.au



# Outreach to refugee families in Myanmar

FR PATRICK COLGAN

*Fr Patrick (Pat) Colgan reports on his visit with Fr Jovito Dales to boarding houses and camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) supported by the Columbans in Myanmar.*

On our visit to three Columban Society-supported boarding houses in Banmaw town, which cater exclusively for young internally-displaced persons, we were heartened to hear that 31 of them had passed their Tenth Standard state exams. One is now a tutor for other young men at the boarding house, another is a firefighter, and another is a student of chemistry at Banmaw University. The male students sang us a lively Kachin song they had composed which expressed thanks to their Columban benefactors as well as being a plea for continued support from those benefactors.

We also visited a refugee camp at Maina, near Myitkyina. This is one of the largest in Kachin State, catering for 266 families, totalling around 1,355 persons. Last December, 182 new IDPs arrived unexpectedly. The Burmese Army had been forcefully occupying new swathes of Kachin territory, with the aim of neutralising Kachin Independence Army posts. Caught in the middle of the shelling, villagers were forced to run for their lives. The majority of IDPs are either elderly or women and children, as many of the men are involved in the war. There are 375 displayed persons, of whom 74 are doing 9th or 10th standard public examinations.

During our visit we heard that food rations had been recently reduced by 30% by the funding NGOs. With the new wave of refugees, the local government only gave one week's rations. Since then, Caritas and the Parish Emergency Team have been providing food assistance. There is big need for an emergency vehicle in the camp, which no agency seems to want to fund. It would cost US \$2,500.

***The Columban-supported Diocesan Education Programme has provided training and a salary for nine boarding masters/mistresses at Maina, who give after-school tuition to children from grade four to eight.***

Myanmar's de facto President, Aung San Suu Kyi, was due to visit on February 12, 2017, so when we were there the local government was running around installing electricity in the main reception/clinic area in preparation... something the IDPs had been requesting for six years!

There is a severe water shortage in the camp in the dry season. There are 12 shallow wells, but despite written and posted camp rules, women often wash clothes or residents bathe near the wells, dirtying them further. In fact, there is a large-scale mental health issue in the camp, related to depression, antisocial behaviour, drug and alcohol use.

Photos: Fr Pat Colgan SSC



The camp leader, a Catholic catechist, does his best to keep families and particularly young people faithful to communal prayer, something very important to Kachin culture, but these are clearly not normal circumstances. The multipurpose hall, used for children's night study, prayer meetings and social/cultural activities, is in danger of falling down and being unusable. He humbly asked if I might find help for this.

Spending most of my time at a desk in Hong Kong, visits like these help me to appreciate again the generosity of our donors as well as the hope, a 'pleading hope' that many young and older people have in the Society, not just in Myanmar but in many other countries. A further group of Columbans arrived for language study and mission in Yangon in February 2017, and our prayers have been with them.

As it was Fr Jovito's first visit to Myanmar, he was moved by the testimonies of students at Columban Fr Neil Magill's Higher Education Centre in Mandalay, and again in Kachin State. He expressed admiration for the young people's dreams and efforts to educate themselves despite all the harsh circumstances of war. He encouraged the students in Banmaw to keep dreaming, to keep thinking big, to "*keep repeating those exams until you get the mark you know you are capable of!*"

I also related how as a young person in Northern Ireland, despite the difficulties of 'The Troubles', I took for granted

my free education. Here in Myanmar, it is inspiring to see so many young people making a great sacrifice to learn.

I told them that they, and not Aung San Suu Kyi or any other politician, are the real leaders of their Kachin State and the entire nation. Nelson Mandela was always convinced that education was the only force that could ultimately break the chains and shackles of the past. Learning is much more powerful than guns, hatred or war. Fr Michael Tang Gun, Caritas's Banmaw Director, thanked all Columban missionaries and benefactors for this tremendous window of opportunity they have opened for the poorest but most eager Kachin young people. Lifting their level of education will lift up whole families and communities too.

## Testimony of a student

Mary Maran Seng Ja was the first ever student at Buduza Female Boarding House. She joined it as someone who had failed her exams but wanted to try again. She is the eldest in her family and feels sad about their life in the IDP camp. She tried very hard to gain a distinction in her Tenth Standard, but at least she obtained a pass. She sees so many of her peers with no education and no future and this encourages her to motivate them to reach out for the opportunity that the Columban donors have graciously offered.

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



# Finding life in the desert

MARTIN KOROICIRI

*I*t was a hot sunny February day when we four seminarians and four lay Columban volunteers set out to prepare for a month of mission to the north of Lima. After seven hours we finally managed to reach the town of Jimbe, a small community mainly of farmers. As we started our first week of visiting the people I began to notice the signs of life in these desert communities, life in the land and life in the people! It would be quite easy for people driving up from Lima to notice only the sand and more sand and nothing else. But as they near Jimbe they might notice channels of water running beside the road and into fields of sugarcane, mangos and avocados. They might also notice many other plants showing that the land is very much alive.

That was my experience with the people of Jimbe. In the villages of Santa Rosa, Macracancha and El Arenal we saw many houses in poor condition with leaking roofs in a region where it rained at least three times a week. We saw houses damaged by soil erosion and flooding. We heard from the people and their parish priest, Fr John Davis, that many of the houses had little furniture in them and no beds or mattresses. So at first I thought that this truly was a desert where the people were living with so few necessities for life or reason to hope for a better future. But then gradually I began to notice the signs of life and love in the concern the people showed for each other and in the close relationships between the families in the communities, their kindness of the people in sharing what they had and their willingness to help each other.

Two events brought this fact home to me. First, we received news that a water canal had burst its banks and was causing the erosion of cassava and mango fields and the flooding of a village, pushing down houses on its way. But before long the word of the need for help got out and men came from nearby villages and some of our group joined with them to rebuild the canal and begin to clean up the flood damage. I was truly moved by the spirit of all the helpers and their willingness to put so much effort into saving their neighbours' farms and dwellings.

The second event happened just a few days later. It was a festival day in Jimbe and the festival custom involves a tradition of cutting down a huge tree from the bottom of the valley and then pulling it up with ropes through the village to the top of the hill. All the people joined in the task, young and old, men, women and children and both the strong and the weak, all joining in as much as they could. This time I was astounded by the fun and joy they found in this playful custom in the midst of the poverty and struggle of their lives. Again it displayed to me their connection with each other, their unity and what they shared as a community as they struggled to live together on this rocky and hilly desert land.

Every day our mission programme started with morning prayer together with the parish priest and ended with a Mass in the main town chapel in the evening. In this way we sought to draw strength for our efforts from the source of all creation and the one





*Teakare Betero (left), Aminiasi Waqa, Fr Darwin Bayaca and Martin Koroiciri (right) in Jimbe, Peru.*

who sent us to carry on his mission. We drew inspiration from St Francis of Assisi and his example of both word and action.

At the final Mass on Saturday night I was surprised when the main celebrant, Fr Wilmer, asked my seminarian companion, Dong, and I to share a few words about our experience of this mission with the people of Jimbe. This was because we were leaving to return to Lima the next day. After conferring with Dong I decided to speak first and I thanked the people for helping me to see and believe how God exists in them, the people of Jimbe, and in their lives and relationships despite all the difficulties and challenges they face every day from poverty and natural disasters like the rain and floods. I told them that

they showed God's love and presence to me by the way they lived with one another.

Then, just before the beginning of Mass, a procession brought three crosses from the top of the hill. This too, they told me, was an old tradition in the community and was called "Cruz del Siglo" or the "Cross of the Century" and for me it was another sign of their faith and trust in a close and merciful God. So it was with much gratitude and fulfilment that we returned to Lima the next day, having experienced so vividly the rich and precious spiritual life of the people of Jimbe.

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*Martin Koroiciri, a Fijian Columban seminarian on his first mission assignment in Peru.*

“

*I decided to speak first and I thanked the people for helping me to see and believe how God exists in them, the people of Jimbe, and in their lives and relationships despite all the difficulties and challenges they face every day...*

# Anniversary Celebrations

## 50th Anniversary of ordination

*F*r Peter Woodruff was ordained priest at St Mary's, Star of the Sea Church, Burnie, Tasmania, by Bishop Guildford Young, on July 14 1967.

Fr Peter was born in East Malvern, Victoria, the eldest of a family of four boys and one girl, but grew up mostly in Burnie, Tasmania, where his father was a teacher and headmaster. After completing his secondary education at St Virgil's in Hobart, he moved back to the mainland for his seminary training, firstly at Sassafras, Victoria, and then at St Columbans, North Turrumurra, NSW.

After ordination Fr Peter was appointed to Peru and following language studies served in parish ministry in the squatter areas of Lima until 1977 when he was appointed to mission education and vocations work in Australia for three years. After some study in Berkeley, California, he

returned to parish work in Peru until 2001 when he came back to Australia and further study at Latrobe University in Melbourne where he eventually received a PhD for a thesis on rural life and culture in the Andes.

A final re-appointment to Peru in 2005 continued until 2009 when he returned to Australia and began a new career as a reporter of stories about mission and missionaries for *The Far East* magazine. Many of these stories were compiled into a book titled '*Columbans on Mission*'.

Fr Peter continues to use his writing skills as editor of both the Australian Journal of Mission Studies and '*Columban Intercom*', an in-house Columban newsletter. ***We congratulate him on reaching this significant milestone of 50 years in the service of mission.***



*Fr Peter Woodruff SSC*

## 25th Anniversary of ordination

*F*r Kevin O'Neill, the current Superior General of the Society of St Columban, was ordained by Bishop Peter Connors at Holy Spirit Church, Manifold Heights, Geelong, on July 10, 1992.

Fr Kevin is fourth in a family of six. Fr Peter is his twin brother and also a Columban priest. Their parents, John and Ruth, reside in Geelong, Victoria.

Fr Kevin studied chemical engineering at the RMIT in Melbourne before he decided to join his brother at the Columban seminary in North Turrumurra, NSW, in 1984. In 1988 he went to Taiwan for his Overseas Training Programme involving study of the Mandarin language and pastoral work with mentally ill patients.

Returning to Australia in 1990 he continued his seminary training until his ordination after which he was re-appointed to Taiwan. After further language study he engaged in prison ministry and in 1994 was made

Coordinator of the Mission Unit while continuing to work with prisoners, youth, the mentally ill and HIV patients.

In 2000 Fr Kevin attended the Columban General Assembly in Sydney where he was elected to the General Council based in Ireland. After six years on the Council he was re-appointed to Taiwan and three years later to mainland China where he was made Coordinator of the China Mission Unit in 2010. As Coordinator he attended another Columban General Assembly in 2012 in Los Angeles where he was elected Superior General of the Society. His base as Superior General is Hong Kong.

***We congratulate Kevin on achieving 25 years of Columban missionary priesthood in the Lord's service.***



*Fr Kevin O'Neill SSC*



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## Outreach to refugee families in Myanmar

In Banmaw, Myanmar there are three Columban supported boarding houses that cater for young internally-displaced persons. Recently we learned that 31 students from the boarding houses passed their level 10 state exams. One is now a tutor for young men at one of the boarding houses. One other is a firefighter and another is a student of chemistry at Banmaw University.

**With your help**, many more young displaced persons in Myanmar can advance through life. ( See pages 18-19)



Photo: Fr Pat Colgan SSC



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