

The Great White Barrier Reef

Concern about coral bleaching on the
Great Barrier Reef.

The Far East

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AUSTRALIA

St Columban's Mission Society
69 Woodland Street
Essendon Vic 3040
Postal address:
PO Box 752, Niddrie Vic 3042
Tel: (03) 9375 9475
TFE@columban.org.au
www.columban.org.au

NEW ZEALAND

St Columban's Mission Society
P.O. Box 30-017
Lower Hutt 5040
Tel: (04) 567 7216
columban@iconz.co.nz
www.columban.org.au

Publisher:

Fr Gary Walker
director@columban.org.au

Editor:

Fr Dan Harding
TFE@columban.org.au

Editorial Assistant:

Mrs Jacqueline Russell
TFE@columban.org.au

Designer:

Mrs Assunta Arena
aarena@columban.org.au

Communications & Publications Director:

Mrs Janette Mentha
jmentha@columban.org.au

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An example of coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef.
(See story pages 4-5)

Photo: Paul Lucas



From the Editor

Missionary life involves changes and trust in God

Missionary life involves changes, some expected, some unexpected. A missionary has to be an adaptable person, ever ready to make sudden changes, to adapt to new situations and at all times to place their trust in God's providence and loving care.

The June issue of *The Far East* magazine offers stories of missionaries in transition amongst other stories from around the globe.

Columban Fr Patrick (Pat) Egan is preparing to retire home to Ireland in July 2017 after serving in the Chilean mission for almost 55 years. He shares with us some of the most difficult moments he experienced during that time.

Likewise, Columban Sister Kathleen Mary Riordan tells us the story of the Columban Sisters in Chile as they now prepare to leave Chile and pass on the flame of faith so that others may carry it on into the future. She has served in Chile since 1974.

On the other hand, while they are leaving Chile, I am preparing to return

to Columban Mission there. It will be a great joy for me to be able to work once again with the Chilean people.

This June 2017 issue will be my last as editor of the magazine. Janette Mentha, the current Communications and Publications Director will take over from the July issue. She has a lot of experience and will do a wonderful job. (See pages 6-7 for my thoughts on returning to Chile).

From Mexico, we read about the construction with support from Columban benefactors of a small sports complex and two meeting rooms in the Columban parish of Corpus Christi, in the City of Juarez. Our Mid-Year Appeal focuses on our ministry in this part of Mexico, given the high incidence of drug addiction, trafficking and gun violence.

Coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef is a great concern to all of us. Paul Lucas from the Townsville Catholic Education Office and environmental expert writes of this concern. Bishop Michael McCarthy of Rockhampton writes of the damage done to the Reef from Cyclone Debbie.

Columban Fr Daniel (Dan) O'Connor writes of tragedy amongst the Christian community in Pakistan on Christmas Day last year. Fr Tim Mulroy offers us a reflection on the season of Pentecost. We congratulate Fr Shay Cullen who will be the recipient of the 2017 Martin Buber award.

'The Pedalling to Live' programme is a Columban founded and supported programme in the Philippines that offers tricycle drivers the opportunity to pay off their own tricycles.

As I prepare with God's help to make an important change in my life, I ask that you remember me in your prayers. Pray also for all missionaries as they adapt to the different seasons of change.

Fr Daniel Harding

Fr Daniel Harding
TFE@columban.org.au



The Great White Barrier Reef

*T*ropical North Queensland boasts two World Heritage areas: The Wet Tropics and the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), both known for their beauty, diversity and enchantment. However, all is not well with either. In particular the GBR, often described as “one of our great underwater gardens”, is at risk.

World Oceans’ Day June 8, 2004 saw the release of a Pastoral Letter on the Reef by the Bishops of Queensland. It was in response to the well-publicized Reef deterioration of the time. Called ‘*Let the Many Coastlands Be Glad*’, it emphasized “our shared responsibility for one of our greatest natural treasures, the Great Barrier Reef.” The Bishops called it a “gift of rare beauty”, reminding us that “Care for the environment and a keener ecological awareness have become key moral issues for the Christian conscience”.

Companionship with and care for the planet, especially the need for “ecological conversion”, have been challenges also promoted by the last three Popes. Recently Pope Francis issued a unique encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, to “everyone in the world” on “The Care for Our Common Home.” In this 190 page letter Pope Francis created a special moment in Catholic Social teaching namely that the protection of God’s creation is now formally brought to the centre of Church teaching.

In this letter the Pope uses Scripture to detail a fresh theology of the whole of creation as “*one inter-related community before God.*” (#92)

Similarly, the 2004 Queensland Bishop’s Pastoral Letter reminded us that, “Not only is the Reef a precious eco-system in itself but also an integral part of the one planetary

life that connects us all - the human species and all species of the land and sea, rainforests, reef, mountains, plains and inland desert.”

Pope Francis advances church theology when he insists that creatures like the ambling sea-slug or the feisty electric sun-fish have value in themselves: “*Every creature is the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection.*” (#77)

Our Pope echoes the research of marine scientists, climatologists and N.G.O’s when he writes “*This sister (Mother Earth) now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the*

most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail.' (#2)

The groaning of the GBR is becoming more evident. In a recent report, James Cook University Professor Terry Hughes, indicated that coral bleaching now stretches along two-thirds of the Reef - a reef approximately the size of Italy!

This is concerning because the 12 month gap between the recent bleachings is far too short for any meaningful recovery of the 2016 damage where 67% of the 700km section from Port Douglas to Torres Strait had dead coral: the single greatest loss ever recorded. Most corals will take 10-15 years to recover if conditions are "favourable."

In 2017 the most intense bleaching occurred from Cooktown to Townsville, remembering that this year's bleach is the fourth such mass-event in recent times, (1998, 2002, 2016, 2017).

Corals are colonies of tiny sea-animals, polyps which attach to rocks, dividing into clones which connect and blossom into over 600 diverse varieties. They are either hard or soft. Hard corals host an algae which provides food and colouring. With high water temperatures the algae are expelled consequently the coral loses its Mardi Gras of colour and bleaches.



Astronauts have told us that they can see the GBR from space in all its splendour and fragility – "the world's most beautiful necklace."

There is a distinctive pattern to the bleaching: the areas where oceans were hottest. Many scientists point to the four major bleachings within the present one degree (approx) of global warming. What of the obvious impending increases?

Water quality is critical! In March tropical Cyclone Debbie tracked across the southern boundary of bleached Reef. Its wanderings smashed corals and exacerbated coastal runoff. Remarkably authorities gave permission for several central Queensland coal-mines to discharge their over-flowing waste dams into the flooding Fitzroy River and its tributaries.

Water quality on the Reef is an ongoing problem. James Cook University's Jon Brodie examined the Australian/Queensland 'Governments' Reef 2050 Plan' and estimates the plan "falls far short" of real requirements to meet the plan's water-quality targets. The \$500-\$600 million expenditure is "obviously totally inadequate... the best estimate being \$8.2 billion to meet 2025 targets." 'Business-as-usual' greenhouse emissions "will almost certainly see the end of the GBR as we know it."

While Governments are doing some good is it little wonder that Pope Francis says that "we lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present and coming generations." (#53)

But there is hope! "...there is reason for hope that humanity at the dawn of the 21st century will be remembered for having shouldered its grave responsibilities." (#165)

Pope Francis praises individuals, many organisations and the ecological movement. Across Queensland signs are evident in the local action of farmers, fishermen, scientists, pastoralists, ordinary citizens and even children who are working for GBR recovery. There is some Catholic action also. The Diocese of Townsville, for example, has developed policy and action in schools and parishes which focus on education, sustainability and "care for our common home."

Catholic Earthcare Australia, together with many religious congregations like the Columban Mission Society, offer resources in support of people living out their "ecological vocation."

Pope Francis calls all to "ecological conversion", to be protectors of God's handiwork as "essential to a life of virtue...not an optional...or secondary aspect of our Christian experience." Most of all he believes that we can do it!

Paul Lucas, a retired Catholic School Principal, works at the Townsville Catholic Education Office and is active in creating care for our common home. Paul is a long term benefactor and friend of the Columbans.

Thoughts upon returning to mission in Chile

This June 2017 issue will be my last as magazine Editor. Here are some of my thoughts as I prepare to return to Chile.

When Bishop Fernando Ariztia, an auxiliary bishop of Santiago, Chile, in 1974 invited the Columban Sisters to come to Chile as missionaries, he asked them not to begin any schools or hospitals and not to live in a convent. Rather he asked them to live in small homes located in recently formed squatter settlements.

As the Church was not yet established in these areas, it would be the Sisters role to live amongst their shanty-town neighbours and support them in any way they could. Gradually their efforts would help give birth to local parish communities.

After almost six years back home in Australia, I am now returning to Chile to be once again involved in this type of missionary work as described by Bishop Ariztia. I originally went to Chile after finishing my seminary studies at St Columban Seminary at Turramurra, Sydney and was ordained deacon in Chile. I then returned to my home parish, St Oliver Plunkett in Brisbane, to be ordained priest. After ordination I returned for many years to mission in Chile.

At the end of 2011, I returned to Australia to become the Editor of *The Far East* magazine, starting in January 2012. This June 2017 issue, however, is my last issue as Editor and from July

onwards, Janette Mentha will take over. Janette has worked for many years on the editorial team. I know for sure that Janette will do a great job as Editor.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Columban Regional Director, Fr Gary Walker and our Columban team in Melbourne, for entrusting me with the role

of Editor during these past five and a half years. *The Far East* magazine began in 1920 and has been published continually since then. I felt I had a great legacy to try to live up to. The magazine is important missionary work.

As well as the magazine Editor, I have been very lucky to spend two years promoting subscriptions to the magazine in the parishes of the Archdiocese of Adelaide and helping out in the Adelaide Cathedral Parish. Archbishop Philip Wilson, the clergy and laity of Adelaide warmly welcomed me in the task of promoting awareness of overseas mission through the magazine.

What am I looking forward to as I prepare to go back to Chile as a Columban missionary?

I am looking forward to once again belonging to the Columban team in Chile. It is a wonderful thing to belong to a team whose vision responds to the spiritual, pastoral and human development needs of the Chilean people.

Being a member of the Columban team means I must be ready to play my part, to pull my weight, to carry my burden, to bear the heat of the day and to make sacrifices so that Christ's Kingdom will flourish amidst the despair, the hopelessness, the drugs and the violence experienced in the poor parish neighbourhoods of Chile.

Then Jesus declared, "*No one who puts his hand to the plough and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*" Luke 9:62

Re-joining the Columban team in Chile, means that there will be no time for boredom, no time to be spent looking around trying to find something to do. Not at all! The missionary tasks before us are gigantic. One just has to walk down the parish lanes and streets with the eyes and ears attuned to the Gospel to experience the struggle between good and evil, life and death, between justice and



injustice, between service, love, community and empowerment up against exploitation, egoism, domination and greed.

"But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear." Matthew 13:16

It will be wonderful to be once more part of the Columban story in Chile. This means awareness of standing on the shoulders of all those Columban and Diocesan priests who have served in the Chilean Mission since 1952, of all those Columban Sisters who have served since 1974 and all those Columban Lay Missionaries who have served since 1993. Since 1952, Columbans have either founded or revitalized over 30 parish communities in Chile located in poor marginalized areas. At the moment, there are five large Columban parishes in Chile, one of which has over 100,000 residents.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest"... Matthew 9:36-37 and Luke 10:2

In returning to Chile, I look forward to presiding at the Eucharist in our parish communities and reflecting on the Word of God together with the people. I look forward to working with a well formed laity, with vibrant Parish Pastoral Councils, with the many Permanent Deacons and with parish Catechists who run all the sacramental, scriptural and liturgical programmes.

I look forward to participating in parish ministries that reach out to drug addicts, alcoholics, gang members, the unemployed, the aged poor, shanty-town dwellers, undernourished children, single mothers, the sick, the imprisoned and those suffering with mental health problems.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Columbans and all the readers of *The Far East* in Australia and New Zealand who have supported me during my time back here. I believe it was God's Will for me to have spent this time back home and it has been an enriching experience for me.

Now I believe it is His Will for me to return to mission in Chile. I hope to send some future stories from Chile to the magazine. So you will hear from me again. Please remember me in your prayers as I prepare to return.

The Far East magazine thanks Fr Daniel (Dan) Harding for his time and contribution as Editor and wishes him all the best on his return to Chile.



Fr Dan Harding (left) & Janette Mentha (right).



Streets of Santiago, Chile.



Fr Dan Harding ACYF 2016.



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“

As in the case of Audy, the Holy Spirit probably needs thirty godparents to distribute all the gifts and blessings...

The Holy Spirit as a godparent

REFLECTION
FR TIM MULROY

A Pentecost reflection

Audy was a bright-eyed, smiling three-month old baby who arrived at the Church for her baptism in the arms of her proud father, Jason. I chatted with him for some moments at the entrance to the Church while a large number of relatives and friends of the family arrived. Soon the Church was rather full. It was Sunday afternoon and this was going to be my first baptism of a Filipino baby.

When the ceremony began I invited the parents and godparents of Audy to come forward and join me in the sanctuary. Then, to my surprise, what seemed like half the congregation started moving, and suddenly I was surrounded by 30 people. As I moved through the ceremony, making the sign of the cross on Audy's forehead, and inviting the parents, and then the godparents to do likewise, all 30 godparents took me at my word and lined up to do so. The entire ceremony took 45 minutes, but no one seemed to mind: what mattered most for them was that Audy should feel immersed in the warmth and joy of the celebration.

Later that afternoon, during a party with Audy's family and friends, I shared my feelings of surprise about the large number of godparents, since the majority of children that I had previously baptized had just one or two. Then, Jason related to me that most Filipino children have several godparents, though he agreed that 30 was a rather exceptionally large number. He also explained to me that in Filipino culture, godparents are generally young adults. Besides their spiritual role, they are expected to assist and support their godchild, especially in the event that one or both parents meets a major obstacle along the road of life, becomes ill, or dies. In a society where there is little government support for those who encounter misfortune, it is very important to build a network of friends to turn to for help. Through inviting 30 relatives and friends to become godparents for Audy, her parents were ensuring that she would be protected and supported no matter what disaster struck her or her family, even if she was left as an orphan.

As Jesus' ministry came to a seemingly disastrous ending and he found himself staring at death, he was deeply concerned not just for himself, but for those he loved whom he would leave behind. He wanted them to know that they would continue to be protected and cared for and so

he reassures them, "I will not leave you orphans" (Jn. 14:18). He promises to send them the Holy Spirit to help, guide and protect them after he had gone. He warns them that for a brief time everything will fall apart and they will feel abandoned by God, but then the Holy Spirit will take over, caring for and nurturing them so that their faith would grow to maturity.

As we become mature in our faith we come to a greater trust in God as a loving parent, like a caring father or mother. We also come to know Jesus as a brother or friend who accompanies us on the journey of life. Most of us would like to have a similar close relationship with the Holy Spirit, but so often we struggle to find a way to express it. Images of the Holy Spirit as flames of fire, a strong wind, or a gentle dove seem abstract and impersonal. Perhaps the image we are searching for is a godparent. A godparent has a unique relationship with us that differs greatly from that of a parent or a sibling or a friend, yet it complements these other important relationships. Furthermore, the term 'godparent' reminds us that what makes this relationship special is the fact that it is grounded in faith. A godparent assumes the privilege and responsibility of caring for and nurturing the faith of their godchild until it reaches maturity. Our godparent can be understood, then, as the personal representative of the Holy Spirit who accompanies us on our faith journey.

Seeing one's role in another person's life as being the personal representative of the Holy Spirit brings an awesome responsibility. How can one person convey the mystery and beauty, the dynamism and creativity of the Holy Spirit to their godchild? Perhaps, that is why many Christians have two godparents. But even two seems too few! As in the case of Audy, the Holy Spirit probably needs 30 godparents to distribute all the gifts and blessings that God wishes us to receive at various times and at different stages of our life's pilgrimage through this world.

Columban Fr Tim Mulroy is the Regional Director for the Missionary Society of St Columban in the United States. Originally from Ireland, he worked as a Columban Missionary in Japan before being appointed to the United States

Memories of a difficult time

FR DANIEL HARDING

Preparing for the Columban Centenary 2018

Columban Fr Patrick (Pat) Egan shares with The Far East his memories of a difficult period in Chilean history, the social changes of the 1960s and the brutal 1973 Military Coup. Fr Pat arrived in Chile on St Patrick's Day, 1963, after the Columbans decided to leave the Apostolate to Seamen at the Port of Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he had been assigned two years previously. In July, 2017, he will retire back home to Ireland.

The first six weeks after the Military Coup

There was a notable increase in the number of people at Sunday Masses on the Sunday following the Military Coup, which had occurred the previous Tuesday, September 11, 1973. On that morning, I remember seeing planes from the Chilean Air Force flying over the parish on their way to bomb the presidential palace. In a sense we were now at war.

This brutal Coup had been led by General Pinochet against the democratically elected government of socialist President Salvador Allende, who in 1970 had become the first Marxist ever to be openly elected in a democratic election.

Like all other priests in Santiago on the Sunday following the Coup, I read out at the Sunday Masses the statement prepared by the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Raul Silva Henriquez, in response to the Coup. He called on the Military to respect human rights, to promote national reconciliation and for a quick return to democratic government. At that time we thought the military regime would last about six weeks and not the 17 years it lasted.

The new Military Regime banned all meetings in the country and abolished the parliament, political parties and all community groups. The Regime ordered all priests to make lists of participants in every parish gathering and send them on to them. The Cardinal immediately ordered the priests to disobey this order. "No way!", he said. In the first six weeks after the Coup this was the first time anyone had said "No" to Pinochet. In fact, during the dictatorship the Catholic Church was the only institution that retained its independence and autonomy.

One of the acolytes at the Columban parish in San Antonio was an active member of the Chilean Communist Party. On the day of the Coup, he heard on radio the Military promise that everyone who went back to work would be safe. So he went to the factory where he worked. Upon seeing him, a workmate warned him, "What are you doing here, aren't you dead yet?"

With Columban help he came to my parish in Santiago, where we hid him. Fellow Columban Fr Noel Dunne was very active in helping those being persecuted to get into foreign embassies and out of the country. We made a special arrangement with the heavily guarded Mexican Embassy for him to slip inside through a side door while they were taking out their rubbish.

Social Changes and the Church during the 1960's

In the years leading up to the Coup, it had been the Church and the Christian Democratic Party that had accompanied the tens of thousands of poor families who had migrated to Santiago during the 1960's to escape rural poverty in the south.

They also migrated to Santiago after the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in history (magnitude 9.5 and lasting 10 minutes) had occurred in the south of Chile on the afternoon of May 22, 1960. It was followed 15 minutes later by a Tsunami with up to 25 metre waves along 1000 kilometres of coast. This tragedy left up to 6000 dead and 2,000,000 homeless out of a total national population of 7.7 million.

As these poor families moved to Santiago and squatted on private land, it was the Church that worked directly



with them to gain legal recognition for their homes, access to education and health care, potable water, electricity, sewerage and paved roads. The majority of our Columban parishes began precisely in these squatter areas, working alongside the people as they struggled for better conditions. The Communists were principally concerned with Trade Unions and not with these squatters.

Then came the Coup

As the months went by following the Coup, 130,000 supporters of the Allende government were arrested. Thousands were tortured, killed and "disappeared". Thousands of foreign experts and academics, who had worked for the Allende Government, were now in hiding, seeking amnesty in Churches all over the city. Police would stand on guard outside Churches to prevent them entering. We Columbans helped many of these to leave the country.

Three weeks after the Coup, the Catholic and Evangelical Churches along with the Jewish Community set up a Peace Committee to support people being persecuted. After receiving great pressure from the Regime, this was replaced in January 1976 by the Vicaria de la Solidaridad. This was set up by Cardinal Silva Henriquez in the Archdiocesan Offices next to the Cathedral. It defended human rights and documented violations and could resist Regime pressure better. Ordinary parishes continued much of this same work at the local level.

Parishes as centres for human rights

Throughout the years of Dictatorship, the local parish became the only neighbourhood centre available to help those persecuted by the military. If someone was arrested, their family would rush to the parish for help. We priests knew we had to drop everything and go as quickly as possible to the local police station and demand to see the arrested person. If we did not see them, then the person could become "disappeared".

Pinochet complained many times that the Church was against him. Of course he was right but we could not admit it at the time. Parishes were the only free places where people could meet and express themselves. Banned political parties from the Left met clandestinely as parish

groups in an unspoken agreement with us. For example, the *Parish Theatre Group* in my parish, that met weekly, was really a front for the Socialist Party. In our neighbouring parish, the Communist Party met as the *Parish Guitar Club* and in the next parish it was MAPU, a small Leftist Action Party that met as the *Parish Youth Group*.

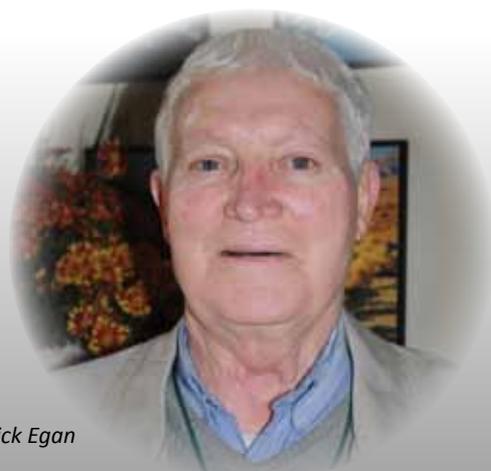
Early on, the Church excommunicated anyone who was involved with torture. Each parish office had a large poster outlying what excommunication involved - no receiving Holy Communion and the other sacraments etc. This did not seem to bother very much some of the military involved in torture. What did bother them, however, was finding out that being excommunicated meant they could not become godfathers at baptisms. This really hurt!

Summary

Since the return to democracy in 1990, new challenges have emerged that the Church must confront. Our Columban mission in Chile today, as part of the Church confronts new challenges such as indifference to faith, consumerism, individualism, social injustices, ecological problems and a loss of a sense of community service.

Just as in the difficult times of the dictatorship, we know that the Spirit of God will continue to guide us in our mission into future decades.

Columban Fr Patrick Egan spoke with Fr Daniel Harding, the Editor of The Far East magazine on a recent visit to Chile.



Fr Patrick Egan



Passing on the flame of faith

Preparing for the Columban Centenary 2018

Columban Sr Kathleen Mary Riordan recently spoke with The Far East about some of the highlights and difficulties of her 43 years of missionary life in Chile. The time is fast approaching for Sr Kathleen Mary and for Sr Angela McKeever, the other remaining Columban sister in Chile, to pass on the flame of faith so that others may carry it on into the future.

Early days

The Columban sisters came to Chile at a particularly difficult historical moment. It was the year 1974, one year after the military coup that began the 17 years of the oppressive dictatorship of General Pinochet. The sisters had been invited by the Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago, Bishop Fernando Ariztia. They were not to live in convents or to run institutions such as schools, but rather to live inserted in poor neighbourhoods where there was no other church presence. They were to share in the daily life of the poor and to promote their formation in faith.

The first three Columban sisters to arrive were Sisters Gemma Shelly, Ita McElwain and Kathleen Mary Riordan herself. They went to live in a small house in the poor neighbourhood which was called 'Venceremos' - 'We shall overcome'. This area had begun as an illegal occupation of private land, where hundreds of poor families had organized themselves to suddenly arrive in large numbers one day, squat on small pieces of land and build their

homes. Until the military coup occurred in 1973, the area had been controlled by the Chilean Communist Party. Now the new military regime took over and renamed the area, 'Villa O'Higgins'.

Before the sisters could move into their home, Bishop Ariztia and Columban Fr Kevin O'Boyle, who worked in a nearby parish with a similar illegal occupation of land, visited every home in the neighbourhood to ask the people whether or not they wanted the sisters to live amongst them. The answer was a resounding "Yes".

Soon after arriving, the sisters were given a small piece of land on which a simple pine-board wooden shack could be erected. Here they began catechetical programmes and a feeding programme for the many undernourished children and aged persons in the area. This could also be used as a chapel for the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments.

The sisters also noticed that there were many young women in their mid twenties who were widows. These were the widows of men that the military regime had detained and had now become “the disappeared”. ***In order to help these widows and other women earn some badly needed income, the sisters developed crochet and embroidery workshops where the produce could be sold for income.*** Women with disabilities also participated in these workshops.

After living in convents, removed from the life of ordinary families, this was an entirely new way of life for the sisters.

Difficult times

Spies for the military regime made life difficult for the sisters during those early years. Sometimes strangers would appear at the daily feeding programme and begin asking questions about who was involved and taking down the names of the families participating. It was difficult to know whom one could trust. Other unknown persons could be seen standing around observing what was going on.

Things took a serious turn for the worse on November 1, 1975, when English doctor Sheila Cassidy was arrested in the Columban Fathers House which she was visiting by the Chilean secret police. Sheila had given medical treatment to a political opponent of the new military regime. Sheila was eventually released after being severely tortured. For the new military regime, the Columban sisters as well as priests were now political suspects and had to be carefully watched by the secret police.

Support for mission

Sr Kathleen Mary says the highly organized nature of the Chilean Church helped the sisters settle into their mission. A strong emphasis on effective pastoral planning along with excellent catechetical materials provided the sisters with a structure in which to work. Likewise, the Chilean Conference of Religious encouraged Religious from all congregations to make a serious option for the poor, to go out and live amongst the poor in poor areas. This prophetic call has been a great inspiration to the sisters over the years.

Missionary outreaches over the years

Looking back over her many years of mission in Chile, Sr Kathleen Mary says one of her principle missionary outreaches, even up until the present time, has been

sweeping the street every morning outside her home. Here she greets both neighbours and strangers. Recently she greeted an unknown young woman who immediately turned around and asked if she could speak with her. With a flood of tears, this young woman poured out her heart as she told of the recently diagnosed terminal illness of her mother.



Sr Kathleen Mary Riordan, Chile 2017.

Another important missionary outreach for Sr Kathleen Mary is the selling of small cactus plants from her garden in yoghurt containers at the unauthorized end of the local street market. This is an area where poor families sell second hand clothes, small household items and goods that fell “from the back of a truck”. Here she meets all kinds of persons, who, knowing that she is a religious sister, ask her questions about faith, about baptising children or preparing them for First Communion and so on. The money from the sale of the cacti goes towards the cost of the yearly mission that she leads in remote areas of Chile’s south.

For the last five years during January, Sr Kathleen Mary has led a mission, promoting Biblical awareness and reflection, to the southern Chilean island of Chiloe. On Christmas day 2016 a large earthquake occurred here with a strong possibility of a tsunami which luckily did not occur. As a result, the most recent mission in January 2017 concentrated on listening to a traumatized people and helping them express their fears.

Passing on the flame of faith

From 1974 to 2017, 33 Columban Sisters have served Christ in the Chilean mission. The two remaining sisters, Srs Kathleen Mary and Angela, are quick to say that the Chilean mission has not been their mission, but Christ’s mission. As they prepare to leave Chile during 2017, they know that Christ’s mission in Chile will continue as others take up the flame of faith and carry it into the future.

Columban Sr Kathleen Mary Riordan spoke with Fr Daniel Harding, the Editor of The Far East magazine on a recent visit to Chile.

Photo: Missionary Society of St Columban

Columban Fr Kevin Mullins (centre) with the Parish Confirmation group.



A temporary haven from violence

MIGUEL ANGEL TEJADA OLAGUE

Corpus Christi, Anapra, is a Catholic community on the outskirts of the Juarez, located on the Mexican side of the US/Mexico border. This community has had to endure one of the roughest periods of violence Mexico has seen. Hundreds of young men and women have been recruited by criminal groups for the distribution of illegal drugs. However, difficult times always help us discover and appreciate more the active presence of God in God's people.

The Missionary Society of St Columban engages in a variety of projects of evangelisation in a number of countries around the world. We focus on fostering community life, the role of lay men and women and proclaiming the truth revealed to us in and through God's Word. We cannot do all this alone. This requires extensive team work along with donations from our benefactors.

We can see some of the results of the donations received in Corpus Christi Parish, Anapra.

We have been able to build two multi-purpose meeting rooms and a small sports complex, which have provided us with the opportunity to meet and work with youth and adults. Our new facilities offer us greater opportunity to help families and a variety of age groups to work out a way forward in hope and friendship.

In a sense, we use the meeting rooms and sports complex to offer our people a temporary haven from a hostile and violent society. Time in the haven allows our people to make friends and find support to face life in the rough and tumble of this violent society. We help create a space without drugs, alcohol and guns. We help many, especially the youth, realise they can shape their lives in more caring and creative ways.





The youth group with members aged between 15 and 24 years has grown quite quickly from a dozen or so to about 100 members. They run fund raising and social activities, help with the catechesis of younger children, and readily welcome new members to the group. There is a second group of children aged from eight to 14 years, which also numbers around 100. Parents of these children, both men and women, also participate actively in the life of the parish community.

We are most grateful to our benefactors for their support in helping us offer an alternative approach to life to many young men and women who otherwise might have been recruited into gangs, violence and the drug trade, quite possibly leading to an early death.

This is a mission worked out in partnership between God, missionary priests, lay women and men and benefactors – all members of the Church. Such partnership is the only way we can see a way forward that prioritises life – the life in abundance that Jesus promises us if we live as his disciples. This partnership gives us a realistic chance of facing up to the problems in our society in a creative and so hopeful way. We feel that we are on the way because there is now less violence than previously but there is still much to be done.



Miguel Angel Tejada Olague is the Corpus Christi Parish photographer.



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.*

Rockhampton bishop speaks out after coral reef pummelled by Cyclone Debbie

Damage to the Great Barrier Reef in the wake of Cyclone Debbie has prompted one of Queensland's bishops to renew a call for greater environmental protection.

"Speaking as a former industrial chemist, I note that there has been tremendous damage done to the reef by the run-off of waters and untreated effluent contained by our industries", Rockhampton Bishop Michael McCarthy said.

Bishop McCarthy has spoken out after many reefs off the north Queensland coast were pummelled and broken by extreme weather.

Scientists raised further environmental concerns with fresh run-off pollution from torrential rains sweeping into Great Barrier Reef waters.

Satellite images of the Burdekin River have shown a brown veil of sediment flooding from the river mouth about 18km out into the sea and onto the reef. Scientists consider this a major source of sediment potentially harming coral and sea grass by restricting light.

"This is where we could be directing our resources to ensure that our environment is preserved for the future and for our planet's long-term viability", Bishop McCarthy said.

"The waste water and untreated effluent from our cities and industries does cause incredible damage to ecosystems of our reefs and lands, and can be addressed by careful management and planning."

Scientific aerial photos, taken three days after Cyclone Debbie hit, hint at the scale of damage in the erosion-prone Burdekin catchment and show flood plumes from the Burdekin, Fitzroy and Gregory rivers pushing sediment and nitrogen pollution out to sea.

To add to the woes of the reef, scientists last month warned that coral bleaching for two consecutive years was causing massive coral loss.

Bleached corals are not necessarily dead corals, but it can take at least a decade for a full recovery of even the fastest-growing coral.



Photo: Paul Lucas

In 2004, the Catholic bishops of Queensland released a pastoral letter about the Great Barrier Reef, which Bishop McCarthy said was *"still timely"*.

The letter, *'Let the Many Coastlands Be Glad'*, emphasised the shared ecological responsibility for the Great Barrier Reef and the need for action to ensure its survival.

The key issues of harm were identified as global warming, sediment run-off from land, sewage outflow, deteriorating water quality and over-fishing. The reef was described in the letter as *"a sublime gift and blessing from God"*.

"Care for the environment and a keener ecological awareness have become key moral issues for the Christian conscience", the letter said.

Bishop McCarthy said the 2004 document remained a call to action.

"I would encourage all to re-read this important and timely directive", he said.

Mark Bowling, Multimedia Journalist, *The Catholic Leader* - April 20, 2017

Mission Intention for June

That national leaders may firmly commit themselves to ending the arms trade, which victimizes so many innocent people.



From the Director

Finishing his tour of duty

*T*he Editor of *The Far East* magazine, Fr Daniel (Dan) Harding is returning to Chile where he worked previously for 21 years. This edition of *The Far East* is his last production as he will be taking up his appointment to Chile from September 1, 2017. It takes some time to pack up and clear the desk, have a break, say farewells to family and friends before heading back to Chile where his heart really is.

In addition to being Editor, Fr Dan has also been promoting *The Far East* magazine in the Archdiocese of Adelaide as well as being involved in pastoral work there.

His appointment to the Australia/New Zealand Region was for four years but he has given us an extra two years. We try to operate on a rotation scheme of Columban priests returning to their home country for four years to promote the missionary work of the Society, before returning to their missionary work overseas. One of the other reasons, is to have a missionary priest back in his own culture for a time, to keep in contact with his origins.

Fr Dan has finished his 'tour of duty' and is returning to Chile. I was in Santiago recently for a significant Columban meeting in preparation for our General Assembly next year, in Taiwan. Chile is a country where I would have liked to have been on mission. We wish Fr Dan well and thank him for his hard work, his dedication to the priesthood and his enthusiasm for mission.

We welcome our new Editor, Mrs Janette Mentha who is our first lay Editor, our first woman Editor, she is breaking the mould. The other Columban magazines from Ireland and the USA also have women as their Editors. Janette's first edition will be the July edition of *The Far East*.

One of the reasons too, is to have a missionary priest back in his own culture for a time, to keep in contact with his origins.

Janette worked for the Archdiocese of Melbourne for 20 years in the areas of liturgy, youth ministry and communications and brings a lot of experience to the role. She has worked for Columban Mission Centre now for 10 years. The preparation and induction of co-workers into working with our missionary society is something we take seriously. Janette has visited Fiji, the Philippines, Chile and Peru to broaden her understanding of Columban Mission. I believe that a picture is worth a thousand words; seeing and meeting people struggling in poverty is the best place to begin understanding aspects of Columban Mission.

We wish Dan well in his new role in Chile and welcome Janette as the new Editor.

I believe that a picture is worth a thousand words; seeing and meeting people struggling in poverty is the best place to begin understanding aspects of Columban Mission.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Walker".

Fr Gary Walker
director@columban.org.au

Fr Shay Cullen to receive the Martin Buber prize

It has been announced in the Netherlands that Irish Columban missionary, Fr Shay Cullen is to be the recipient of the 2017 Martin Buber Award in recognition of his internationally acclaimed work on human rights undertaken through the PREDA (*People's Recovery, Empowerment and Development Assistance*) Foundation which he established in the Philippines in 1974. He will be presented with the award in Kerkrade next November during the annual International Festival of Dialogue - *EURIADE*.

Professor Martin Buber was a Jewish philosopher who advocated peace dialogue, mutual recognition of human rights and dignity, and a united Jewish and Arab Palestine. He became well known internationally for his '*dialogical principle*' – a way of thinking that implies that ONE

human being - 'I' - really perceives and accepts the OTHER as 'YOU'.

Buber died in 1965, and the prestigious award in his memory was initiated in 2002 with German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher as the inaugural recipient. Since then, recipients have included Queen Silvia of Sweden, President Klaus Johannis of Romania, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Prince Irene of the Netherlands, and Karl-heinz Böhm, founder of the Austrian Menschen für Menschen Foundation for Ethiopia.

Being chosen for this internationally focused award indicates the reputation and acclaim that Fr Shay Cullen's human rights work is attracting internationally. PREDA is active in the rescue and caring of abused children from jails, abusers and brothels and giving victims of abuse a safe home with protection,

education, values formation, affirmation, empowerment and healing therapy and restoring their self-esteem.

It is engaged in defending human rights and promoting justice for the marginalised, as well as running Fair Trade to support mango-growing farmers. Fr Shay was an early board member of the IFAT (*International Federation of Alternative Trade*).

He is a popular international speaker, campaigning advocate, media commentator, and writer. In 2006, he published a

book *Passion and Power*, with an introduction by Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, and an endorsement by the Hollywood actor and human rights supporter, Martin Sheen.

Numerous newspaper articles and television documentaries have reported the success of his work protecting children and campaigning for human rights. He was an invited delegate to the conference drafting the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Helsinki and has addressed the US House of Representatives Committee on International Relations on the issue of street children. In 2015, he addressed MPs in the Bundestag about the need for advocacy and support for people whose human rights are being violated in the Philippines where a lucrative sex industry operates.

Fr Shay has been nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize by MPs in Germany and in Canada and has received numerous recognition awards in several countries. These include the Human Rights of the City of Weimar Award in Germany in 2000, the Human Rights Award of the City of Ferrara in Italy in 2001, the Prix Caritas in Switzerland in 2003, and the International Solidarity Prize by Matres Mundi in Spain in 2008. He is in Germany this week to receive the A.K. Shalom Award from the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt.

At home in Ireland, he received the Hugh O'Flaherty International Humanitarian Award in 2016, an



Fr Shay Cullen



International Person of the Year Award in 2008, and the Irish Music Awards' Humanitarian Award in 2009.

Now in his 70s, Fr Shay remains a humble man deeply dedicated to his missionary work. Humbled by his many recognition awards, he says: *"I accept awards not for myself but on behalf of all those who are working and risking their lives to defend the rights and dignity of oppressed people and to win freedom for those who are victims of human rights violations."*

Matt Moran, author of recent book *The Legacy of Irish Missionaries Lives On*, says: *"Fr Shay represents the very best in the life-changing work of our missionaries throughout the world. Preventing the abuse of women and children at the hands of human traffickers and their own governments is his life's work. His mission for justice and*

peace is ecumenical in reach. It is based on taking a stand for human rights and protecting the dignity of every person, in particular exploited women, children and youth. It is wonderful to see his efforts being recognized internationally."

During a short holiday in Ireland, he will address Senators in Leinster House on May 17 about human trafficking, child prostitution, and the increasing human rights violations in the Philippines where over 8,000 people have been killed by police and agents of the state in a campaign against illegal drugs use. On May 22, he will be accorded a civic reception by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Co. Council.

Further information about the inspiring work of PREDA can be found at www.preda.org



Fr Shay represents the very best in the life-changing work of our missionaries throughout the world. Preventing the abuse of women and children at the hands of human traffickers...

Founder Fr Oliver McCrossan (right) with a driver from the 'Pedalling to Live' programme.



The smile behind the struggle VIRGENIA O VIDAD

Virgenia O Vidad is the coordinator of the 'Pedalling to Live' programme in the Philippines which helps those in dire need generate an income by becoming owners of their own tricycles. This programme was started by Columban Fr Oliver McCrossan.

The family of Rodrigo Sabac lived on the small island of Olutanga in the Filipino region of Zamboanga, on the large southern island of Mindanao. The main source of income for people in the area is fishing as well as farming small plots of land and cultivating seaweed.

Forty-seven-year-old Rodrigo Sabac is an islander. His father was a fisherman and his mother looked after their eleven children. Growing up, it was always a challenge to have enough money to provide for the whole family's daily needs. Fishing is weather-dependent and when his father could not go fishing, the family couldn't eat. Rodrigo recalls

that during Typhoon Sendong in 2011, they were stranded without food for a day and a night wondering if they would survive.

Fishing is not an easy way to earn your living. You exist constantly between life and death. But for Rodrigo, there was little choice. He had to go out every night to catch fish to feed his family. Sometimes, it was rewarding and he would come home with many fish but there were other times when he would come home with nothing. His mother's vegetable patch was what kept them going at these times.

Due to the lack of money, none of the 11 children managed to finish high

school. Rodrigo's father died a few years ago. His mother is still alive and she continues to live in Olutanga with some of her children.

In 2007, Rodrigo married Arseline and they have four children. The eldest is in grade four, the second is in grade two, the third is in grade one and the youngest is just one-year-old. After his marriage, Rodrigo continued to earn a living as a fisherman despite the difficulties he encountered. He needed to feed his children every day.

Sending his children to school was not easy as they had little money to cover the children's school supplies, transportation and school uniforms.

Photos: Virgenia O Vidad



Another struggle was the lack of medical assistance available for the poor. As they did not own a house, they frequently were unable to pay rent and had to move.

In 2012, Rodrigo decided to transfer to Ozamiz City with his wife and children in the hope of finding a better job. But it was a risky decision because he hadn't finished school. He had no academic qualifications and also it was risky due to his age. He quickly fell into despair when he realized he was unable to provide his family with three meals a day. It was then that he heard about the 'Pedalling to Live' programme and he decided to apply.

Under the terms of the programme, you rent a tricycle with a view to eventually owning it. That's why it is called a 'Rent to Own' scheme. Participants pay the cost of a tricycle (25,000 pesos or \$663.00AUD) over a period of a year and a half. Sometimes it can take longer. From the earnings that they make from ferrying passengers, they put 20 pesos aside a day into a personal fund to help their family. They also pay 60 pesos a day towards the cost of the tricycle, which becomes theirs when they have repaid the total cost. After that, everything they earn is their own.

Rodrigo is determined that he will provide for the education of his children with the help of this scheme. But driving a tricycle is tough. Rodrigo has to wake up very early in order to earn at least fifty pesos before eight o'clock in the morning so that he can provide breakfast for the family. More hard work follows after breakfast as he tries to generate the income for lunch and dinner. The one thing that keeps him going is his determination that one day he will get a chance

to improve his living conditions, especially now that he is getting older.

When I visited Rodrigo Sabac's family, I saw him lying on a bed in a very small and dark room. It was a very difficult place to live due to being in a flood prone zone. The small room served as a bedroom, kitchen and living room. He looked so sad and depressed. I asked him what was wrong and he told me he had been diagnosed with tuberculosis and advised to rest for six months.

He was worried about the daily needs of his family. At the moment the 'Pedalling to Live' programme is providing rice and some basic needs to the family while his wife is working as a laundry woman. We were able to access basic medication at the city health unit for him. For now, Rodrigo is determined to drive his tricycle every day so that he, at least, has the income to buy enough milk for his one-year-old baby. He himself is on the second month of his medication and so hopefully after this he can transfer to the 'Green Shelter' housing project which we also run for the families in our programme.

After my short talk with Rodrigo I had many sleepless nights. I realised that even if I continue to work for many years in the community, it will never be enough because of the increasing poverty levels. But at least we are helping some families by giving them a livelihood and also by giving them hope that poverty is not a

reason for them to lose their hope and faith in God. We will struggle together to overcome it.

Rodrigo Sabac's dream is that his children will be able to finish their studies. For this reason, he is very thankful for all the support given by Columban friends and benefactors to the 'Pedalling to Live' scheme and the 'Green Shelter' programme, which are providing poor families, like his own, with the possibility to hope for a better future.

Virginia O Vidar is the coordinator of the 'Pedalling to Live' and 'Green Shelter' programme in the Philippines. Programmes were started by Columban Fr Oliver McCrossan, who was assigned in Ozamiz City, Philippines in 1976.



Virginia with the 'Pedalling to Live' members.



Members of the 'Pedalling to Live' programme.



Christmas drink of death

FR DANIEL O'CONNOR

Columban Fr Daniel (Dan) O'Connor relates a tragic event in a Christian colony in the Punjab, Pakistan, last Christmas. Columbans such as Fr Dan work with the poorest of the poor in Pakistan where often feelings of low self-esteem and depression can lead to tragic results.

*M*ubarakabad, meaning 'Blessed Place' is on the outskirts of the city of Toba Tek Singh in the centre of the province of Punjab, in Pakistan. It is a Christian colony consisting of around one hundred households and is a place of extreme poverty.

There are many similar localities dotted throughout Pakistan where Christians live in slum conditions. Most of those who live there are labourers, cleaners and street sweepers who are oppressed and looked down on and considered as being "unclean" because of the work that they perform. This often results in a low self-image and feelings of depression.

Each Christmas brings forth hope with family reunions and something special to celebrate with the birth of the Saviour in the humble stable in Bethlehem. On the night of December 24, 2016, Mubarakabad was abuzz with excitement and festivity.

The young men had decorated the street crossing with bright lights. They danced to the music blasting from the loud speakers placed in the street. The revellers had also consumed some alcohol. Others, wives and children watched from the sidelines. The celebrations went on for hours.

No one wanted to have a dry Christmas. The alcohol was arranged with difficulty. The District Council had all but shut down illegal brewing and selling of liquor in the area leading up to Christmas. As the factory-made-brands were too expensive for the poor people of Mubarakabad to purchase, a local Christian managed to obtain some confiscated liquor from a nearby police station where he worked. On Christmas Day the drink arrived into the community transported in a rickshaw.

But there was a problem as it was not enough for the 125 thirsty men who wanted a drink. Some after-shave lotion, containing methanol was mixed with water to make up the required quantity and sold at an affordable price. A donkey cart operator who purchased some of the concoction stated that it tasted different. It was bluish in colour and some foam was evident.

After drinking some of the brew, men became very ill and were rushed to the local hospital. Over the next three days, the adulterated liquor claimed 44 lives and many others were afflicted with impaired eyesight and even blindness because of the toxic liquor consumption. The hospital received 122 patients from December 26 -29. Victims needed to have their stomachs washed out within four hours of having consumed the toxic drink.



The Christian community was plummeted into darkness, despair and devastation.

Some of the patients had been brought to the hospital too late resulting in the poisonous substance seeping into their body tissues. All that could be done then was to provide them with symptomatic treatment. The hope, light and joy of Christmas had vanished. The Christian community was plummeted into darkness, despair and devastation. The families of the victims were left with no bread winner to provide for them. These tragic events will only sink these families deeper into poverty and destitution.

Columban Fr Daniel O'Connor from New Zealand is the Coordinator of the Pakistan Mission Unit. He has spent nearly three decades in Pakistan.



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The smile behind the struggle - Philippines

In order for tricycle drivers to become owners of their own vehicle in Ozamiz City in the Philippines, Columban Fr Oliver McCrossan began the 'Pedalling to Live' programme. This is "a rent to own" programme whereby the drivers gradually pay off the cost of the vehicle. By eliminating paying ongoing rent to middlemen, the drivers can now earn more to support their families.

With your help, the 'Pedalling to Live' programme can continue to support those such as the tricycle drivers and their families most in need. (See pages 20-21)



Photo: Virginia O Vidar



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