

# The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

May 2017

## Devastating floods in Peru

Columbans working in Peru report on unprecedented natural disaster.



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

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# The Far East

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# Contents



- 3** From the Editor  
Columbans prepare for centenary celebrations
- 4-5** The Philippine war on drugs  
First-hand account of the cost on the poor.
- 6-7** Poppies and pain  
The '12-Step programme' in Myanmar
- 8-9** Reflection - Countering Islamophobia
- 10-11** Moments in history
- 12-13** God's Work  
Sr Damien Rooney shares her memories.
- 14-15** Pray for Columban  
Sr Kathleen Melia
- 16** Mission World  
*"Repent to save the planet"*  
The Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar, Cardinal Bo, urges an Ecological Conversion
- 17** From the Director  
Never give up, never give in
- 18-19** Devastating floods in Peru  
Columbans report from Peru.
- 20-21** Chiangmai - where Catholics are increasing  
A small but growing Church in Thailand.
- 22 - 23** The day I met Johnny Cash  
Fr Bobby Gilmore recalls.
- 23** Your Columban Legacy





*Family home destroyed by raging flood waters in Peru.*

*Photo: AAP image/EPA/German Falcon*



## From the Editor

### Columbans prepare for centenary celebrations

Next year the Columban Fathers will be celebrating the centenary of our foundation in Ireland in 1918. Since the middle of last year we have been publishing in *The Far East* magazine a series of articles that look back at different aspects of our history, highlighting some key events and some important Columban personalities.

In this May issue, we publish two articles looking back at Columban history as well as several contemporary mission stories from around the world. Recently two Korean Columbans were ordained priests in their home dioceses, Fr Antonio Seok from the Archdiocese of Daegu and Fr Andrew Ryu from the Archdiocese of Gwangju. It was to Daegu that the first group of Columban missionaries in Korea arrived in 1933 and soon took over the area that became the Archdiocese of Gwangju.

Columban Sr Damien Rooney died at the end of last year. She had been the oldest living Columban Sister. In a lively manner she shares her memories of her calling long ago and her later work in China with the

Columban Fathers Co-founder, Bishop Edward Galvin. We also remember in this issue to pray for Columban Sr Kathleen Melia, who was recently attacked in the Philippines.

Drugs are a major world problem. Columban Fr John Keenan writes of *The Philippine war on drugs* and the unnecessary cruelty and injustice this war inflicts upon the poor.

Writing from Myanmar, Columban Sr Mary Ita O'Brien informs us that more Kachin people in the north of Myanmar have died from drug-related problems than from the civil war that has been raging there for more than 50 years. Columban Fr Alo Connaughton writes of the opium trade as well as the Catholic Church across the border in Thailand.

In Sydney, Columban Fr Patrick McInerney is the Director of the Columban Mission Institute (CMI) which runs the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations. Fr Pat was a missionary in Pakistan for many years. He writes of the importance in our contemporary societies of countering Islamophobia and gives some concrete ways to do this.

Parts of Peru have received more than ten times their normal rainfall during the month of March. Columban priests working in parishes throughout Peru report on the flooding.

On a lighter note, Columban Fr Bobby Gilmore shares his experience of meeting country music singer Johnny Cash and his wife, the singer June Carter, while he was a missionary in Jamaica.

Special celebrations are being organized next year in New Zealand and Australia to mark the centenary of our foundation. There will be opportunities to attend these celebrations in the major cities of New Zealand and Australia. We will keep you informed in the magazine. Please remember Columban Missionaries in your prayers.

*Fr Daniel Harding*

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# The Philippine war on drugs

Photo: weyo/Bigstock.com

*Columban Fr John Keenan has seen first-hand the cost of the crackdown on drugs in the Philippines. Here he appeals for a more humane way of dealing with this menace.*

*T*he war on drugs initiated by President Rodrigo Duterte on July 1, 2016 has made headlines around the world. The fifth commandment, *'Thou shall not kill'* is totally ignored. Most of the extra judicial killings take place among the poor. Even women are killed as well as children who are caught in cross-fire.

I celebrate Mass in a shanty-town each Sunday morning. After our Mass last Sunday, I was invited to bless a house. Filipinos will not sleep in a house where a murder has taken place until it is blessed. We proceeded along the narrow pathways in the shanty town. Towards the end I was led through a narrow passage way leading to very narrow stairs which made it difficult for me to climb up to the small room.

The couple living there told me that their brother had been shot dead. He slept on plywood in a corner of the shack. A policeman had made his way up the narrow stairs and shot him at close range. Such incidents are all too common especially in the poor areas in the ongoing war against drugs.

Since the new Government took over in July 2016, as of March 2017 over 7,500 people have been summarily executed. They are suspected drug addicts and are denied due process which they have a right to. I was asked to bless another house where the man of the house was similarly shot dead as he slept. It was a two storey rickety shack. Afterwards the woman living downstairs asked me to bless her room. She pointed out to me the ceiling boards where the victim blood trickled down. His wife showed me their small baby. The wake of the executed man was held on the street since the shack was too small for the coffin.

Another woman talked about how her husband was shot in front of the children. He pleaded to be allowed to kiss his children goodbye. This was denied. He was taken outside and summarily executed. To add insult to injury the poor people have to raise funds to bury their murdered loved ones. The killing goes on without mercy.



*Even women are killed either by police or vigilante groups. One woman was hired by her husband to become a killer.*

The appeals of human rights groups to the '*International Criminal Court*', to end the summary executions are ignored. The aim is to kill 100,000 addicts!

The root cause of drug addiction is poverty. Many children cannot go to school so they grow up illiterate. They can find no employment so become involved in the drug trade in order to survive.

Some live on the streets, others in one roomed shacks in inhumane conditions. Some sniff glue and solvent. Some snort, smoke or inject shabu, the local name for 'ice - crystal meth', to assuage the pangs of hunger as there is no concrete program to address the problems of unemployment, inadequate housing and poverty.

The human cost of the war on drugs is enormous. Families are devastated. Communities infiltrated by spies and informers. Many young women become widows and children orphans. Even women are killed either by police or vigilante groups. One woman was hired by her husband to become a killer. Not being a suspected killer she can move in and kill at close range. She has already killed six persons. She regrets what she has done as she herself has children. If she quits the bloody job she fears that she too will be killed.

In theory suspected drug users are given the choice of surrendering or being shot. Often those who surrender are shot dead. If not, they are imprisoned in inhumane over-crowded jails in terrible conditions. They are supposed to go to rehabilitation centres which are few and far between. There is a serious shortage of doctors, nurses and trained counsellors to help addicts to recover. They are sick people in need of healing from their addictions, not criminals to be shot at sight.

Local churches are being asked to help in the rehabilitation process but are unprepared for the huge numbers.

The killing must stop and the victims of drug addiction must be given a chance to recover and rebuild their lives. That is their basic human right. Unless the Government changes its policy, the killing will continue and we'll have many more destitute widows and orphans. There must be another way to deal with the drug menace. Hope springs eternal. The people deserve better.

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*Columban Fr John Keenan has worked in the Philippines for many decades.*



# Poppies and pain

## The '12-Step Programme' in Myanmar

*Drugs have wrought havoc in Kachin State. Despite over 50 years of ongoing warfare for independence from Myanmar, more Kachin people have died from drug-related problems than from the armed conflict.*

*Columban Sr Mary Ita O'Brien explains how the Diocese of Myitkyina is addressing addiction through the 12-Step Programme.*

*K*achin State is the northernmost state of Myanmar. It is a land of beautiful mountain ranges where the rivers Malika and Maika are born and together form the world-famous Irrawaddy River.

Bordering China, it is home to around 1.2 million people including migrant workers who work in the gold and jade mines. It is rich in resources such as timber from tropical forests that produce teak and other valuable timber. Resource rich Kachin State produces sugar cane, rice, gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, amber, jade crystal and coal.

In the rural parts of Kachin State, small-scale poppy production occurs. The use of opium for medicinal and recreational purposes has a long tradition. However, in the 1970s the cultivation of opium increased as more people began to 'use' it. As demand grew, the sale of opium became more lucrative and slowly poppies replaced other crops.

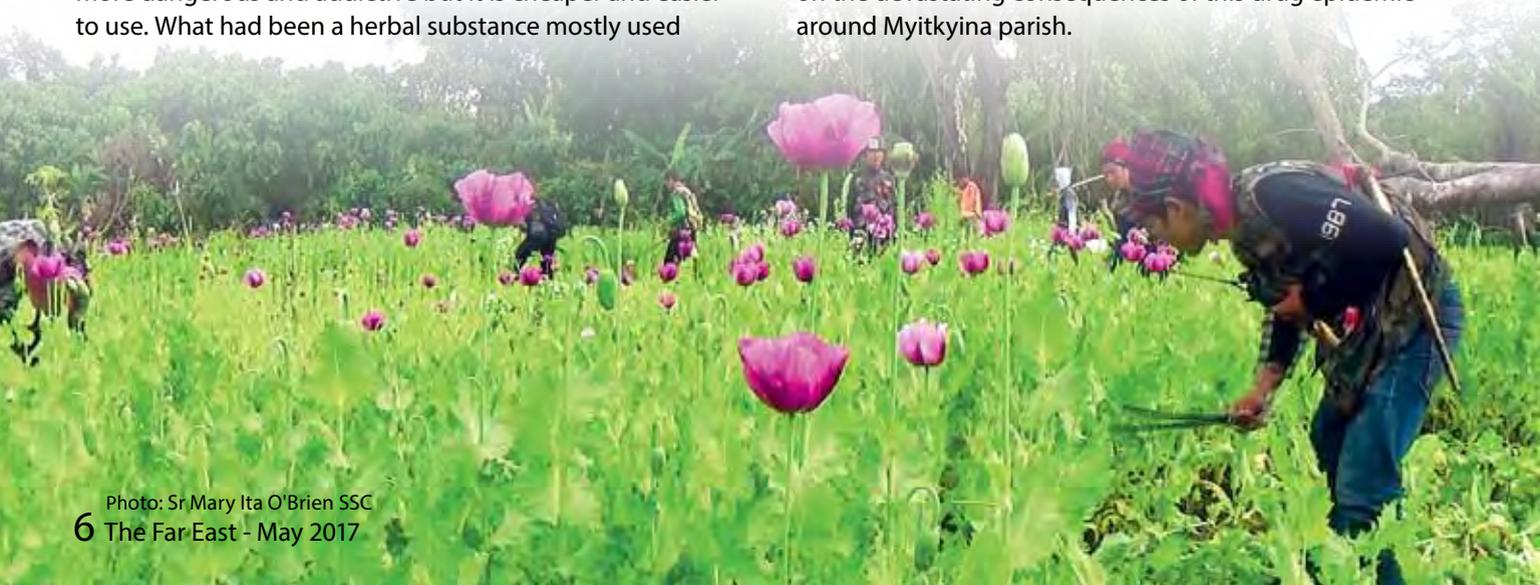
Heroin, the processed form of opium, replaced the traditional raw black opium. The injected form of heroin is more dangerous and addictive but it is cheaper and easier to use. What had been a herbal substance mostly used

by adult males was now available to young people and women.

Later yaba/yama - an amphetamine-type stimulant - was developed and because it was affordable and available it was popular with students, migrant workers, field labourers and those involved in human trafficking.

There is a heroin epidemic today in Kachin State especially among young people and the consequences are devastating for families, local villages and towns. Injecting heroin is one of the main causes of the spread of HIV. More Kachin people have died from drug-related problems than from armed conflict as the number of users has increased radically over the years since the most recent outbreak of the civil war in 2011.

Beginning in 2009, the Programme for the Chemically Dependent (PCD) was spearheaded by Fr Leo Gopal, Peter Nlam Hkun Awng and myself. It was encouraged by the Bishop of Myitkyina, Francis Daw Tang. Originally the team leader, Hkun Awng, trained staff to carry out research on the devastating consequences of this drug epidemic around Myitkyina parish.





In response to the terrible findings, intensive awareness programmes were undertaken in the diocese. As the situation deteriorated, we realised that an effective treatment centre was needed and our staff needed professional training, experience and preparation for running the '12-Step Programme'.

By 2014 our staff had undergone the necessary training and were back in Myitkyina ready to begin. At the same time, the Kachin state anti-drugs programme was launched in every village and town. In collaboration with the diocesan anti-drugs committee, the PCD staff launched their first programme at the Rebirth Rehabilitation Centre, which opened in 2015 in Myitkyina Diocese. It caters for those who are chemically dependent and offers the '12-Step Programme'. The need is great but only a limited number can be facilitated on each programme. The '12-Step Programme' is new in Myanmar and few understand the process.

Recently I met two men in Yangon who had completed the programme in other countries. They run AA style meetings twice a week for a group of five or six people and are ready to help us develop the Myitkyina programme. To date, two programmes have been completed in Myitkyina and we are working on a follow-up. We have a very committed staff in the centre who are trying their best to plough new furrows in promoting human dignity through compassionate and more effective treatment of the most vulnerable victims of this 'killer' epidemic.

## A personal story...

*"I am 28 years old, the second youngest of seven children in a close family. After graduating from high school in 2005, I went to college. I made new friends there and we were active in our Catholic Church youth group. I wasn't overly religious but I*

*went to Mass every Sunday and prayed at home in my own family. During my second year, I realised it was very difficult for my family to pay all the expenses so I dropped out of college. I thought if I worked for a year I could earn money and then return to my studies the following year. I went to work in a logging company and there I learned about drugs.*

*"At the logging company, I worked all night. As the days passed I felt very tired. I found my colleagues were very energetic and active. So I asked them how they had so much energy working all night every night. They suggested I take some drugs as they would give me plenty of energy. I did and it felt very good. So I took either opium or yaba every night when I went to work. After six months, the logging company went out of business. There was no work and I had become a drug addict.*

*"When I returned to my hometown, it was difficult to get yaba. So I began to use heroin which was easily available and not expensive. From the day I started heroin I had a lot of problems and hardships in my daily life. I needed money all the time. I had problems with my family because I was asking them for money. I felt very sad, stupid and wrong. At night I cried a lot when I was alone.*

***"An episode with the drugs squad, which could have resulted in 17 years in jail, made me turn to God. After this incident I really wanted to change. I needed help but my family didn't believe me. I prayed to God to help me. A friend introduced me to a rehabilitation centre not far from my village. There I got the courage to change. During rehabilitation, I realised I needed a greater power than myself in my life; now I know I depend on God each day. I am a recovering addict re-establishing relationships with my family and neighbours. But it is not easy."***

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Columban Sr Mary Ita O'Brien SSC from Limerick, Ireland, has been in Myanmar since 2003.



A woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is holding a large white sign high above her head. The sign has the words "WE ALL ARE MUSLIMS" written on it in purple and red marker. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, there are other people, including a man in a blue shirt and a man in a blue uniform, and palm trees under a clear sky.

WE ALL  
ARE  
MUSLIMS

# Countering Islamophobia

*Columban Fr Patrick McInerney is the Director of the Columban Mission Institute in Sydney and its Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations. He shares with us ways to counter Islamophobia.*

In recent years there has been a sharp rise in Islamophobia, an irrational fear of Islam and Muslims. This fear is heightened by sensationalist reporting of violent, criminal events carried out by a tiny and unrepresentative group of Muslims acting contrary to explicit texts of the Holy Quran and established Islamic principles. It is further heightened by an almost exclusive focus on these acts while ignoring the vastly more frequent acts of political, racist, sectarian and ethnic violence committed by others. It is spread by populist politicians seeking electoral advantage at the expense of vulnerable, targeted groups. It flourishes where ignorance, stereotypes and prejudice abound.

In this toxic environment, what can we do to counter Islamophobia? How can we support Muslims? How can we promote a just and harmonious society where all citizens are given due respect?

## Fact check

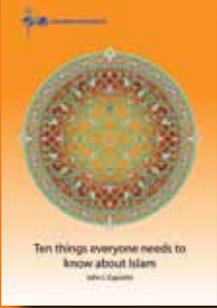
When you hear or read something, do not take it at face value. There are too many "fake news" and "alternative facts" being disseminated through media and gossip. Just because something is said or printed repeatedly it is not necessarily true. Do a fact check.

## Mind your language

Do not use expressions such as "Islamic terrorism" or "Muslim terrorist", because they are oxymorons - a contradiction in terms - are offensive to Muslims and spread a false impression of Islam.

## Inform yourself

Make an effort to learn the basics of Islam from a reliable source. Do not rely solely on the newspapers, the TV, the internet or public discourse. Read a published book by a reputable scholar. We recommend 'Ten things everyone needs to know about Islam' Booklet by Professor John Esposito as an authoritative, accessible and attractive account of the basics of Islam. **See details below.**



Ten things everyone needs to know about Islam

By John L Esposito

**\$8.80 each**  
*inc. GST & postage*

The 36 page A5 booklet is beautifully illustrated and answers the most commonly-asked questions about Islam.

It dispels the stereotypes and misrepresentation that too often prevail in the secular press.

Available for purchase  
ONLINE:  
[www.columban.org.au](http://www.columban.org.au)  
Ph: 03 9375 9475

## Meet a Muslim

The best way to learn about Islam is to meet a Muslim. When you meet face-to-face, when Islam is not just a media-generated amalgam of seemingly strange beliefs and practices, the proverbial "other", but has a name - Abidah, Fatima, Maha, Ibrahim, Ahmed, Muhammad - and a face, is someone you recognize as your "brother" and "sister", then the fears, stereotypes and prejudices simply fall away.

## Challenge stereotypes

When you hear racist, Islamophobic comments, whether it be around the water fountain at work, at the restaurant when dining out with friends, or around the kitchen table at home, challenge them: "that is not what I read ...", "that is not what I heard from ...". You may lose some friends in the process, but if they prefer ignorance and bigotry to truth and justice, they aren't worthy of your friendship anyway.

## Respect diversity

Avoid putting people into boxes. Avoid labels. Allow people to be themselves. There is no such thing as "the Muslim community". There are Muslim "communities", which are as linguistically, ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse in practice and customs as any other group.

## Reach out to others

When feeling under siege from the constant barrage of prejudice and overwhelmed by the seeming lack of any prospect of real change in society, resist the temptation to "circle the wagons". It is easy to stay at home, among your own, and bewail your fate, "they're all against us"; but it is hard and takes courage to keep on reaching out to others, building bridges not walls, promoting relations, working for the common good and building one society, but that is exactly what our religions challenge us to do, repeatedly, for as long as it takes.

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



*...but it is hard and takes courage to keep on reaching out to others, building bridges not walls, promoting relations...*



# Moments in history

FR RAY SCANLON

## Preparing for the Columban Centenary 2018

I recently had the joy of attending the ordinations of two Korean Columbans in their home dioceses in South Korea.

The first ordination was that of Fr Antonio Seok who was ordained by Archbishop Thaddeus Cho in the Cathedral Church of the Archdiocese of Daegu, a venue of historical significance in the Columban story in Korea. Daegu is where the first group of Columban missionaries arrived in 1933. The group consisted of eight priests from Ireland, one from the USA and one Australian. They were welcomed, provided with accommodation and introduced to the language and customs of Korea by the French bishop, Bishop Florian Demange, and the French priests of the Paris Foreign Mission Society.

So it was this thought that was on my mind as I processed into the Cathedral along with the archbishop, many priests of the diocese and a number of my fellow Columbans. That pioneer group would have visited and prayed and offered Mass in this same Cathedral 84 years ago. ***I imagined them looking down from above, joyful in appreciation of this ordination and the growth of our mission society in Korea since their arrival.***

On the following day, Fr Antonio Seok offered his first Mass in the presence of his home parish community in a church occupying the basement of one of the large apartment buildings of modern-day Daegu.

One week later I travelled to the city of Gwangju for the ordination of Fr Andrew Ryu in the magnificent parish

church of Yeomjudong. Once more I was conscious of Columban history as this province of Chollanamdo was the area entrusted to that first group of Columbans after they completed their training in Daegu. Under their leadership it would become the diocese of Gwangju.

The ordaining bishop this time was Bishop Simon Ok who was joined in the sanctuary by Emeritus Archbishop Victorinus Kim, who, despite his advanced age, made every effort to be present for the first man from the diocese founded by the Columbans to be ordained a Columban. Again I was thinking of the many missionaries from Ireland, USA, Australia and New Zealand who had laboured in this diocese for many years in anticipation of this new day.

One further fitting element was the venue for Fr Andrew Ryu's first Mass. It was the parish church of Pangnimdong, a parish founded by Columban Father Peter Tierney in 1967 and served by several other Columban Fathers since.

Fr Seok and Fr Ryu are the 14th and 15th Korean Columban priests. In preparation for priesthood they studied first at Sogang University in Seoul and later at Atenao University in Manila. They also spent two years experiencing missionary life and learning Chinese language in Taiwan and it is to Taiwan that they will head as priests to engage in mission there after some months of pastoral ministry in Korea. We wish Frs Seok and Ryu many years of joyful and fruitful evangelization as Columban missionaries.

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*Columban Fr Ray Scanlon resides at the Columban Mission House in Essendon, Australia.*



KOREA



AUSTRALIA



*Columbans in Korea in 1933 alongside Bishop Demange of Daegu.*



*Columban Frs Andrew Ryu (left) and Antonio Seok (right).*





# God's work

SR DAMIEN ROONEY

## Preparing for the Columban Centenary 2018

*Sr Damien Rooney passed away in St Columban's Nursing Home in Ireland on December 29, 2016. She was the oldest Columban Sister. She shared some of her memories of life before she became a nun and meeting Bishop Edward Galvin in China.*

*Sr Damien spent most of her missionary life in China and then in Hong Kong. Over the years she held various positions of authority, including Matron of Ruttonjee TB Sanatorium and Superior of the community.*

*She had a wide circle of friends, especially Chinese, with whom she kept in touch. She prayed unceasingly for the missions.*

*"I went to China because we used to get *The Far East* magazine. I was the eldest of six children - four girls and then two boys. We grew up between Roscommon town and Castlerea in County Roscommon in the west of Ireland.*

*"I read about China in the magazine and decided this is where I would like to end up. I wrote to the Columban Sisters and I was invited to meet the person in charge of vocations in Dublin when I was 17.*

*"I had a boyfriend, and would you believe it, he helped in my vocation. His name was PJ. My mother would ask me*

*in the evening to get two cans of water from the pump. PJ would offer to come with me. 'I'll go up with Molly and I'll help to carry the cans of water.' My mother didn't refuse."*

*One day he said to me, 'Will you marry me?' I responded, 'If you'd asked me last year maybe I would have, but this year there is somebody...' And he asked me, 'Who is the fellow?' and I told him, 'Jesus Christ.' He replied, 'Not another!' A previous girl in his life had entered the Presentation Sisters in Galway. She only died a few years ago."*

*"The day I entered, October 1, 1940, PJ came to see me that morning to say goodbye. He was a true blue. He did get*

Photos: Missionary Society of St Columban



married to a very nice lady six years after I entered. They had no family and he died at 45 from kidney trouble. He was such a good fellow. He is certainly in heaven.

"It was very hard leaving my father and my mother – very hard. The only thing about it is that God was in it. They told me, 'If this is what you choose, we're all for it'. We said goodbye and we thought we would never meet again.

"After I entered and did my postulancy, I was told to do nursing, which took three years, because I was going to China after I was professed. Mother Mary Patrick was our Superior General."

"We travelled to China on an aircraft carrier. It was after the Second World War and there was nothing else available. We left from England. It was hard going and took a month to get there. We went out to China and we thought we would never see home again.

"In 1946, I was appointed to work in Hanyang city. Bishop Edward Galvin was there. He was the first bishop of Hanyang and co-founder of the Columban Fathers. Bishop Galvin was very gentle and very nice. He would come over to the Sisters' home just across the road to tell us whatever news there was. We liked him very much. He was a very good holy man."

"Stationed with Bishop Galvin was Fr Dan Fitzgerald. He was always the perfect priest – always. He too was a very good man and he loved Jesus Christ. He was the same his whole 100 years until the day God took him (9 August 2016). He is above in heaven now. He was a priest to the day he died.

**"Our life in China was tough, in a way it was much tougher than now. But we had a vocation.** I was working in a hospital the Columbans were setting up which dealt with maternity matters as well as general health. It was hard going but you were doing it for a purpose – you were doing it for God with other Sisters who were of like mind.

"Learning the Chinese language was a necessity. You had to know the language. It is a difficult language but we did our best and learnt enough of it to carry on in our daily life. Some of our Sisters are excellent at Chinese.

"Bishop Galvin was a great man and was looked up to by the people as well as by the missionaries. He was out there 40 years and in the end he was expelled. We all had to leave. The Communists had Bishop Galvin imprisoned there night, noon and morning.



*Columban Sr Damien Rooney working on mission over the years.*

"After the expulsions from China we went to Hong Kong. I was based at the TB Sanatorium for 10 years looking after the patients and then I came home for a holiday for a few weeks and I got to see my family. It was lovely."

"I was in Hong Kong until 1989. Then I was sent to Birmingham in the UK to help in the formation of our young Sisters. While there, I used to visit the men in Winston Green Prison every week, a ministry I loved. I have been back in Ireland since about 2006."

"This is my mission now. I am 95 now. Life now is so different. But when you look back on the whole thing, it is one continuous line. God was in the whole thing. I believe in religious life absolutely – it is God's work. I just loved it and the God who directs us."

On the death of Fr Dan Fitzgerald, Columban Fathers Regional Director in Ireland, Fr Pat Raleigh wrote:

*"It was very fitting that his lifelong friend of 70 years, Sr Damien Rooney was present for his Funeral Mass. During the Mass I presented Sr Damien with a Miraculous Medal and chain that Dan very much cherished."*

# Pray for Columban Sr Kathleen Melia

FR VINCENT BUSCH

*O*n March 1, 2017, Columban Sr Kathleen Melia was assaulted around 9:00pm just outside her home in the mountain town of Midsalip, which is located on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao.

She had gone outside to close the wooden louvers that covered the windows. When she opened the door to go out, she was attacked by a masked man who applied a choke hold on her neck. Sr Kathleen managed to release his grip by gouging his eyes. She shouted for help. Her assailant hit her repeatedly in the face and the chest area.

In the course of her attack, Sr Kathleen fell backwards and broke her leg between her right knee and thigh. Neighbours heard her shouts, came to her aid and contacted the police. In the course of the attack the assailant made no attempt to enter the house or to steal anything from Sr Kathleen. His sole purpose seemed to attack Sr Kathleen. When neighbours came the man ran away.

Sr Kathleen was taken to the clinic in Midsalip which has no medical facilities. From there she was taken by ambulance on a painful 90km ride to the nearby city of Ozamiz. She arrived after midnight on March 2 and was admitted to Medina Hospital. In the course of her medical examination it was determined that Sr Kathleen needed a blood transfusion to increase her hemoglobin count.

Meanwhile, Columban Srs Sofia Natama, Teresita Bernad and Cecelia Cuizon, who live and work in Ozamiz, were concerned about getting

Sr Kathleen safely to Manila where she could get proper care for her broken leg. Sr Kathleen has brittle bones and had bone repair surgery years ago in Manila.

Before Sr Kathleen could safely travel she needed a blood transfusion, but before that could happen the Sisters needed to find donors with Sr Kathleen's B-Negative blood type. This blood type is rare in the Philippines where nearly everyone possesses positive blood types.

The Sisters spread the news that they needed B- blood. After four days of searching Columban Fr Paul Glynn found a seminarian in Cagayan de Oro, Dominador Amoncio, with B- blood. Dominador was rushed to Ozamiz in the company of Columban Lay Missionaries Irma Cantago and Auring Luceno. His blood was tested and deemed ok for use. After the long transfusion, Sr Kathleen made a slow 31-hour boat journey to Manila where she was taken by ambulance to Cardinal Santos Hospital.

On March 14, Sr Kathleen's leg fracture was surgically repaired. Due to complications from a prior surgery on the leg, Sr Kathleen will not be able to put weight on her repaired leg for three months. She will need to use a walker until the leg and bone have healed and strengthened.

Sr Kathleen remains calmly involved in her recovery. While in Ozamiz she had many visitors from the Subanen indigenous community, who have known and worked with her for decades, as well as visitors she knows from Ozamiz.

I visited Sr Kathleen every day and on Sunday, March 5, celebrated Mass with her in the Ozamiz hospital with the Columban Sisters. On the morning of March 15, Sr Kathleen had her first therapy session in which she managed to sit on the side of her hospital bed. Sr Kathleen's calm resolve during her ordeal and the efforts of the Subanen people and Columban Sisters have aided substantially and continue to aid her recovery.

We humbly ask for your prayers for Sr Kathleen as she recovers from the attack.

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*Columban Fr Vincent Busch provided this update about Sr Kathleen. Fr Vincent Busch has been a missionary in the Philippines since 1974.*

“

*She shouted for help. Her assailant hit her repeatedly in the face and the chest area.*

*In the course of her attack, Sr Kathleen fell backwards and broke her leg between her right knee and thigh.*



PHILIPPINES

*Columban Sr Kathleen  
Melia working amongst  
the people of the  
Philippines.*





# 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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## *"Repent to save the planet" - The Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar, Cardinal Bo, urges an Ecological Conversion*

*At the Conference of Religious Women of Asia and Oceania, recently held in Yangon, Myanmar, the Archbishop of Yangon, Cardinal Charles Bo, addressed the religious women with these words.*

*"Today we are faced with an environmental holocaust. It is a very delicate moment. Pope Francis raised his voice against this impending disaster talking about modern sins, 'ecological sins', made individually and collectively by humans who destroy Mother Earth.*

*"Greed has sparked an ecological terrorism against Mother Earth. Climate change is real and the planet Earth overheats, causing thousands of 'environmental refugees'. Climate change is an atomic bomb waiting to explode. We are on the threshold of an ecological apocalypse. This ecological apocalypse is the result of an ecological sin against God's creation.*

*"It is urgent to strengthen the prophetic thrust, making oneself a missionary of mercy to promote ecological justice. The two documents of the Pope: *Laudato Si'* and *Misericordiae Vultus*, are our reference points. We must talk about global ecological conversion.*

*"Only one percent of the population, the rich, owns 50% of the wealth in the world: From here derives environmental injustice and ecological injustice. Greenhouse gases that increase global warming are emitted by rich countries. The United States, with a population of about six percent of the world, produce 40% of greenhouse gases. Who is dying? The poor. Poor countries are the most vulnerable to global warming. Cyclones, earthquakes and floods create thousands of victims of natural disasters.*

*This is ecological terrorism. The powerful of this world decide who should live or die. Economic and ecological terrorists are unleashed against the poor.*

*"We need an integrated approach in the fight against poverty and to protect nature. Ecological crisis is a moral crisis. It is an existential crisis. Nature is mutilated for economic greed. Humanity has broken the pact with nature and this is why it is a profoundly moral issue- an ecological original sin that needs an ecological conversion and an ecological evangelization".*

The Archbishop concludes: *"Repent, God's creation is in danger, change your life to save the planet".*

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*Agenzia Fides - February 27, 2017*

*Photo: kwest19/Bigstock.com*



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## **Mission Intention for May**

That Christians in Africa, in imitation of the Merciful Jesus, may give prophetic witness to reconciliation, justice, and peace.



# From the Director

## Never give up, never give in

Easter is never over because it is the foundation of our Christian faith. The knowledge that the life of the Risen Christ lives in us is a cause for rejoicing and a defence against the misfortunes that befall us.

There is a deep conviction in all of us that bad things should not happen to us if we are loyal and true to Jesus Christ. But unfortunate events do occur in our lives over which we have no control. They can shatter our faith in God because we think it is not fair of God to make us suffer when we have been good! We have been fair with God who in turn should be fair with us. But our lives do not always work out that way.

For example, both Jesus and Mary, his mother, suffered a great deal. The Gospels tell us that Jesus felt abandoned by his Father during his passion in the garden and again on the Cross. During the crucifixion he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). That cry from the heart sounds like spiritual desolation.

Mary stood at the foot of the Cross while her Son Jesus died. Her sense of loss must have been profound, not only because she was losing her Son but also for the way in which he died, crucified on a Cross. Then when He rose from the dead with a new life her encounter with him alive must have been joyful. We have no record of it in the gospel but I believe she must have met her risen Son. How incredible!

With the resurrection Christ's new life lives in us through our baptism. He is with us and He says to us, "I am with you". In the tough times when we feel the absence of God, we have to remember that Jesus knew hard times himself. We have to hold onto this truth that He knows what we go through and is with us.

*There is a deep conviction in all of us that bad things should not happen to us if we are loyal and true to Jesus Christ.*

One of the founders of the Missionary Society of St Columban, Bishop Edward Galvin, must have also felt a sense of abandonment in 1952 when he was ordered to leave Hanyang, China after 40 years as a missionary there. All those years of work lay in ruins behind him. His dreams were in the dust. He had lost everything but not his relationship with God who had sparked the vision of mission in China.

Bishop Galvin was an outstanding man of faith, but I would also like to remember people I have met who are people of deep faith who trust in God, never giving up nor giving in.

*In the tough times when we feel the absence of God, we have to remember that Jesus knew hard times himself. We have to hold onto this truth that He knows what we go through and is with us.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr Gary Walker  
director@columban.org.au



# Devastating floods in Peru

ELLEN TEAGUE

*During the month of March, 2017, Peru suffered unprecedented flooding. This was caused by exceptionally warm water in the Pacific Ocean which led to torrential rain along the South American west coast. At the height of the floods at the end of March, several Columbans working in Peru sent in the following report.*

*T*he floods in Peru are flash floods. With the lashing downpours seen in recent weeks, dry river beds have become torrential rivers of water mixed with soil and rocks and whatever else they bring with it.

Three of the Dioceses in which Columbans work have been affected: Carabayllo, Chosica and Chimbote. Columban Fr Kevin McDonagh who works in Samanco, in Chimbote, is cut off from the outside world. The population here is without clean water. The situation is getting precarious for the people in and around this fishing and agricultural town and indeed the whole Chimbote area in the north of the country.

Everywhere the flooding with muddy water has caused havoc with 100,000 houses destroyed or unusable, so far the death toll is 75 in accidents related to the disaster. Many of the communities where our local Peruvian lay missionaries have ministered and accompanied people over the past 15 years are badly hit. Jimbe and the higher districts leading to the Andes, where an international group, including two Fijian Columban Lay Missionaries, has been working, are still cut off due to landslides.

Columban Fr Ed O'Connell reports that on Sunday his parish in Lima took up collections, *'taking in three times the usual offering, and clothes, clean water and food stocks to be taken later in the week to affected areas'*. He added that teams of youth from the 12 communities in the parish are preparing to visit disrupted communities, coordinating with the parishes there, to help clean up or do preventative work in building up dams, as the emergency is not over yet.

Photo: AAP image/AP Photo/Martin Mejia



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*Even in the midst of all the suffering, we are seeing Peru and Peruvians at their very best. It is inspiring and heart-breaking all at once.*

Columban Fr Bernard Lane reports that schools, universities and other institutes have been closed for the time being. He reflects: *'The social-political-economic cost will be high, plus there is the whole question of climate-change which is ignored by so many still. Also there is the irresponsibility of so many authorities in terms of prevention and preparation for such natural disasters. Flooding and landslides occur most years but the extent of this current natural phenomenon is hard to believe ... In all my 32 years in Peru, this is the most devastating disaster we have seen.'*

It is still raining in the mountains and further flooding is expected well into April. The challenges ahead are enormous in terms of getting through the disaster and reconstruction. There is little bottled water available, but fortunately there is water flowing again in Lima though with low pressure.

Fr Bernard Lane reflects: *'It is worrying to think of so many people without clean water especially in the provincial areas. The question is how much more can the people take. Their response and solidarity so far has been nothing short of heroic.'*

*Even in the midst of all the suffering, we are seeing Peru and Peruvians at their very best. It is inspiring and heart-breaking all at once. Please, we are asking for prayers and positive thoughts in solidarity with the people of Peru in these times of suffering, especially those most directly affected.'*

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Ellen Teague is the Media Coordinator for the Columbans in Britain.

# Chiangmai - where Catholics are increasing

FR ALO CONNAUGHTON

*Columban Fr Alo Connaughton interviews Bishop Francis Vira Arpondratana of Chiangmai in Thailand about the small but growing Christian population there.*

**Q:** Could you give a rough idea of the terrain and the people in your diocese.

**A:** Chiangmai is the most northerly of the 10 dioceses of Thailand. It is bordered by Myanmar and Laos and a drive of less than an hour will take you into China. About 90% of the people belong to six big ethnic groups. In the past many of them migrated from Yunnan in China. It is a mountainous area and in the years gone by one of the main activities was growing poppies for the opium trade. In more recent times, big efforts were made to change this and a lot of the people now grow conventional crops like rice, tea, coffee, fruit and flowers.

**Q:** You mentioned six large groups; what are they?

**A:** The largest group, the Karens make up about 60% of the population. These are close 'relatives' of the Karens across the border in Myanmar (Burma). The Akha, with 20% of the population are the next biggest group. The others are the Lahu, Lisu, Yao and Hmong. All the groups are quite different in language, culture and character. For example, the Karen people tend to be reserved, even shy, whereas the Hmong who make up 5% of the population are the opposite. They are extrovert and very successful business people.



## Q: What about the religion of the people?

**A:** About 92% of Thailand's 68 million people are Buddhist and around 4% are Muslim. The Christian population of the country is less than 1%. In the north of Thailand the people who live in the mountains are generally animists. They are close to nature, they have a strong belief in spirits and in many ways this leaves them more open to Christianity.

## Q: When did Christianity come to Thailand?

**A:** The first Catholic missionaries came with the Portuguese in the 1500s. The Protestants were the first to go to Chiangmai and, in fact, Catholics were unable to work there for a long time because of hostility from them. The Paris Foreign Missionaries came to Chiangmai in the 1930s and later, the Bettaram Congregation. Today there is a good ecumenical spirit among the Christians.

## Q: In many parts of the world the number participating in the Catholic Church is declining – how about Chiangmai?

**A:** Quite the contrary; each year we have had around 1,700 adult baptisms and in fact at the moment we have around 16,000 catechumens, that is adults who are preparing for Baptism in the Catholic Church.

## Q: What attracts people to the Church?

**A:** The first thing you have to take into account is the action of the Holy Spirit. But there are other factors. For example, our diocese does a lot for the promotion of education for both Catholics and non-Catholics. For people who live in isolated villages this is important. Many parishes have boarding facilities for children and youth from the mountains who want to attend schools. **Often the Catholic communities are seen as more tolerant and forgiving than the traditional religions.**

## Q: What is the state of personnel in the diocese?

**A:** We have 95 priests, 160 Sisters and 11 religious brothers and a team of lay catechists. We have 48 parishes but some of those parishes have up to 50 of what we call stations. These are chapels or places where the local community meet for Mass and they can be 70km or more from the parish centre. Many of these stations are in mountainous areas and involve a lot of walking. In all, we have 850 stations and 550 of these are chapels. Obviously, with so many small communities the priest can't visit very often. Lay leadership is important. We have 180 catechists but 70% don't have much preparation.

## Q: How about youth participation?

**A:** We have a lot of youth involvement. For example at the last event in Chiangmai we had around 1,000 young people present. Big annual events can bring as many as 6,000 together. One reason of course is that in the rural villages the families still have 4-5 children and there isn't much competition for the attention of youth. In big cities like Bangkok the situation is very different.

## Q: If someone appeared with a magic wand to grant you three wishes what would they be?

**A:** I'll mention two. The first one would be to give better continuing religious formation to newly-baptised people. Priests are so stretched that they have little possibility of doing much more than attend to the basic services. A second wish would be to get sponsorship to finance the education and formation of a lot more lay leaders. Outsiders are often willing to offer money for buildings but less interested in the formation of people. We urgently need more lay leaders. Sometimes we get offers of help from outside but of course the ability to speak Thai language is absolutely necessary.

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*Columban Fr Alo Connaughton is a former editor of The Far East magazine in Ireland. Ordained in 1969, he is now involved in the formation of seminarians in Thailand and China.*



# The day I met Johnny Cash

FR BOBBY GILMORE

*Columban Fr Bobby Gilmore recalls the day he met Johnny Cash and his wife June Carter.*

One day when I was working in Montego Bay, Jamaica, I got a call from the bishop requesting that I go out and bless the foundation of a new hotel, the Ritz Carlton. He was invited to perform the ceremony but due to other engagements couldn't make it. Reluctantly, I set off not realizing that it was a formal occasion attended by all the great and the good of Jamaican life.

Arriving at the area in which the ceremony was to take place, I was ushered into a prominent position carrying my holy water in a plastic bottle and a stole. The organizer of the project, John Rollins, welcomed the Prime Minister, members of parliament, local politicians, businessmen

and women and other prominent names that included Johnny Cash and his wife June. They lived nearby and were supportive of projects in Montego Bay such as a foundation that cared for homeless children.

After the formalities were completed we were invited to a formal lunch. Again, there were speeches of support for the project and for the man, John Rollins, who was the main investor.

The area where the hotel was going to be built was an old plantation called Rose Hall. Rose Hall had an infamous resident during slave times by the name of Annie Palmer. Locals in the area claimed that she appears now and then.



*Arriving at the area in which the ceremony was to take place, I was ushered into a prominent position carrying my holy water in a plastic bottle and a stole.*

So, she is appropriately named The White Witch of Rose Hall. The golf course adjacent to the hotel is called The White Witch.

After the speeches Johnny Cash was asked to sing a song that he had written many years earlier titled, *Annie Palmer, the White Witch of Rose Hall*. He got up, took his guitar and with June belted out the song to a rousing reception. Sitting next to him and June at lunch I found they were great talkers. He talked about his trips to Ireland and

particularly the one to Mullingar that he had to cancel because of the death of Pope John XXIII.

Returning to Ireland I happened to meet a few people at a golf outing who worked at the Navan Carpets Company. In the course of conversations I asked if they had any big projects coming up. They replied that they were making the carpets for the Ritz Carlton in Montego Bay. Small world!

*Columban Fr Bobby Gilmore now lives and works in Ireland.*



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## Devastating floods in Peru

*During March, Peru suffered from torrential rain, mud slides and unprecedented flooding. According to Columban Fr Bernard Lane, "In all my 32 years in Peru, this is the most devastating disaster we have seen."*

**With your help**, Columbans working in Peru will be able to reach out to those most affected by this natural disaster. (See pages 18-19)



Photo: AAP image/AP Photo/Martin Mejia



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