

The Far East

COLUMBAN MISSION MAGAZINE

November/December 2017



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Spare a thought this
Christmas

Volunteering for the homeless.



ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

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The Far East

November/December 2017

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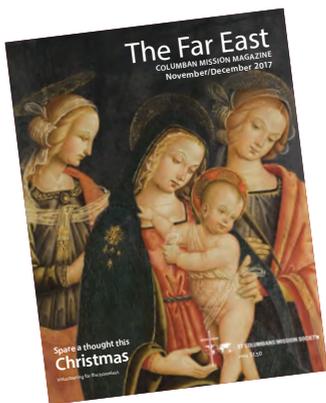


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The Madonna and Child with Two Female Saints, c.1500 (oil on panel), Master of the Cortona Tondo (fl.1500). (See story pages 22)

Photo: Private Collection/Bridgeman Images

From the Editor

Compiling the November/December issue of *The Far East* magazine set me thinking about the month of November when we remember and give thanks for those who have gone before us. The four occasions are *All Saints Day*, November 1, *All Souls Day*, November 2, *Remembrance Day*, November 11 and the Feast of our Patron, St Columban, November 23. In an address to a General Audience in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI referred to St Columban as 'The best known Irishman of the early Middle Ages'. You will read about him on pages 4 -5.

As we leave behind the sombre tone of November we move into Advent, which begins on the first Sunday of December. It is a time for waiting and preparing for the joyful celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas. In a reflection Columban Fr Tim Mulroy compares Advent to fishing, both involving preparation and waiting. Columban, Sr Abbie O'Sullivan gives us an insight into being homeless at Christmas.

For our Columban Centenary we list the names and images of Columban Fathers who have been Regional

Directors in Australia/New Zealand since 1920. There are 16 in total including our current Director Fr Gary Walker (as we go to press) and the incoming Director Fr Brian Vale. As one Columban wit said, "I see that this year on St Columban's Day it will be a question in Essendon of Vale Walker et Ave Vale!"

We record the final gathering of friendship and faith that was celebrated on September 23 to mark the closing of the *Columban Mission Institute* in Sydney.

In a moving article, Fr Brian Vale says 'Goodbye to the Harbour City', to the staff at Columban Mission Institute in Sydney and to his many friends there.

Suffering continues in Pakistan where some Christians are still being persecuted for their faith. Read about Asia Bibi, a Christian woman, wife and mother, who has been sentenced to death for blasphemy. We continue to pray for her release.

Building a village from the ground up gives a new beginning for 3,500 people who were left homeless after a catastrophic typhoon devastated Cagayan de Oro in Mindanao in 2011.

Columban Fr Paul Finlayson worked with other missionary congregations to bring about the construction of 550 houses and is involved in forming a new vibrant community.

The late Columban Fr Charlie Duster from the USA leaves the precious inheritance of his chalice and paten to Fr Pat Visanti who will be ordained on November 23. I met Fr Duster on several occasions and I can say that he was the epitome of kindness and generosity.

Reflecting on art: Take a glimpse at the professionally produced Art Guide to accompany the Columban Art Calendar. Our final article is a humorous account of Columban Fr Neil Magill's spill from a motorbike in Myanmar.

Wishing you a happy and blessed Christmas.

Janette Mentha
tfe@columban.org.au



“

... Columban left his island with 12 companions to engage in missionary work on the European Continent.



The best known Irishman of the early Middle Ages

St Columban's Feast Day November 23, 2017

Pope Benedict XVI addressed a General Audience in June 2008, with these words: I would like to speak about the holy Abbot Columban, the best known Irishman of the early Middle Ages. Since he worked as a monk, missionary and writer in various countries of Western Europe with good reason he can be called a "European" Saint.

Columban was born c. 543 in the Province of Leinster in southeast Ireland. He was educated at home by excellent tutors who introduced him to the study of liberal arts. He was then entrusted to the guidance of Abbot Sinell of the community of Cleenish in Northern Ireland, where he was able to deepen his study of Sacred Scripture.

At the age of about 20 he entered the monastery of Bangor, in the northeast of the island, whose abbot, Comgall, was a monk well known for his virtue and ascetic rigour. In full agreement with his abbot, Columban zealously practiced the severe discipline of the monastery, leading a life of prayer, asceticism (severe self-discipline) and study. While there, he was also ordained a priest. His life at Bangor and the Abbot's example influenced the conception of monasticism that developed in Columban over time and that he subsequently spread in the course of his life.

When he was approximately 50 years old, following the characteristically Irish ascetic ideal of the "peregrinatio pro Christo", namely, making oneself a pilgrim for the sake of Christ, Columban left his island with 12 companions to engage in missionary work on the European Continent. There the migration of people from the North and the East had caused whole areas, previously Christianised, to revert to paganism.

Around the year 590, the small group of missionaries landed on the Breton coast. Welcomed kindly by the King of the Franks of Austrasia (present day France) they were given the ancient Roman fortress of Annegray, totally ruined and abandoned and covered by forest.

Accustomed to a life of extreme hardship, in the span of a few months the monks managed to build the first hermitage on the ruins. Thus their re-evangelization began,

in the first place, through the witness of their lives. With the new cultivation of the land, they also began a new cultivation of souls. The fame of those foreign religious, living on prayer and great austerity, spread rapidly, attracting pilgrims and penitents. In particular, many young men asked to be accepted by the monastic community in order to live, like them, this exemplary life which was renewing the cultivation of the land and of souls.

It was not long before the foundation of a second monastery was required. It was built on the ruins of an ancient spa, Luxeuil. This monastery was to become the centre of the traditional Irish monastic and missionary outreach on the European Continent. A third monastery was erected at Fontaine.

Intransigent as he was in every moral matter, Columban then came into conflict with the royal house for having harshly reprimanded King Theuderic for his adulterous relations. This created a whole network of personal, religious and political intrigues which, in 610, culminated in a decree of expulsion banishing Columban and all the monks of Irish origin from Luxeuil and condemning them to exile. They were escorted to the sea and boarded a ship bound for Ireland. However, not far from shore the ship ran aground and the captain, who saw this as a sign from Heaven, abandoned the voyage and for fear of being cursed by God, brought the monks back to dry land. Instead of returning to Luxeuil, they decided to begin a new work of evangelization. Thus, they embarked on a Rhine boat and travelled up the river. They went to the region of Bregenz, near Lake Constance, to evangelize the Alemanni.

However, soon afterwards, Columban decided to cross the Alps with the majority of his disciples. In Italy the King of the Lombards allocated to him a plot of land in Bobbio, in the Trebbia Valley. There Columban founded a new monastery which was later to become a cultural centre on a par with the famous monastery of Monte Cassino. Here he came to the end of his days: he died on 23 November 615.

Spare a thought this Christmas

Columban Sr Abbie O'Sullivan writes about her voluntary work at the Capuchin Homeless centre in Dublin where everyone is welcome, specifically those who find no room at the inn.

Walking through Dublin city centre in the month of December one could easily fool oneself into thinking that this is a wonderland where any expectation can be fulfilled. The multi-coloured streetlights are blinking and flashing. The vendors are shouting their wares. The atmosphere is electric. But the thought strikes me, "In January, this will all have faded away."

Not too far away I arrive at my destination, the *Capuchin Homeless Centre* where I have been a volunteer for ten years. Outside the church, a large banner undulates in the fresh December breeze. It reads 'For us a Child is born'.

On this morning at the Centre, as on every other morning, about 300 homeless people of all ages, nationalities and religions are enjoying a little heat and a good wholesome breakfast. Everyone is here for the same reason – there is no room at the inn for poor, destitute people and at the Centre a hot breakfast is available. Every day, except Sundays and Christmas Day, about 350 homeless people come for breakfast.

Every day up to 500 homeless people come for a hot dinner. On Wednesdays, about 1,500 come for a bag of groceries. The queue begins around 6am. People come from the parks, the streets, shop doors, bus shelters or the hostels provided for the homeless. No one likes to stay too long in the hostels as they aren't safe. Four or five can be put in one room and often they are robbed there or fights break out. The parks or streets are chosen in preference.

At 3:30pm the Centre closes and those still there have to leave and look for a safe place for the night. Street sleepers are very vulnerable. Jimmy is an elderly man who has seen better times. I saw him one day wrapped in his over-sized overcoat, an old soiled rucksack thrown over his shoulder. His face was puckered and unshaven but that didn't hide the pain in his face or the tears in his tired eyes.

He told me the rucksack held his one possession – a folding-up tent. It was flimsy and I doubt it would have kept the wind or the rain out. He usually slept out in a park as he felt the streets were too dangerous. He told me that when he woke up there was a tear in his tent and his mobile phone – the one link he had with another human being – was

missing. Also gone was the €20 note he had hidden in the seam of the tent. He said, "Sister, I don't want anything from anyone. I'm just happy someone cares and was interested in my story. Thank you for listening."

These are the people who like Joseph and Mary on the first Christmas found no room at the inn. They are the poor, the maimed, the drug and alcohol addicts, the homeless whom society forgets about. They are the women of the streets, women who have been badly hurt and those whose children have been put in care but who may be pregnant again. They are those who fell on hard times and who just weren't able to pick themselves up again. In fact they are you and me except for the grace of God. There are around 150 people sitting at the tables or standing around. At one end is the Christmas Crib. One of the Capuchin friars comes to conduct a Christmas prayer service. As I look around I see tears on some faces. I see the look of remembrance on other faces as they recall happy days of childhood in the company of their family sitting by the fire in expectation of Christmas presents.

When the service comes to an end, one after the other, they make their way spontaneously to the Crib. Each one lifts the new-born infant and kisses it. It is a very poignant moment when those of us looking on realise that the first Christmas must have been a little like this scene. Jesus, Mary and Joseph were certainly homeless on that Holy Night. And we know that the shepherds from the hills were their first visitors. They had no beautiful presents to bring or beautiful scented clothes to wear.

May the blessings of the Christmas Season come to all of us and especially to those who have least among us. May the bells ring out and remind us when we look at the Crib that Christ is born in everyone's heart especially in those who feel excluded from society, those who are lonely, those who can't seem to make it in our sophisticated world. Spare a thought for them this Christmas and remember – *'There but for the grace of God go you or I'.*

Columban Sr Abbie O'Sullivan works in Dublin as a counsellor in a boy's secondary school and part-time in the Capuchin Day Centre for homeless people.



Sister, I don't want anything from anyone. I'm just happy someone cares and was interested in my story. Thank you for listening."



Advent and fishing: both require preparation

FR TIM MULROY



Each year, at the beginning of December, as those around him begin preparing their Christmas shopping list, Ben begins preparing his fishing gear. Then, as family members and friends make plans for Christmas parties, Ben heads off with a few close friends to spend a long weekend at a remote lakeside village. Last year, as this group of middle-aged men set out with the light-hearted spirits of school-boys, Ben turned to me with a big grin, *“It’s such a pity that you’re not coming with us on this Advent retreat.”*

A few weeks later, when I met Ben again at a New Year’s party, my first question to him was, *“So how did your Advent retreat go?”* I had expected a witty response, but instead two beers later he was still sharing his insights about the links between his fishing trip and Advent spirituality!

For Ben, no other experience can capture the spirit of the Advent season like a fishing expedition. A few days in a boat, with a rod and line, teaches him what it truly means to wait in joyful hope. While he engages in detailed planning and preparation, he can never predict the moment when he will make his first catch.

On some trips that joyful surprise happens within the first hour, but on other occasions he has to wait patiently for a day or more. Over the years he has learned to remain alert and vigilant for that moment when a fish nibbles the bait, the line becomes taut, and his heart pounds with excitement. For Ben, this practice of attentive waiting is similar to the spirit we nurture during the Advent season as we wait in joyful hope for the return of Christ in glory at an unexpected moment.

Part of our attentive waiting means becoming more attuned to the signs of God in the world around us, so that we can recognize Christ when he returns. Again, Ben thinks that there’s no better way to develop such an awareness than to go on a fishing trip. Before setting out he carefully studies the



... and the key to Advent is to enter into the mind of Christ so as to see the world from God's perspective."

weather patterns for several days. Throughout the trip, he constantly scans the sky and the horizon for subtle changes in the sun and in the clouds. He frequently notes the direction and strength of the wind, as well as the temperature of the air and water. After carefully weighing these various factors, he then propels his boat to that place where the fish are most likely to gather. Thanks to such careful attention to his natural surroundings, as well as to his comprehensive knowledge of the habits of various kinds of fish, Ben thinks that he can come close to entering into the mind of a fish! *"The key to fishing,"* he says *"is to learn to see the world from a fish's perspective ... and the key to Advent is to enter into the mind of Christ so as to see the world from God's perspective."*

At this point in our conversation I began to tease Ben, inquiring if it's him or the beer that's talking! At first he laughed heartily, but then reminded me that the first group of apostles – Peter, Andrew, James and John – who were chosen by Jesus at the outset of his public ministry, had been fishermen.

Furthermore, after his resurrection, Jesus returned to Lake Gennesaret to invite these same fishermen to become his messengers to the world. There is no doubt in Ben's mind that, when Christ returns in glory, those who will be ready to welcome him will be those who are vigilant in waiting, filled with a joyful hope, and attentive to the world around them. In short, people with the mind and heart of a fisherman.

This December I'm joining Ben and his companions at that remote lakeside village, knowing that I have a lot of Advent lessons to learn from them there.

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





100 Years of mission

Preparing for the Columban Centenary

The Missionary Society of St Columban will mark a very important milestone in 2018 when it commemorates 100 years of mission.

Events connected with this momentous anniversary will take place in 2017 and 2018. This commemorative year opens on St Columban's Day November 23, 2017 and concludes on St Columban's Day November 23, 2018.

Planned events

- Historical events published in The Far East from our archives as part of our recognition of all who have gone before us.
- Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral, East Melbourne, at 11:00am on June 24 followed by a gathering and display at the Cardinal Knox Centre.
- Public lectures at Australian Catholic University (ACU) on Mission Today and Tomorrow by Columban Frs Pat McInerney and Noel Connolly.
- A trip to China in October 2018 to commemorate 100 years since the Maynooth Mission to China was officially founded in 1918.

Regional Directors 1920 – 2017

Superior



1920 - 1924
Fr Edward Maguire



1924 - 1931
Fr Romuald Hayes



1932 - 1944
Fr Luke Mullany



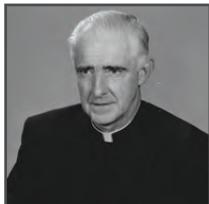
1945 - 1955
Fr James McGlynn



1955 - 1965
Fr Francis Chapman



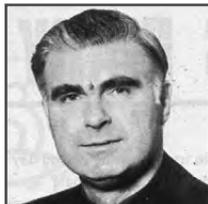
1965 - 1970
Fr Francis Hunter



1970 - 1976
Fr Charles O'Mahony



1976 - 1982
Fr Bernard Cleary



1982 - 1986
Fr Reginal Howard



1986 - 1990
Fr Michael Gormly



1990 - 1994
Fr William Moran



1994 - 2000
Fr Brian Gore



2000 - 2005
Fr Trevor Trotter



2005 - 2011
Fr Noel Connolly

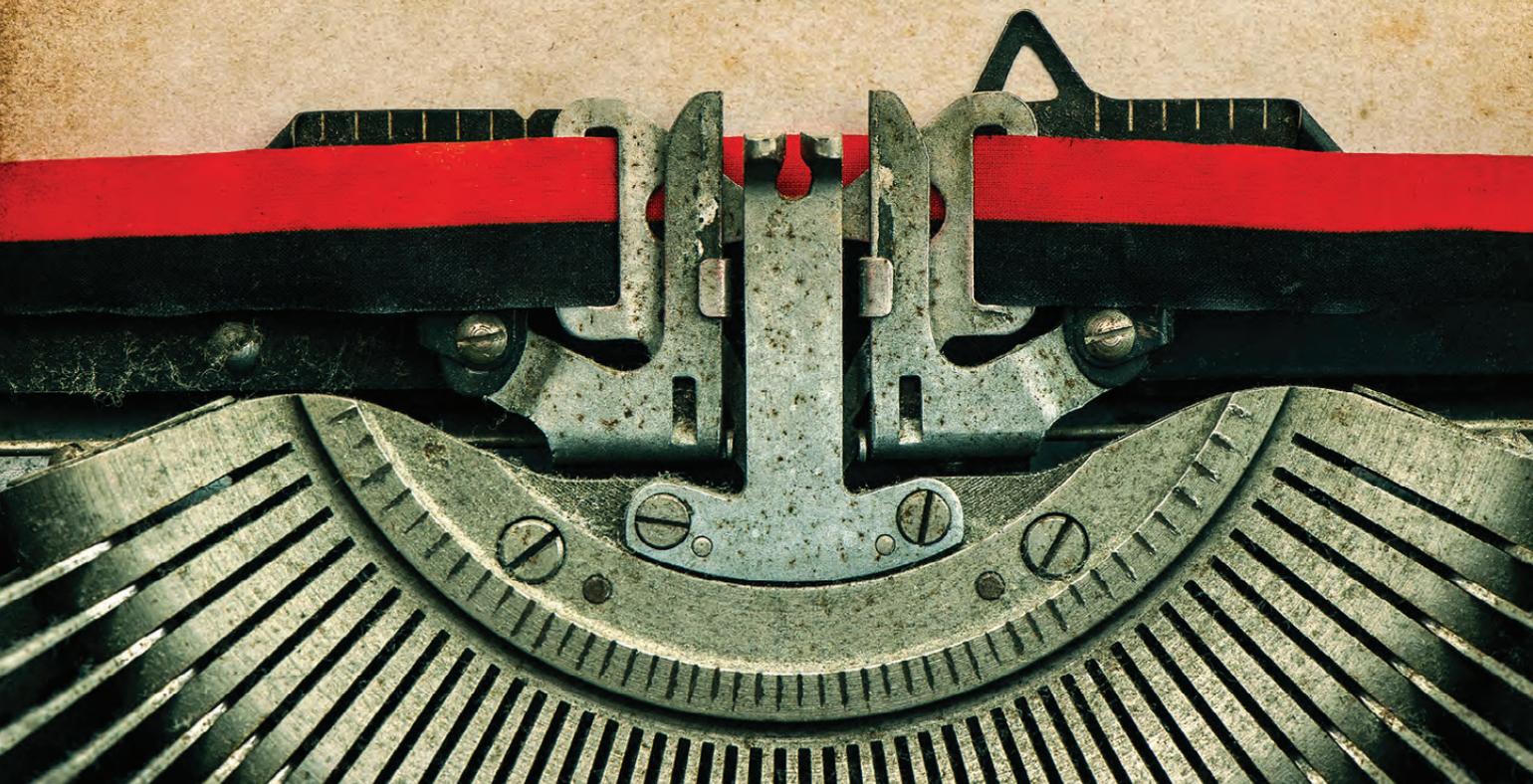


2011 - 2017
Fr Gary Walker



2017 - Current
Fr Brian Vale

TELL YOUR STORY



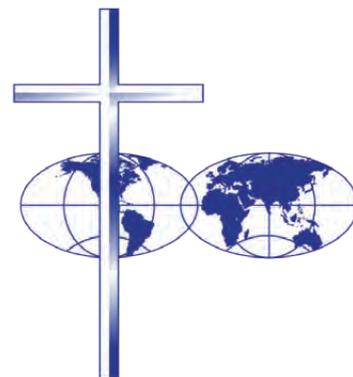
What is your Columban story?

We are keen to find out how you became connected or got to know the Columbans. Your stories are key to our past and our future. With your permission we would like to publish your Columban story in *The Far East* and on our Website. They can be published anonymously if that is your preference.

Example: In the June edition of the *Columban Mission Magazine*, in the USA, Cecilia Davison wrote the following:

"I first came across *The Far East* magazine quite a few years ago when a Columban priest came to our parish. He was so full of enthusiasm and energy that the papers on our lectern started flying and falling causing people to immediately warm to him. I find it refreshing to read *The Far East* articles, where hope and goodness of people so clearly shine through."

In 100 words or less send your Columban story and photo (optional) to:
Columban Mission Centre
P.O. Box 752
Niddrie VIC 3042 **OR**
E: tfe@columban.org.au





Lorraine Murphy (left), Srs Josapha Lergessner & Patricia Naughton (right) at the CMI Celebration, North Sydney.

Final gathering of friendship and faith

*F*riends, collaborators and staff of the Columban Mission Institute (CMI) came together in North Sydney on September 23, 2017 for the 'CMI Celebration' to mark the closing of the Institute in October 2017.

For many years CMI has contributed to mission in Sydney and beyond – in formation and education for mission, Christian-Muslim relations and interfaith relations in general and in Peace, Ecology and Justice.

The occasion was an opportunity to remember, give thanks and celebrate the achievements over many years of the CMI and the people who made them possible – benefactors, staff, students, collaborators, supporters, partners in various events and participants in various programs.

Throughout the evening a number of 'Storytellers' shared their memories and connections to CMI, from its forerunners, St Columban's College seminary and the missiology course at the Pacific Mission Institute (PMI), North Turramurra, to the present day mode of Centres focussed on missionary priorities.

A Mass of Thanksgiving was concelebrated by Columban Superior General Fr Kevin O'Neill and CMI Director Fr Patrick McInerney. The choir from St Vincent's Church, Ashfield, under the direction of Jenny Collins-White, led the singing.

In his concluding remarks at the end of the evening Fr Patrick McInerney said, "although CMI will close on October 10, this does not mean the end of mission.

The labours of the past have borne fruit so that many of our Columban concerns – the Vatican II and subsequent understandings of mission, of justice, of peace, of ecology – have been handed on and are now part of the regular life of the local churches. God's mission is being carried on by laity, by religious, by activists, in myriad ways, with migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, people of all faiths and none, in parishes, schools, hospitals, chaplaincies and secular organizations, in towns, cities and rural areas across Australia and beyond."

"As the Columban Mission Institute closes, some of our missionary projects are being handed on to others, the Culture of Peace Formation Program to Catholic Mission, and the Faith Ecology Network to be facilitated by Australian Catholic University (ACU). And Fr Peter O'Neill will bring his experience in Taiwan to his new role as the Columban Peace, Ecology and Justice Coordinator at the Columban Mission Centre in Essendon."

Fr Patrick also said "Columbans in Sydney will continue those other missionary works that do not depend on the Columban Mission Institute. For example, Fr Noel Connolly and I offering courses in mission studies at the Catholic Institute of Sydney and at the Broken Bay Institute; Fr Brian Vale and the Josephites facilitating intercultural courses for church personnel coming from overseas or returning from overseas. Fr Noel Connolly is already working part-time with Catholic Mission and for the 2020 Plenary Council.



In his concluding remarks at the end of the evening Fr Patrick McInerney said, "although CMI will close on 10 October, this does not mean the end of mission..."

Since Christian-Muslim relations continue to be a pressing issue for church and society, here in Australia and around the world, and since Columbans are in a privileged position to build on the friendships we have established over the past 20 years, we will continue the Christian-Muslim apostolate.

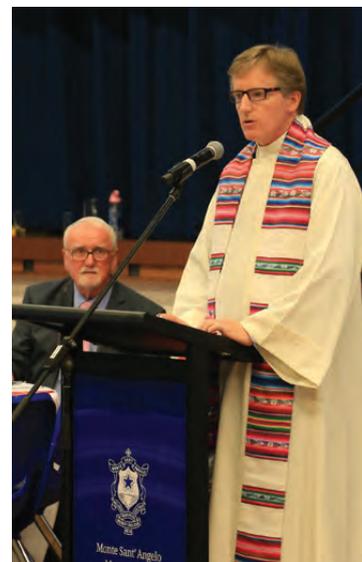
Other Columbans in Sydney will continue to contribute in various ways – through chaplaincies, service to the Chinese Catholic communities, Mass supplies, attending events, and supporting church and secular organizations that serve the common good."

The new address for the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations is:

C/- Institute for Mission
1-5 Marion Street
Blacktown NSW 2148
E: info.cccmr@columban.org.au



Vice Director
Anne Lanyon.



Columban Frs Trevor Trotter (left), Reg Howard, Noel Connolly, Jim Mulrone & Patrick McInerney (right) former Directors at CMI.



Goodbye to the Harbour City

FR BRIAN VALE

I have been a staff member of the *Columban Mission Institute, Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations* in Sydney for almost eight years. On November 23 of this year, I will take up the appointment of Regional Director for Australia/New Zealand in Melbourne. ***So the time has come for me to say goodbye to Sydney and to my ministry in this beautiful Harbour city.***

Reflecting on this ministry here in Sydney reminds me I have experienced many enriching moments of different encounters. Some I would call 'God-moments' such as when I sat at the back of mosques listening to the recital of prayers at Eid celebrations. I often

felt an inner sense of 'oneness' that, although I was praying my different prayer in my own tongue, I was one with my Muslim sisters and brothers, all praising the one God with reverence and love. They were more than moments of ritual for me as I often left with a lingering sense of being uplifted and encouraged with a sense of solidarity with them.

I remember having a similar sense of spiritual nourishment several years ago after an *Australian Catholic University* sponsored prayer breakfast for parliamentarians in an inner city hotel. Greeting a Muslim friend that morning at the conclusion of the recital of prayers from several faiths we first simply smiled then spoke of

how we had enjoyed the spiritual atmosphere we had shared. I have had similar experiences listening to the chanting of Jewish prayers at the different Shoah memorial services I attended, especially the annual one at St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney.

There have also been many 'people-moment' encounters. Often when I have explained what ministry I am involved in I have had the quick response: "*Oh, that's interesting!*" It has been an interesting journey.

I have spent many hours preparing for the annual *Abraham Conferences, Youth PoWR* celebrations, school and church talks. Making new friends among conference committee members and working alongside



them has been a gift, a mystery which continues to reveal itself with new insights into other faith understandings. I have been inspired by the example of many good people whose deep faith, generosity and broad vision for society has contributed so much to local communities, especially in the face of much suspicion, fear and even hate.

Being a bridge between members of my own faith community and Muslim communities has been a position of privilege, but it has not gotten easier and it often feels like the broader Catholic Church has been slowly drifting away from this important dimension of the Church's ministry. Breaking the Ramadan fast with

families at iftar meals sponsored by our friends at the *Affinity Intercultural Foundation* and enjoying their hospitality has also been one of the highlights. Once I brought a large group of foreign priests to attend a family iftar meal, which was the first time many of them had entered the home of a Muslim, even though they had Muslim neighbours in their own countries.

I am not sure how much broader my understanding of God has grown in recent years, but I know that it has been in a gradual state of flux, ever adjusting to brief tiny insights of how God pops up in my daily life. I am aware of the limits of my cultural/faith lens on life. I think I have developed

a more open approach and stretched the boundaries of my tent as they say. I look forward to sharing these experiences with new friends in Melbourne.

Columban Fr Brian Vale is the Regional Director for Australia/New Zealand.

Mission World

We ask your prayers: *The prayers of our readers are requested for the repose of the souls of friends and benefactors of the Missionary Society of St Columban who died recently and for the spiritual and the temporal welfare of all our readers, their families and friends.*

Mission Intention for November

That Christians in Asia, bearing witness to the Gospel in word and deed, may promote dialogue, peace, and mutual understanding, especially with those of other religions.

Mission Intention for December

That the elderly, sustained by families and Christian communities, may apply their wisdom and experience to spreading the faith and forming the new generations.



photo: sgame/bigstock.com

Asia Bibi nominated for Sakharov Prize 2017: the blasphemy law in the spotlight

*L*ahore (Agenzia Fides) - Asia Bibi, the Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy and in jail since 2009, has been nominated the European Union's high-status award edition 2017 of the prestigious "Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought".

The Prize is an initiative of the EU Parliament and is awarded to individuals or groups battling to defend fundamental human rights.

Peter Van Dalen, a member of the *European Conservatives and Reformists Group* (ECR) in the European Parliament, who proposed the candidacy of Asia Bibi, explained that **"Asia Bibi's case is of symbolic importance for others who have endured suffering simply for expressing freedom of religion"**.

"In her we see the situation of the whole Christian community. Her case is tragically indicative of the insecurity faced by all minorities when it comes to their fundamental human rights", notes Kaleem Dean, an intellectual and Pakistani analyst, in a comment sent to Fides. *"If she succeeds in being awarded the Sakharov Prize, Asia Bibi would receive 50,000 Euros. Yet at stake is more than money, (though, of course, she does deserve to be compensated for the damage caused): the recognition of freedom of religion in Pakistan is at stake"*, he continues.

"The government - he says - is burying its head in the sand, in order not to hear the anguished cries of minority communities".

In particular her case brings the notorious "*blasphemy law*" into play: *"Blasphemy charges are an instrument of what has become state oppression against minorities. Governors should have the courage and vision to reform the blasphemy law"*, concludes Dean.

Nasir Saeed, director of Center for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), committed to the defence of religious minorities in Pakistan says, *"For years, the issue has been taboo."*

Saeed concludes, *"The blasphemy law is not in line with international human rights standards. And its abuse raises further violations of international law. The Government of Pakistan does not address such an important issue, although it is a question of life and death"*.

The CLAAS director recalls that there are reports of a large number of blasphemy cases based on false allegations and on the absence of judicial investigations: *"This is why we call on Prime Minister Abbasi to put the issue on the agenda of his government and bring it to Parliament"*, he concludes.



Asia Bibi

From the Director

On the move again

As I was preparing to move from Sydney to Melbourne to take up the new role of Regional Director of the ANZ Columban region I reflected on the many occasions I have had to pack up and move on in my missionary life.

My initial move was from New Zealand to start studies for the priesthood at the Sydney seminary in 1969, then after ordination on to Japan in 1976 where I lived in eight different houses over about 20 years. I came back to Sydney in 1986, on to Japan again in 1992, New Zealand again in 2003, then back again to Sydney in 2009.

Moving into new surroundings, transitioning into new cultures and taking up new roles are a regular dimension of a missionary's lifestyle. Living through these times of transition are not usually very comfortable moments and it takes courage and time to stay with the variety of feelings and to find one's feet in the new place. But on a global scale being on the move is a part of the lifestyle of millions of fellow human beings today, especially for refugees and those internally displaced by war and natural disasters. Many of these people have had to escape horrific situations and carry traumatic experiences with them into their new place. I am fortunate I have not had to make major life or death choices in my moves.

As we approach Christmas we remember the story of Joseph and Mary on the move to Bethlehem for the birth of their child and later having to flee to Egypt. The rather peaceful scene displayed in the cribs in our homes and churches reveals a variety of different travellers gathered around the child Jesus after his birth, including three travellers from the East.

Many of us will also travel this Christmas to gather with family to celebrate the birth of Jesus and the hope and life that his coming brings into our world. I hope that it will be a time of joyful celebration for you and your family. Let's consider also how we can make more "room in the inn" for the homeless and refugees.

Last Christmas I was thrilled to watch on TV the meals provided for the homeless in many of our ANZ cities. Some of you may have been involved in such acts of generosity. I read also of wonderful stories of hospitality with Muslim

and Christian groups working together to help the homeless at Christmas. For example, in the United Kingdom Muslim NGOs worked with Christian churches to hand out sleeping kits in London; Sikhs and Hindus were housing homeless in Leicester and Jews were feeding them in St Albans.

As one vicar said: "It was a glimpse into how the world should be." Such events do not just happen overnight but take weeks of preparation by people of different faiths (and no faith) getting to know each other, working alongside each other and sharing their common values. I pray that the spirit of Christmas will be part of our celebration this Christmas.



Moving into new surroundings, transitioning into new cultures and taking up new roles are a regular dimension of a missionary's lifestyle.

Fr Brian Vale
director@columban.org.au



Building a community from the ground up

In December 2011, Typhoon Sendong caused catastrophic devastation in Cagayan de Oro on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. The *International Red Cross* recorded 1472 deaths, 1074 missing and 1748 injured. Nearly 40,000 homes were damaged of which 11,463 were destroyed, affecting 700,000 people.

The poor suffered the brunt of the typhoon's destructive force. Those made homeless were given temporary accommodation in overcrowded and unhygienic shelters, but bureaucratic disorganization and internal politics made it impossible to respond adequately to the crisis.

Eventually, religious orders and missionary congregations working in the affected areas realized that the best way forward was to join together in a common effort. A consortium was formed including the *Columban Missionaries*, *Stigmatine Fathers* and the *Religious of the Virgin Mary*, the *Poor Servants of Divine Providence*, *Marian Fathers*, *Sacred Heart Missionaries* and the *Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro*. This consortium decided to begin a project to provide low cost housing for homeless families.

Five years on and thanks to partnership with the government, international organisations, Columbans and other donors and the families now housed by the project, a colourful new village has been built called *Mother of Divine Mercy Village*, consisting of new houses for 550 families (3,500 people), all with clean water and electricity, a day care and health centre, educational and meeting facilities, and a children's playground.

The village is located in Opol near the city of Cagayan de Oro, where Columban Fr Enrique Escobar serves as parish priest. His predecessor was Columban Fr Paul Finlayson (picture far right overlooking the houses on page 19), who was asked in 2012 to become involved in finding a solution to the homeless crisis caused by Typhoon Sendong.

Since early 2016, Fr Paul has lived in the village and is committed full time to the families who live there, providing counselling, spiritual guidance and helping in the vital work of forming community.

Fr Paul is finding the challenge of responding holistically to the families, whose lives were ravaged by the typhoon, a new opportunity to live out his missionary vocation. **Not only is he literally building a community from the ground up by helping to organize the construction of the village, but also he is actively involved in forming a new, vibrant community.**





Sequel to a chalice and paten

FR TIM MULROY

In February of this year Columban Fr Charlie Duster was admitted to the hospital where he was informed a short time later that he was terminally ill.

During the following weeks, with the same zeal with which he had lived his missionary life, he prepared himself to meet God face to face. He also bid farewell to family and friends, and took care of important personal matters.

Among his treasured possessions was a chalice and paten that had been given to him as a gift by his parents, Charles and Cleo Duster, on the occasion of his ordination and first Mass in December 1961.

These precious gifts had travelled with him on his various missionary journeys around the world during his 55 years of priesthood. In fidelity to the command of Jesus at the Last Supper, *"Do this in memory of me,"* Fr Duster used them in the celebration of Mass, while also cherishing the blessing of his beloved parents, other family members, and friends in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. These were the people who had nurtured his vocation and whose prayerful support he could count on throughout the various chapters of his missionary life in Japan, Italy and Fiji.

Now, however, as Fr Duster approached the closing chapter of his life, he expressed the wish that his chalice and paten have a sequel: that they be given to a young Columban priest who would continue to celebrate Mass with them.

On the feast of St Columban, November 23, his wish will be granted: Fr Pat Visanti will receive Fr Duster's precious inheritance on the occasion of his ordination to Columban missionary priesthood in Fiji.

Fr Pat grew up in the capital city, Suva, and later worked in a bank there. A gifted musician, he was also a member of the cathedral choir. Thanks to an encounter with Columban priest, Fr Pat Colgan, he became interested in mission and, after a period of personal reflection, decided to become a Columban missionary priest.

During these past eight years, in addition to his seminary training in Fiji, he spent two years with the Columban team in Pakistan. After his ordination, he hopes to return there, taking with him Fr Duster's gifts.

Fr Visanti's future missionary life is likely to be just as adventurous as Fr Duster's. Like Fr Duster, wherever he goes, he believes that Christ accompanies him in the celebration of the Mass. And since he also believes that Fr Duster is united with Christ, every time he raises the chalice and paten during the consecration, he can also be confident that he has a faithful Columban companion by his side.

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



Among his treasured possessions was a chalice and paten that had been given to him as a gift by his parents, Charles and Cleo Duster, on the occasion of his ordination and first Mass in December 1961.

The accident and the Christian monk

FR NEIL MAGILL

*I*t is difficult for us in Myanmar (Burma) to get a visa so we have to leave and go to Bangkok very often to renew our visa. Bangkok is very highly developed with its high-rise buildings, cars and buses crawling at a snail's pace and street walks crowded with people. I find the easiest way to get around is on a motorbike taxi. They weave in and out between cars and buses and when they get a clear view they put the boot down and speed off. Recently when I was there I got a motorbike taxi as usual to go to the Embassy. The law in Bangkok is that the rider of the motorbike and the passenger wear helmets...a good idea.

When I got on the back of the motorbike the rider was wearing his helmet but mine was strung around the handlebars. We took off for the Embassy without the helmet. He manoeuvred his way expertly through the cars for about 15 minutes and once when he had a clear view he built up speed. Suddenly a car appeared from nowhere and my motorbike rider slammed on the brakes. I fell off, he fell on top of me and the motorbike on top of both of us. Some people on the side walk lifted up the motorbike and the rider scrambled to his feet, got my helmet off the handlebars and put it on my head as I lay on the side of the street. I burst out laughing to his and the onlookers surprise. Some onlookers saw blood on my hands and advised the motorbike rider to take me to a hospital. I assured him there was no need.



Photo: Tupungato/Bigstock.com



So off we went again but this time I was wearing the helmet. A few minutes later he stopped outside a shop and motioned to me not to move. Within a few minutes he came out with a bottle of water and politely handed it to me. There is a kindness in the hearts of people everywhere if we treat them with respect and dignity.

I got my visa and the next day I flew back to Myanmar. Mandalay airport is a long distance out of town and the normal charge is \$10 for the 50 minute drive. The driver was keen to practice his little English so we got into a conversation.

'Where you come from, Sir?'

'I come from Ireland'

'How long you live in Myanmar?'

'Almost 10 years.'

'Your wife live in Myanmar too?'

'I have no wife.'

'Ah, sad, sad, sad, you have no wife, no children.' Why not, he asked in pain. He was almost crying. *'You are Buddhist?'* I asked. *'Yes.'* *'Buddhist monks do not marry and have no children'* I said. He thought for a few moments and then said *'You are Christian monk.'* *'That's right'* I said.

We continued our conversation/dialogue until I arrived at my destination, the Mandalay Higher Education Center.

I got the money to pay him and he got out of the car and refused to take the money.

'You are Christian monk. I respect. No charge.'

Despite all efforts he would not take the money. He raised his two hands to his forehead and bowed. I returned the traditional bow of respect. We shook hands and off he went. **There is kindness and generosity in the hearts of everyone.**

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

Reflecting on art

2018 Columban Calendar Art Guide

Each year Columbans produce an in-depth Art Guide to accompany the Columban Art Calendar.

The Art Guide is professionally produced with an insightful explanation of each painting compiled by Dr Claire Renkin, (Art Historian and Lecturer at Yarra Theological Union) and narrated by Robyn Moore (Professional Speaker and Voice Artist), with Music by Chris Zabriskie. Viewing the Art Guide with the 2018 Columban Art Calendar you can...

Learn about the artwork, the story, the background, the artist and the meaning of each work.

Discover the role religious art plays in forming people's spirituality.

Look at Christian art as a wonderful avenue for understanding Christian tradition.

The Art Guide is available for purchase as a DVD or can be viewed online at www.columban.org.au

This is a preview of the description for January 2018 which features in the 2018 Columban Calendar Art Guide:

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple (fresco, c.1305-1309) by Giotto di Bondone (c.1266-1337)

Giotto grips our attention in this portrayal of Simeon reaching out to hold the infant Jesus in his veiled hands. This detail from the great Florentine master's fresco of the narrative traditionally known as the Presentation of Christ in the Temple invites us to imagine this story through the eyes of the devout old man. Luke recounts how it had been revealed to Simeon, an old man of the temple, that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. Simeon gazes, reverently upon the Christ child. As Simeon says, he may "depart in peace" now that his longing to see the Messiah has been fulfilled. Christ in contrast appears unsettled, his attention divided as he reaches out with his right arm for the protecting presence of his mother. (Mary is missing from the detail). Christ's searching gesture evokes every newborn's vulnerability. Even so the child's gaze remains fixed upon the old man. In the visual power of the exchange between the two figures, Giotto transforms the moment into a profound spiritual revelation as one life begins and another is ending. The narrow space that separates the two heightens the contrast between the venerable old man and the innocent child. We recall Simeon's prophecy that her child would cause Mary to suffer as if a sword had pierced her heart. Like Giotto's 14th-century audience we find our own contemplation of this moment tinged with love and fear for the future of this Child and His Family.



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Photo: Bridgeman Images

Can you help?

1923 Columban Art Calendar

HELP

Photo: houbaczech/Bigstock.com



Columbans are looking for a copy of the first Columban Art Calendar, called *The Irish Mission to China Calendar* published in 1923.

If you or someone you know has a copy of this calendar, the society would appreciate you considering donating it back to the Columbans for their archives.

Please contact:
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100 Years of mission - St Columban's Mission Society

Events connected with this momentous anniversary will take place in 2017 and 2018.

This commemorative year opens on St Columban's Day November 23, 2017 and concludes on St Columban's Day November 23, 2018.

We thank our benefactors, who have supported and believed in Columban Mission. *"Without you we would not have achieved anything. Together we have achieved a lot to the Glory of God."* Fr Gary Walker SSC



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