

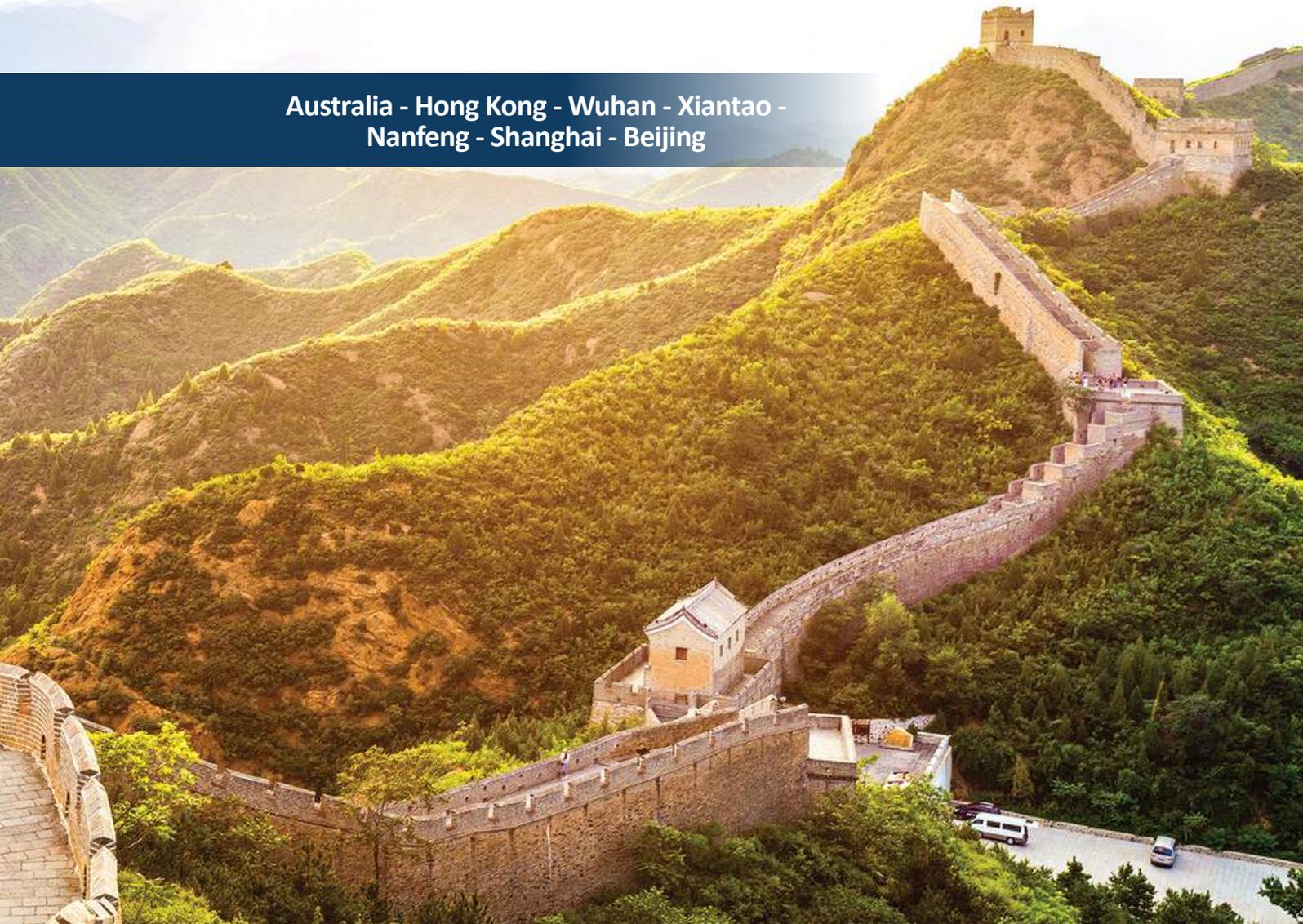


China Trip

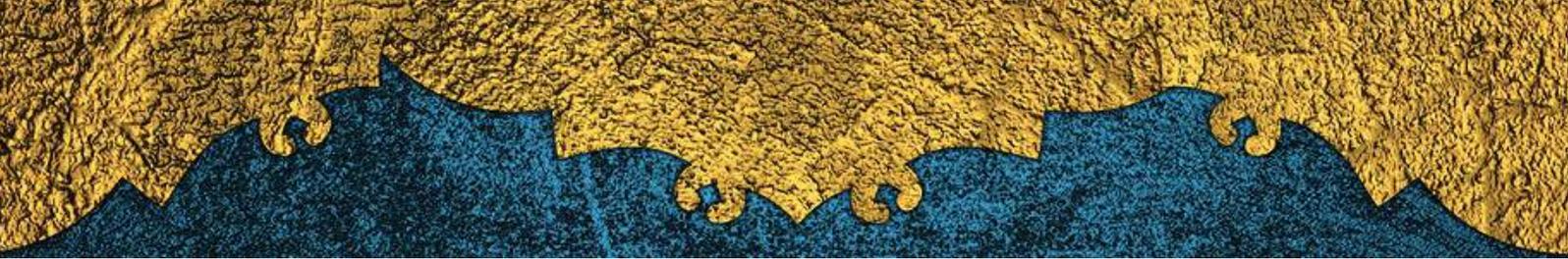
October 8 - 19, 2018

Report

Australia - Hong Kong - Wuhan - Xiantao -
Nanfeng - Shanghai - Beijing



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Aim

A pilgrimage to commemorate 100 years since the Missionary Society of St Columban was officially founded on 29 June, 1918.

To enter into the world where Bishop Galvin and his young priests began the Mission of St Columban 100 years ago.

To be spiritually uplifted as you travel to areas where Columbans worked in harsh conditions to spread the Good News of the Gospel.

To lead a first ever Columban pilgrimage to China from the ANZ Region and to raise awareness of Columban works both here in Australia and New Zealand and in other countries where Columbans work.

To get to know and thank our Columban supporters who made it possible for Columbans to reach 100 years of mission.

Background

We worked closely with Dr Jeremy Clarke from Sino Immersions who had lived and studied in China and understood the difference between a holiday and a pilgrimage.

His task was to organise and co-ordinate all the logistics for a 12 day pilgrimage for 20 travellers that included 6 cities and towns, not including Macau and international flights, 2 internal flights, 1 internal high speed-train and numerous metros, buses and taxis.

To visit numerous churches and sites of interest along the way and to ensure that the pilgrims learnt as much as possible about the early Columbans and their mission activities in those areas.

Jeremy Clarke worked closely with Frs Tommy Murphy and Dan Troy in China to ensure that the busy program ran smoothly.

Response to the pilgrimage

At first the response was slow but with a sudden rush we registered 23 pilgrims excluding Jeremy Clarke, Angus Gilbert, (Sino Immersions), Frs Tommy Murphy and Dan Troy. They ranged in age from 56 years to 87 years. The pilgrims seemed undaunted by the busy schedule that led us through China by air, rail and sometimes taxi.

Meeting each other

Unlike other pilgrimages where you have a large room to get to know each other, China presented a challenge with its lack of space for such an occasion. Many pilgrims were introduced to each other at the Melbourne and Sydney airports. In Hong Kong on the first night we divided into small groups for dinner as there was not one restaurant that would accommodate all of us. Somehow it worked and by day one of the pilgrimage we were connected as a group.



The pilgrimage begins

Pilgrims were encouraged to keep their journals up to date so that they could reflect on their experiences during and after the pilgrimage.

Some highlights and there were many (see attached itinerary)

Day 1 - Monday October 8, 2018 Australia to Hong Kong

Pilgrims arrive at various times.

Day 2 - Tuesday October 09, 2018 (optional free day) Hong Kong

The Catholic Cemetery

Some of the group went to Macau with Jeremy Clarke and the rest of us which numbered twelve were led by Fr Tommy Murphy to the Catholic Cemetery that had been ravaged by the tornado that tore through Hong Kong in September.

We saw the graves of Columban priests and Columban Sisters, one of which was the grave of Sister Mary Francis Mapleback from Australia. Ellen Mary (Nellie) Mapleback was born in Rushworth, Waranga, Rodney County, Australia. Working in a solicitor's office in Melbourne, she felt called to missionary life but she knew of no missionary congregation in Victoria. A friend who knew of her wish happened to meet a Columban Father who had just arrived from Ireland in 1918 and she told Nellie about him. The rest is history.

It was a moving experience seeing the graves of those who had left their countries to spread the Good News in China, and in most cases, never to return home.

We then visited the Hong Kong Jockey Club where Jeremy and Fr Brian Glasheen and a couple of others attended the races that night.



Damage after the tornado



Frs Brian Glasheen and Tommy Murphy

The Catholic Centre

Mass was celebrated by Fr Brian Glasheen in The Catholic Centre located in the heart of Hong Kong. It was here that we met Columban Fr Michael Cuddigan who had organised the Mass.

On the next floor down from the Chapel we visited the Catholic Bookshop who were displaying the Australian 2019 Columban Art Calendar. What a surprise.



Day 3 - Wednesday October, 10, 2018 Hong Kong

Immaculate Conception Cathedral

The day was organised by Fr Jim Mulroney and we headed off to the Immaculate Conception Cathedral where volunteers gave a wonderful presentation on the history of the Cathedral. The guides then took us on a tour of the Cathedral where we saw spectacular altars, paintings and icons.



Vinnie and her sister Emily begin the pilgrimage in traditional Fijian dresses to celebrate Fiji Day.



The General Council House

We then bussed to the General Council House which is located in the mountains outside Hong Kong where we were introduced to Frs Kevin O'Neill, Pat Colgan, Darwin Bayaca, Jovito Dales and the new Lay Missionary Leadership team Vida Amor, Kevin Sheeran and Catharina Son Seon-Young.

We also met Jacqui Hung from the Justice and Peace Office and William Tsui, a successful business man in Hong Kong and long term friend of the Columbans.

Each pilgrim introduced themselves and shared some of their Columban experience. It was the first opportunity for the group to get to know each other a little better.

After lunch and refreshments the pilgrims divided into three groups and learnt first hand about the roles of the General Council, the Lay Missionaries, and Justice and Peace issues and about the current economy in Hong Kong.

Mass was celebrated in the living room overlooking the mountains. Another special occasion to thank God for being part of His mission and for the opportunity of travelling through China seeing the trail blazed by Bishop Edward Galvin and his brave followers.



Mass at the General Council House



General Council House after the tornado



Fr Glasheen listening to Vida and Catharina

Day 4 - Thursday October 11, 2018 Hong Kong – Wuhan

Flew to Wuhan where we met Frs Dan Troy, Anthony Rye and Antonio Seok Jin-Wook who invited two of us to visit a mother in her 40s with cerebral palsy, her eight year old daughter and her grandmother who assists with the care of the family. Each day the grandmother takes the granddaughter to school as her enrolment was conditional that her mother (with cerebral palsy) did not come near the school. Cruelty and injustice at its best.

Fr Dan has been a friend of the family for many years and provides assistance to the young mother who makes cards to boost the family income. I do not think that they know that Dan is a Catholic Priest.

What a privilege it was to be hosted by the family and to see yet again another great example of Columbans at work.



Day 5 - Friday October 12, 2018 Wuhan

St Columbans Cathedral

Took the metro to St Columbans Cathedral where Fr Dan Troy celebrated Mass and Peter Connell (pilgrim) did the First Reading. It was a moving experience to sit and reflect that Bishop Galvin had celebrated Mass on this very spot. Following Mass, the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, founded by Bishop Galvin, and parishioners treated us to a sensational lunch. We were invited to learn how to make dumplings and get to know some of the parishioners. The Superior of the Sisters, Sr Cara welcomed us and told us about their pastoral work in the diocese. They are a small order of devoted women faithful to the vision of Bishop Galvin. Our group made a substantial donation to the Sisters for their work.



The group outside the Cathedral





St Columbans Cathedral

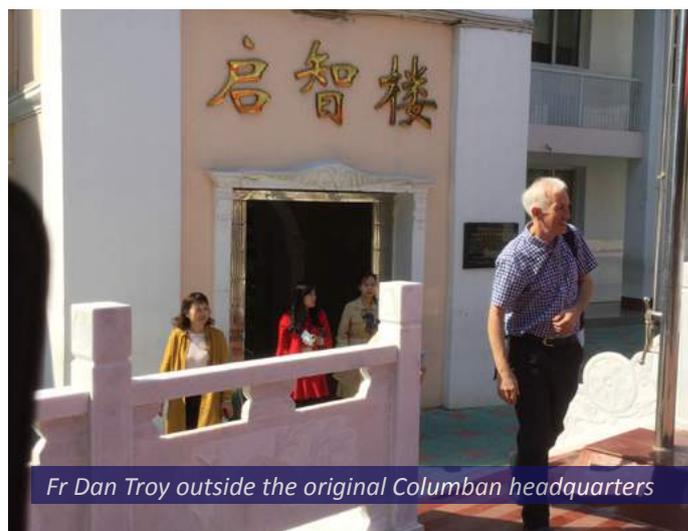


Irene learns how to make dumplings

The original Columban Headquarters

Following lunch we visited the original headquarters of the Columbans. This building received much coverage in *The Far East* in 1939 when the Yantze flooded killing thousands of people. Today the building is a school.

Then it was off by taxi to see the famous Yantze River where the original bridge still stands and accommodates all types of transport including trains.



Fr Dan Troy outside the original Columban headquarters



Janette and Fr Dan Troy at the Yantze

Day 6 - Saturday October 13, 2018 Wuhan – Xiantao

Took a bus to Xiantao, to see one of the areas where Bishop Galvin worked and to attend Mass at the parish of the Holy Rosary. We met the Parish Priest, and newly ordained Columban Deacon, Peter Dong. Columban, Fr Antonio Seok Jin-Wook from Korea was the main celebrant at the Mass which was attended by many of the local parishioners. It was here that we heard the most magnificent singing from the congregation. After Mass we met many of the parishioners who were most generous in their welcome and hosted us to another amazing lunch which included eel and rice wine which was 53% proof. Phew!



We then bussed to The Holy Trinity Parish where many Columbans spent time on mission. It was here that we met the administrator, Fr Joseph who gave us an overview of Columban participation between 1920 and 1950. The church is newly constructed with strong cathedral elements. We wondered if it were to become the main Cathedral for the area but Fr Joseph said he didn't think so.

On the property was another large building under construction to be used as Diocesan and Administration offices. While we were having an afternoon tea in the yard, the church band arrived back from a funeral. We were treated to a great performance to which we responded with Waltzing Matilda. It was unplanned and unscheduled but Fr Dan took the credit for organising the band to arrive just before our departure. Great work Dan.



The parish band.

Day 7 - Sunday October 14, 2018 Wuhan to Nanfeng

To visit the grave of Columban Martyr Fr Timothy Leonard

Took a train to Nanchang – 2.5 hours and a long bus journey to our hotel in Nanfeng where we were met by Fr Dan Troy and Fr Joseph, the Parish Priest of the Sacred Heart in Nanfeng. After a late arrival we were treated to a banquet by Fr Joseph. It was here that we celebrated Monica's (pilgrim) 87th birthday.



Day 8 - Monday October 15, 2018 Nanfeng – Shanghai

The day began with an early Mass at St Joseph's celebrated by New Zealand pilgrim, Fr Bernard Dennehy, after which we took a bus to the grave of Columban Martyr, Fr Timothy Leonard who was murdered in 1929. He was only 36 years of age – just a boy.

We prayed at the grave site and some Chinese parishioners who had travelled with us sang the Hail Mary. It was a sad and memorable moment. It seemed such a long way to travel to see a church and a gravesite but it was well worth the long day's travel, the late night and the early start. A poignant moment to remember the sacrifice of just one of the young Columbans for the faith.

Back on the bus to Nanchang airport during which Jeremy gave us an overview of the urban and rural Christian scene in the area.

On arrival in Shanghai, we were met by Fr Tommy Murphy, who had just returned from Ireland after officiating at his nephew's wedding. It was late, and after a quick dinner many of us took a walk along the Bund, which is a waterfront area in central Shanghai. We saw spectacular lit up buildings and barges. It was on the Bund in the 1920s that many young Columbans arrived on mission.



Monica helped up the steep hill by Jeremy and Fr Joseph to the grave site of Fr Timothy Leonard

Fast train to Beijing

Day 9 - Tuesday October 16, 2018 Shanghai to Beijing

Attended Mass at St Joseph's Shanghai to experience a Chinese Mass. There was a small congregation in the church at 6.45am reciting the rosary. Then Mass was in Latin. Note: *Mass in Latin is only celebrated once a month.* It was interesting. Quick breakfast and then on the bus to the train station to catch the fast train to Beijing. Five and a half hours at just over 300kms per hour. Terrific experience. Late check in to the hotel then out for a Peking duck banquet followed by an early night.



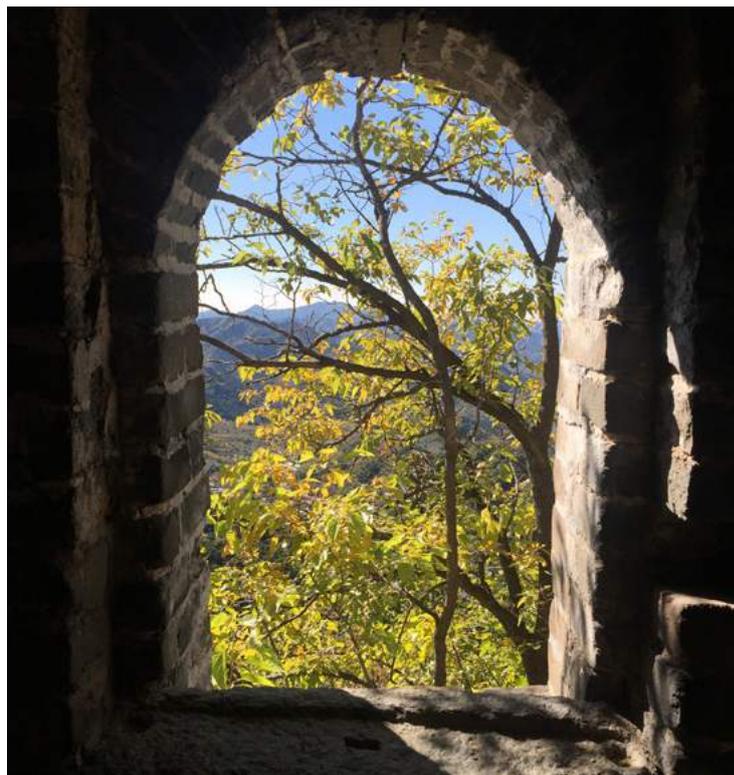
Fast train to Beijing

Day 10 - Wednesday October 17, 2018

Beijing

A site seeing day with an 8.30am start on the bus to the Great Wall. The bus ride was an opportunity for Fr Tommy Murphy to address the group and remind us of what Bishop Galvin had said when he went to China – “We are here to do the will of God”. He then asked us to reflect on what our role was on this trip and what it might be when we returned home.

A great overview of the wall was given by our local tour guide, David. He said that young men had been seconded to build the wall with thousands dying from starvation and exhaustion. Many of the bodies were buried into the wall to form part of the structure. Shocking! Shocking! Shocking!



A time for reflection

That night we divided up into three groups once again. Our group leader was Fr Tommy Murphy who managed by chance to get us a private room in a restaurant. This was great as it gave us an opportunity to share our thoughts and reflections on the trip before and during dinner. It was a special night with such honesty and thoughtfulness from the group. A few silent tears from a couple of pilgrims, including myself.



Fr Tommy leads the group in reflection



Day 11 - Thursday 18 October Beijing

Caught a bus to visit the grave of Matteo Ricci and other foreign Missionaries that are located on the grounds of a school owned by the Communist Party. Fr Tommy Murphy arranged for one of the professors of the school to share the history of the property and the graves of missionaries from many religious orders.

After a quick lunch we visited the South Church where the statues of Matteo Ricci and St Augustine were featured in bronze at the entrance to the church.



Then a visit to the Temple of Heaven led by Fr Tommy Murphy before attending Mass at 4.30 at St Joseph's Cathedral next to the hotel. It was celebrated by Fr Tommy Murphy with concelebrants Frs Bernard Dennehy and Brian Glasheen.

Fr Tommy gave a most inspirational reflection on the pilgrimage and thanked those who had organised it. At dinner that night, Monica and others from the group thanked Angus for his assistance and friendship. Monica thanked Angus particularly, for his care and compassion. He was a great young man whom Jeremy had employed to assist him, and in particular to travel with and take care of Monica.

Fr Tommy blessed Angus and he was on his way. Shortly after Fr Brian Glasheen 'fell off his perch' and was taken back to the hotel by one of our travellers, Susan. He had a fever and was possibly just completely exhausted. He made a full recovery.



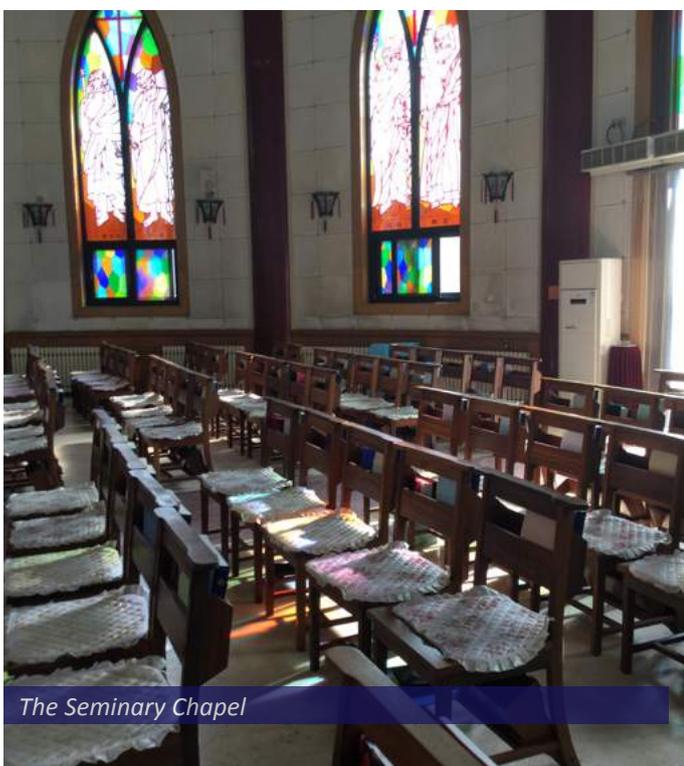
Day 12 - Friday 19 October Beijing – Home

We visited the Seminary where Fr Tommy Murphy is a Spiritual Director. The seminary has 90 young seminarians studying philosophy and theology. It was an interesting fact to learn that the Communist Party built the seminary. We also met Columban Fr Pat O'Beirne who teaches English and conducts spiritual direction there.

We attended a Mass at the Seminary Chapel celebrated Fr Bernard Dennehy. Fr Tommy Murphy gave another inspirational homily. For lunch we were joined by Columbans Fr Eamon O'Brien and Maurice Hoban who were back from Ireland lecturing at the seminary for a couple of weeks.

It seemed timely to thank Fr Tommy and Jeremy for their tremendous contribution to the pilgrimage and to sing Happy Birthday to Fr Brian Glasheen who was about to celebrate his 80th birthday.

After a brief trip to Tiananmen Square we gathered at the Beijing Hotel in the 'Writers Room' for a farewell drink and again to say thank you to Fr Tommy and Jeremy. A few more tears and we returned to our hotel to collect our luggage and off to the airport.



The Seminary Chapel



Frs Tommy Murphy, Maurice Hoban, Eamon O'Brien and Pat O'Beirne



In summary

Close bonds and new friendships developed during our twelve days together as a mobile community of pilgrims witnessing the trail blazed by Bishop Edward Galvin and his brave followers.

Whilst the evaluations forms are yet to be sent out I have received many emails, text messages and phone calls from participants thanking the Columbans for the informative and spiritual experience that *The Trip to China* provided.

A 'Book of Memories' that includes this report, images, feedback from pilgrims will be sent in the new year to each pilgrim as a memento.





Thank You