

# Columban Mission Institute

A brief history  
September 2017



**COLUMBAN MISSION INSTITUTE**



# Contents

- History of the Columban Mission Institute..... 4
- The Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations..... 5
- The Centre for Promoting Communion with the Church in China..... 8
- The Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice..... 9
- The Pacific Mission Institute.....12
- The Centre for Mission Studies.....14

# History of the Columban Mission Institute

FR PATRICK MCINERNEY

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

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

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

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



*PMI staff & participants, North Turramurra.*

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

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

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

---

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

# The Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

FRS PATRICK MCINERNEY & BRIAN VALE

## Beginnings

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

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

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

## Early growth

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

After attending a talk at the Centre, in response to a need for Muslim speakers at interfaith events, Mr Mehmet Ozalp and other young Muslims established the *Affinity Intercultural Foundation*, becoming major dialogue partners. The organization grew substantially and in 2009 divided its efforts: *Affinity* continue the interreligious dialogue to the present day, while the *Islamic Sciences & Research Academy* (ISRA), undertook the educational efforts and is now

offering tertiary degrees in Islamic Studies through Charles Sturt University.

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



Fr Patrick McInerney SSC

## Development

The tragic events of 9/11 in the USA in 2001 triggered a frenzy in Christian-Muslim relations here and around the world. People seeking understanding called the Centre for talks giving information and background on Islam to counter negative stereotypes. With the Centre's contacts among Muslim groups, it soon became possible to arrange a Muslim co-speaker, where the very fact of a Christian and a Muslim sharing a platform, very rare at that time was already a powerful witness of cooperation. As reputations grew, people contacted the Centre asking for a Muslim to come and speak to them. Later, they contacted the Muslim organisations directly without any reference to the Centre. Finally, Muslims began hosting and promoting their own interfaith events.



Fr Brian Vale SSC

## CMR Publications

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

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

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

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

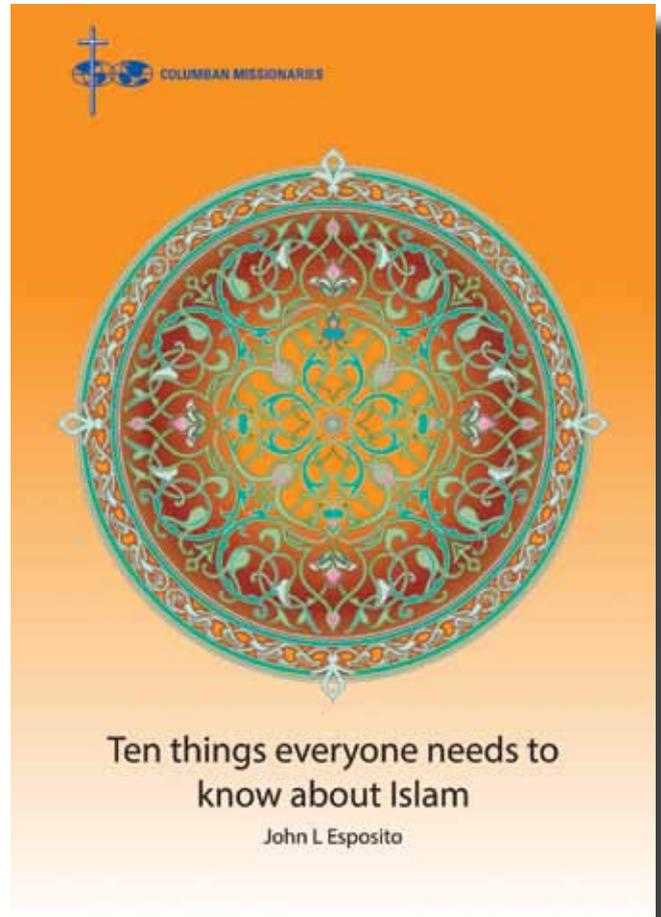
**The Golden Rule poster** has the ethic of reciprocity; 'treat others as you want to be treated', in the scriptures of 13 different religions. This shared value fosters mutual respect and dialogue between believers from different religions. The poster was published by the Centre and launched in the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

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

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

## Other major activities

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



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

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

**Of Gods and Men:** In March 2011 the Centre helped promote this award-winning film about the Cistercian

monks of Tibherine in Algeria. It tells the remarkable story of the monks and their double fidelity, to God and to the local people, all caught in the violent conflict between Islamist insurgents and the army. The film is a powerful meditation on the Christian relation to and presence among Muslims.

## Teaching tertiary courses

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

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

## Hospitality and social relations

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

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

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

**Youth PoWR:** Mindful that many interfaith activists are 'senior citizens', we wanted to ensure that young people also take up this challenge. We came up with *Youth PoWR* (Parliament of the World's Religions). It is prepared, promoted and hosted by a team of young people from



*Youth PoWR event Sydney, September 2016.*

different religions and all the speakers and performers are young people. It is the largest multi-faith youth event in Australia.

## The future

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

## CMR staff over the years

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

---

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

# The Centre for Promoting Communion with the Church in China

The Centre for promoting communion with the Church in China was established by Fr Cyril Hally in 1997 at the Columban Mission Institute. The Centre's mission was to promote within the Australian Church a knowledge and understanding of the history and suffering of the church in China. Columban missionaries have always had a special concern for the church in China as it was there that the Mission Society in 1920 began its missionary work.

One of the first activities of the Centre was to offer the services of Columban priests to the Chinese Catholic communities in Sydney, Parramatta and Broken Bay dioceses. Columban Fr Paul McGee, began to publish and distribute an information newsletter called *China Exchange*. The newsletter contained articles about the early history of the church in China, the political circumstances that led to the present situation of the divided church and reports on how the Catholic communities were coping with life under the antireligious policies of the Communist government. The articles were written by experienced Columban and religious missionaries and lay academics. Forty-eight issues of *China Exchange* were published and distributed.

In 1998 Bishop Anthony Li of Xian requested the Centre to facilitate a university study programme in social communications for a young woman from his diocese. The bishop desired to have a qualified social communication expert in his diocese to develop ways and means of spreading the good news of the Gospel beyond the walls of the parish compounds. In 2004, the Centre arranged for the candidate to be accepted as a student at Macquarie University in Sydney where after completing two courses was awarded the degree *International Communications* (MA) from the Faculty of Arts and the degree MA from the School of Politics. **Besides providing tuition fees, the Centre also accommodated the candidate at the Mission Institute house in North Turramurra and supported her with living and travel expenses while in Australia.** In 2006, the young lady returned to China to work for the church in the diocese of Xian.

In 2002, Bishop Aloysius Jin of Shanghai again asked the Centre to send a Columban priest to Shanghai for an extended period to organise and conduct renewal



Fr Paul McGee SSC

programmes for all the priests and sisters under 50 in the diocese. The bishop wanted each programme to be a full time live-in community experience of five months' durations for groups of 25 priests and sisters. Five programmes were conducted successfully over a period of three years. These programmes helped the young priests and sisters to develop their English speaking, reading and writing skills and also introduced them to some of the theological and spiritual thinking of the Second Vatican Council.

By the year 2012, information about the church in China was freely available in periodicals, religious newspapers and on the internet. As a result, it was decided the publication of *China Exchange* was no longer necessary. In addition, key staff members of the Centre had reached retirement age and wished to engage in other works of the Columban Mission Society. Accordingly, at the end of 2012, it was decided to formally close the Centre. However, priests who had worked with the Centre over the years, continued to provide Sunday liturgies for the Mandarin and Cantonese speaking Chinese communities in Sydney.



In 1997, the Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice (PEJ) was formed. The founding members, Frs Michael Gormly, Cyril Hally, Tom Rouse and Pat O'Shea had experiences of structural injustice, oppression of the poor, ecological destruction and militarism in the Philippines and South Korea. They knew that issues around peace, ecology and justice were connected. Responding to them is our Christian mission and part of Columban mission globally. In early 1998, Fr Michael Gormly, the first PEJ Convenor, wrote in an article for *The Far East*: "What is happening in God's world today. Why so much violence? Can we identify sources of hope for the poor and the next generation? How do we help to promote fullness of life and harmony with God's creation?" So they began the work of the Centre by engaging with Catholic and secular social justice groups in reflection, action and advocacy on issues such as justice for East Timor and West Papua, the effects of mining in the Philippines, and international poor country debt. Networking with diocesan agencies, religious congregations, catholic education offices and other churches became a large part of the work of the PEJ Centre.

In 1999, for the preparation of the Great Jubilee 2000, the Columbans in Australia and elsewhere were involved in the preparation of resources highlighting the Jubilee biblical themes of Sabbath, Land, Reconciliation, Freedom from Slavery, Sight for the Blind and Forgiveness of Debt (*Luke 4: 16-30*). Columban Fr Brendan Hoban was part of the Centre at this time. Then Director of Columban Mission Institute (CMI), Fr Trevor Trotter, approached John McGrath, Director of Mission Services at the Broken Bay Catholic Schools Office, regarding a partnership. Anne Lanyon, a teacher and Religious Education Coordinator, was employed as the Diocesan Jubilee Coordinator. Thus began mission formation in schools.

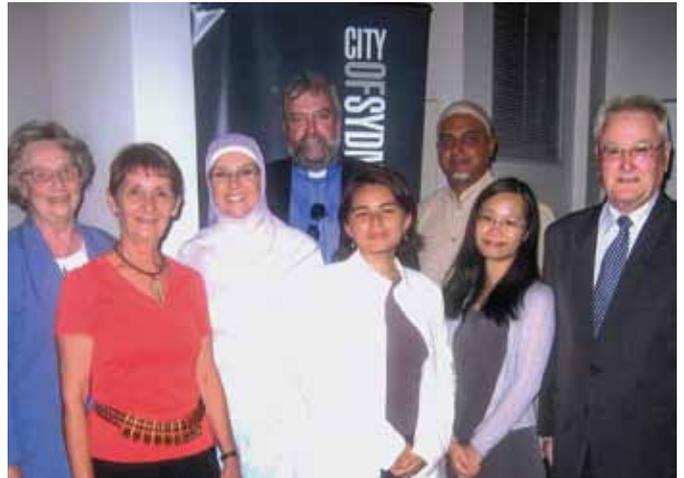
In 2000, the first *Social Justice Day* for students in Broken Bay was held and continued annually for 16 years. Since then the Centre has run numerous workshops for students in various dioceses on peace, ecology and justice issues. The formation of teachers began in Broken Bay with programs related to Jubilee 2000, then continued with Anne Lanyon and Ken Nobin of Parramatta Diocese working in partnership to run a Social Justice Train the Trainer Program.

By 2009, this had evolved into a two day formation program now known as 'Growing a Culture of Peace' (COP). It is run across dioceses by Anne Lanyon, Columban Fr Jack Evans and Luke Tobin who was a teacher in the Sydney Archdiocese and now works with Catholic Mission. Catholic Mission will continue to run this program when PEJ closes. Partnerships have enabled us to do more with limited resources.

In 2001, Fr Brian Gore moved to Sydney from Melbourne to become the second Convenor of the PEJ Centre, whilst at the same time acting as the Columban ANZ Regional Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Coordinator. Brian's passion for the poor inspired people across Australia with workshops and strong involvement in the Jubilee 2000 Drop the Debt campaign. He initiated a national 'Run for Life' series of events with ultra-marathon 'running priest' from the Philippines, Fr Robert Reyes. At this time PEJ became the Coordinator of the Jubilee 2000 Working Group. The Centre maintained this commitment to keeping alive the awareness of the foundational Hebrew Jubilee principles of economic and environmental justice through Anne Lanyon's board membership of Jubilee Australia.

In 2002, PEJ's venture into written publications led to the newsletter, Columban Connections, being produced three times a year. This eventually became an electronic monthly newsletter. Written resources for parishes, schools and religious congregations used colourful leaflets for a variety of purposes. The 9/11 Twin Towers bombing and the violent response of the invasion of Iraq prompted the Centre to be proactive in promoting active Gospel nonviolence. *The Way of Peace* resource was produced. Other resources which are all still available online at [www.columban.org.au](http://www.columban.org.au) are *The Gospel of Life* on the Beatitudes, *The Lantern* on Evangelisation, Ecological Liturgy resources for Lent and Advent and the Australian version of *The Stations of the Forests DVD*.

In 2003, the Centre developed greater opportunities for dialogue between religions and the secular. Amid the climate of fear, PEJ collaborated with the *Centre for Christian Muslim Relations* and local Councils to conduct public forums on 'Christians and Muslims Growing Peace'. Over four years the Centre ran 18 of these in New South Wales to break down barriers of ignorance through face to face meetings. By this time Columban Fr Charles Rue had joined the Centre. He initiated an event, 'Wonder and the Will to Care', which brought together 120 people of different faiths to share their ecological insights. So the Faith Ecology



*Growing Peace Forum with Christians & Muslims at Sydney City Council. Sr Pauline Rae (left), Anne Lanyon, Silma Ihram, Fr Patrick McInerney, Chantelle Ogilvie, Afroz Ali, Susana Ng & Fr Charles Rue (right).*

Network was born. In these times of planetary ecological crises, *Faith Ecology Network* (FEN) now has a global reach and has become a valuable Australian network for strengthening dialogue between the sciences and diverse religions. FEN holds public events and nature experiences to bring people together, to learn, grow ecological awareness and promote religious reasons for advocacy. In recent years Hannah Cifuentes and Liesje Barratt have assisted in the work of FEN. As PEJ closes, the FEN team has plans under way for it to flourish and grow into a new model that will take it into the future.

In 2004, Fr Brian Gore returned to the Philippines and Anne Lanyon became the third PEJ Centre Coordinator. Fr Charles Rue became the Regional Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Coordinator, combining the two roles. PEJ Centre became more involved in a variety of secular and religious networks, bringing a global and Gospel perspective to local issues about food sovereignty, genetically modified food, fair trade and human trafficking. The workshop developed around the issue of slavery in the chocolate industry became much in demand in schools and the wider community.

In 2005, after the Columban Mission Institute moved from North Turrumurra to Strathfield, opportunities for greater collaboration in mission education arose. Fr Charles Rue taught a course on Environmental Ethics at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. Anne Lanyon and Columban Fr Jack Evans began guest lectures on peace, ecology and justice with Religious Education students at Australian Catholic University.



FEN participants Fr Charles Rue (left), Robert Iocapetta, Vijai Singhal, A Friend of North Head Sanctuary, Anne Lanyon & Miriam Pepper (right) learning about Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub at North Head, Sydney.

For 20 years the Centre has adapted responses to the question *“What is happening in God’s world?”* in order to respond to where God’s Spirit is leading us. As well as education, formation, production of resources, networking and membership of many groups, through generous collaboration with others, some big initiatives were taken on. The Jubilee 2000 event for schools in the Diocese of Broken Bay was huge, involving 20,000 students and teachers. For the 2008 Sydney World Youth Day, with the help of a grant, the Cena Um dance group with Columban Fr Colin McLean from Brazil and the Preda Akbay theatre group from the Philippines travelled to Sydney. Together with wonderful dance and drama teachers from St Peter’s College, Tuggerah, the Columban Youth Theatre of the Oppressed performed in Sydney and on the Central Coast. In 2010 this enormous undertaking was followed up by coordinating an unforgettable return immersion experience in the Philippines with the St Peter’s College students. In 2016 there was a national speaking tour with Columban Fr Sean McDonagh to promote Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. Through the willing support of other Church agencies Fr McDonagh’s expertise directly reached over

two thousand people plus mass media audiences. We are so grateful for the way cooperation can make the world a better place.

Although the PEJ Centre is closing, the challenges of our world are ever present. The same questions asked by Michael Gormly 20 years ago are still relevant. We give thanks for the leadership of Pope Francis in calling believers to a deeper commitment to mission and all peoples to ecological consciousness and action for the suffering poor and the earth. *“The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development.” Laudato Si’ #13.* We also give thanks for Pope Francis’ call to *“Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace”* in his World Day of Peace Message 2017. As we close the Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice we hand on to others. ***Let this not be an ending but a new chapter in a new beginning: “to make an end is to make a beginning.” TS Eliot.***

---

*Anne Lanyon is the Coordinator for the Centre of Peace, Ecology and Justice at the Columban Mission Centre in Sydney.*



CMI North Turrumurra - Fr Charles Rue (left), Fr Brian Vale, St Magella Tracey, Fr Charlie O'Mahony & Fr Chris Farrelly (right), 1990.

St Columban's Seminary began in Wahroonga in 1952 and moved to North Turrumurra in 1959. In the 1960s the leadership saw the need for more mission studies for its seminarians. The need for an institute was real as there were no renewal, updating or re-entry courses being offered in Australia for its nearly 1,700 Catholic missionaries. An opportunity arose in 1971 when the Australian Bishops established the *National Missionary Council* (NMC). Dialogue began between the various mission-sending bodies, including female and male religious institutes, diocesan clergy and the lay mission groups.

Ideas around the word 'missology' had only grown slowly in the Church prompted by among other things: the *Divine Word Missionaries* (SVD) with cultural-anthropology studies, the *Protestant Edinburgh Missionary Conference* in 1910, the 1919 *Apostolic Mission Letter of Pope Benedict XV*, 1930s mission studies at Propaganda College, Louis Luzbetak's

1962 publication of *The Church and Cultures* which appealed to a wide English-speaking audience.

With the backing of the NMC, the Columbans organised the first *Australian National Missionary Conference* at Turrumurra in January 1972. Delegates came from 22 countries. Notable speakers included Alfonso Nebreda SJ from Manila, Herman Janssen MSC and Anglican Canon Peter Robin from PNG, Theodore Van Asten, the Superior General of the Missionaries of Africa, and Bishop Myles McKeon, the NMC president. Columban students followed up with an Open Day for Mission Sunday 1972, repeated the next year with 1,500 people attending. By 1976 it had blossomed into a Mission Exhibition. Then in 1995 they held another *National Mission Consultation* at Strathfield. This conference along with the 1972 conference marked a significant phase in the ANZ Columban Society's contribution to mission theory and practice.

In 1973, a trial ten-week *Mission Studies Program* hosted 19 students from outside the College. Lecturers were contracted from outside the College including overseas experts. Demand increased and a year-long program started. It was called the *Pacific Mission Institute (PMI)*. Columban Fr Brendan Lovett was the first Director followed in 1979 by Columban Fr Cyril Hally. Night classes began for external students in 1985. The PMI's 'holistic' philosophy made personal formation of participants as important as academic studies.

***Mission studies opened up issues not often faced in Australian church circles - ecology and justice, dialogue with Islam, liberation theology, the African context and the churches in China.*** A modern mission library was developed under Columban Frs Fergus Duffy and later Don Wodarz. In 1979 the periodical and documentation collection of the NMC was shifted to Turrumurra.

The role of women both as staff members and students of PMI had a major effect in developing the Australian post 1970 Columban seminary-based mission studies. Sisters Majella Tracey FMM, Pauline Rae SMSM and Kathleen Luchetti RSJ served as co-directors.

Another significant aim of the PMI program was to assist returned missionaries to reflect on their overseas experiences and to go through a period of adjustment before re-entering their home church or returning overseas. Another group using the PMI were the initial members of the *Columban Lay Missionary Program*.

Cooperating with other theological schools made PMI mission programs available to a wider range of students. Turrumurra joined with Marist Fathers to form the Union Theological Institute (UTI). It gained accreditation in 1979 and full accreditation as a founding member of the Sydney College of Divinity (SCD) in 1983. As Rector, Fr Noel Connolly gained recognition for our mission courses and St Columban's became a centre for missology in the new ecumenically based SCD.

The PMI was renamed the *Columban Mission Institute (CMI)* in 1993 when Fr Trevor Trotter was Rector. But demand for residential mission studies fell. In November 1996 all formal academic programs at Turrumurra ended.

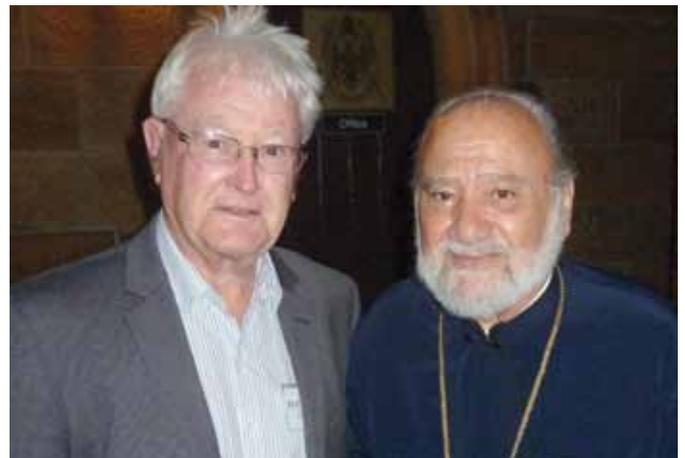
From 1974-1996 over nine hundred men and women participated in residential PMI-CMI mission studies programs at Turrumurra, in addition to the hundreds of non-residential students. When participants and staff



*Students & staff at St Columban's, North Turrumurra.*

scattered around the world they spread a significant Columban contribution to the Australian missionary movement in every continent.

Since 1997 CMI has functioned more as an animator in the local church in the areas of China, Peace, Ecology and Justice and Christian-Muslim Relations. Mission Studies were reintroduced when Columbans joined the staff of the Catholic Institute of Sydney in 2005 and the Broken Bay Institute shortly afterwards. This time the emphasis has been academic and is not centred around the personal formation of aspiring or returning 'missionaries'.



*Fr Charles Rue & Eminence Archbishop Stylianos, at an eco-theology seminar held at the Greek Orthodox Seminary, Redfern, 2015.*

---

*Columban Fr Charles Rue resides in Sydney.*

Columbans do not have outstanding personal gifts or genius. Our 'genius' comes from the people we have lived with and grown to love. However, these experiences have also given us questions. In Latin America and the Philippines, the biggest questions revolve around poverty and justice; in China, Korea and Japan around culture and language; in Pakistan and Mindanao around dialogue with Islam.

When I was a seminarian, I was trained to be a parish priest who could work in lonely, difficult places overseas. I don't think the major missiological questions occurred to me. But by the middle seventies mission theology was becoming increasingly important in our College in Turramurra. Studies in culture, religion and interreligious dialogue, justice and eventually ecology began to play an increasing part in the training of our seminarians. We also began the *Pacific Mission Institute* (PMI) to train religious, priests and teachers preparing for or returning from cross-cultural ministry.

Probably the most significant Columban in this shift was Fr Cyril Hally, one of the fathers of missiology in Australia. Cyril was an anthropologist and a voracious reader of history, sociology, anthropology and demography. He was still reading the night before he died at 91. I know because I visited him that night and he told me about what he had just read in *Charles Taylor's The Secular Age*. All this reading gave Cyril a refreshing outlook on theology. Anthropology is the study of cultures and implicit in that outlook is a freedom to look critically at your own culture. He asked questions most theologians did not think of.

More than a decade after the end of the Council, we were also coming to realise the deeper meaning of Vatican II. Pope John XXIII wanted the Council to engage with the world and to take history seriously. ***The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World insisted we could only be faithful to our mission by "scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel."*** (#4) Up till Vatican II we had a more perennial theology found in major classical textbooks. It was a theology that rarely changed. Now theology had to be historical and to interpret the 'signs of the times'.

This prompted the staff at St Columbans to start teaching the seminarians and the people preparing for mission by



*Professor Gabrielle McMullen, Deputy Vice-Chancellor ACU (since retired) & Fr Noel Connolly.*

studying missiology more scientifically. We also developed an excellent Missiological Library and Resource Centre.

The PMI residential course closed in 1996. Its successor the *Columban Mission Institute* (CMI) was built around centres for *China, Peace, Ecology & Justice* and *Christian Muslim Relations* and did not have its own academic program so, there was a break in formal studies in mission.

Missiology returned as a serious academic discipline in 2005. When Columbans started teaching missiology at the *Catholic Institute of Sydney* (CIS). Some of the early courses offered were *New Models & Images for Mission*, *Introducing Islam*, *Justice & the Church's Mission*, *Evangelisation Today* -

Educational Perspectives, Interreligious Dialogue and Faith, Mission and Culture. Shortly after we also began to teach missiology at the Broken Bay Institute.

Fr Patrick McInerney and I still lecture in the Masters programs at both CIS and BBI (*Broken Bay Institute - The Australian Institute for Theological Education*). This is critical because it enables us to keep mission before the eyes of our theologian colleagues, to encourage them to theologise in the light of the 'signs of the times'. We also have the opportunity to keep mission before the seminarians and teachers of the future.

After the CMI closes Fr Patrick McInerney and I will continue to lecture in the meaning of mission in our present secular, plural and globalised world, on Islam and interreligious dialogue.

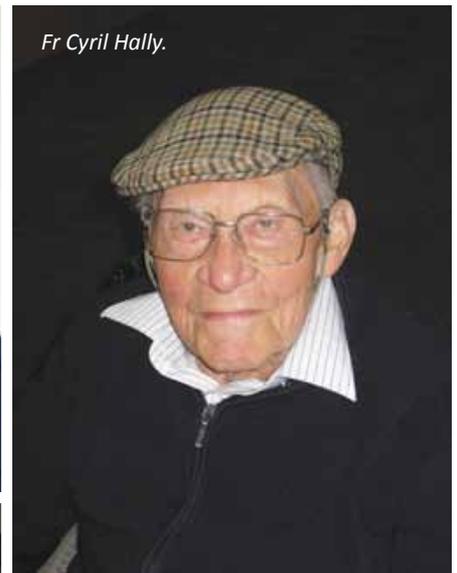
Fr Brian Vale and I will be involved in programs to welcome, integrate and enable overseas trained priests and religious

into the Australian church. We feel specially called to this last cause because this is the 'age of migration' and our Australian Catholic Church is becoming increasingly multiethnic but is not yet fully multicultural. Once again, we are speaking out of our experience. We can speak because we too have been migrants. We know the challenges, confusion and loneliness. We also know the excitement and expansion of our humanity that people can experience in living in another culture.

As you can see, this has been a journey for us Columbans and for the many people who have taught and studied with us. But it has originated in our experience of sharing our lives with people around the Columban world who have shared their lives and questions with us.

---

*Columban Fr Noel Connolly is a member of the Columban Mission Institute in North Sydney and a lecturer in Missiology at both the Broken Bay Institute and the Catholic Institute of Sydney.*



*Fr Cyril Hally.*



*Fr Noel Connolly promoting Columban Mission Studies at various events over the years.*



**COLUMBAN MISSION INSTITUTE**

Published in *The Far East* magazine  
July, August & September 2017.

[www.columban.org.au](http://www.columban.org.au)