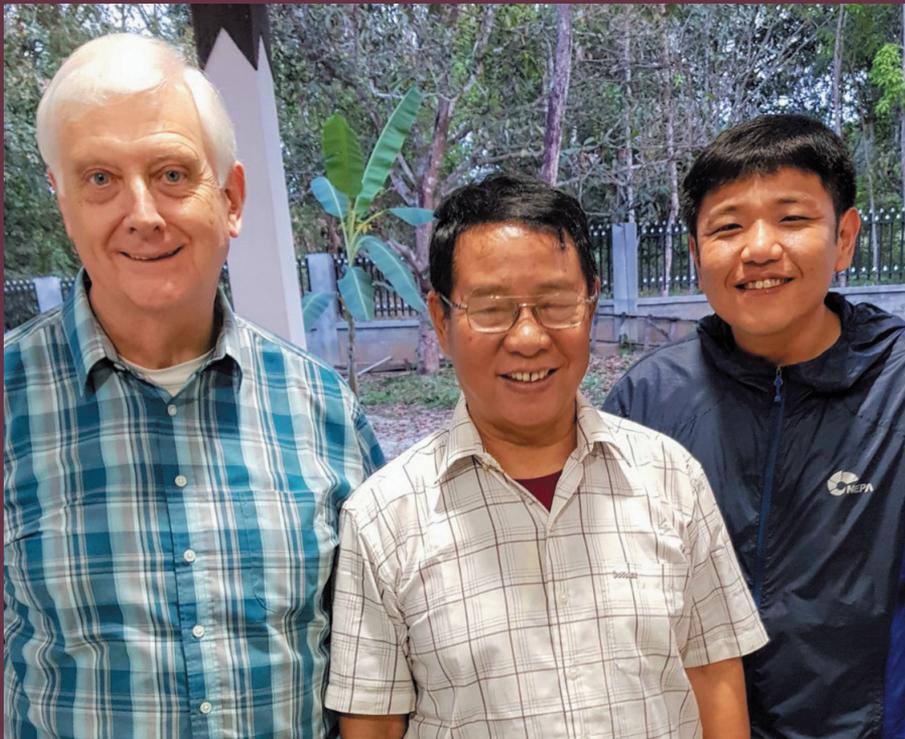


Columban Mission

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August/September 2022



Faces of Mission

C O N T E N T S

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Columban Mission

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The Missionary Society of St. Columban was founded in 1918 to proclaim and witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Society seeks to establish the Catholic Church where the Gospel has not been preached, help local churches evangelize their laity, promote dialogue with other faiths, and foster among all baptized people an awareness of their missionary responsibility.

In So Many Words

By Fr. Trevor Trotter

Mission Is Simple

Recently, I was on a Zoom call with some of the Columban leaders in countries such as Korea, Peru and Myanmar. There was much talk about the impact of the pandemic in those countries along with the many other challenges faced by the people. Of course, political situations and the poverty and suffering of people was very much on our minds and in our hearts. Mission flows from the heart and is motivated by compassion and empathy.

While there is much work to be done, when we talk about Columban mission, at its root, it is simple. It is love that drives God's mission and that is what we are living. We are part of God's mission.

My realization of the simplicity of mission was reinforced by engaging with Pope Francis' encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*—Brothers and Sisters All. He says right at the beginning that this encyclical is about "fraternity and social friendship" and later, he summarizes his message by saying that mission is about kindness!

Kindness seems such a simple word, and at first glance, it does not appear to be adequate to explain the hard work being done in parishes and communities all around the world. Just to say that we must be kind may seem weak or inadequate. But, when we read Pope Francis' letter we see that he covers many of the major problems in our world today. To be truly brothers and sisters to everyone in the world means changing our current economic and political structures. We have to learn to think of other people differently. It is to push back against the unjust forces in our world. It is to change our way of living so that others may live.

Recently in our Church, and especially since Pope Francis took over, we have heard that all Christians are invited to be "missionary disciples." It is not the way we Catholics normally think of ourselves. The question comes to us, "How can I be a missionary? I have a family to raise, a job to do and bills to pay. Who has the time and the energy to be a missionary?"

It seems to me that Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* gives us the answer. To be kind to the other members of our families, to be kind to the people we work with and all others in our world is to be missionary. We are extending our friendship to them and acknowledging them as our brothers and sisters.

This has been a theme of much of the Pope's teaching. He often takes up the story of the Good Samaritan. If "love your neighbor" is the Gospel message, the next question is "who is my neighbor?" Francis' response is "Whom are you going to make your neighbor?"

To be a missionary means to move out of the comfortable circle of friends that we have and to extend a hand of friendship to a stranger and make that person my neighbor. This seems a simple gesture, but imagine if, in all the areas of conflict in our world, people extended their hands in friendship, what the result would be? Such a simple step could transform the world!

Let us pray for this gift of kindness from the one who is kindness itself!

It is love that drives God's mission and that is what we are living. We are part of God's mission.



Columban Fr. Trevor Trotter lives and works in Australia.



Good morning Saya!

Reflection on Teaching

By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala

When I first arrived in Myanmar (formerly Burma), I had to learn the Burmese language for almost year. I attended daily classes with local teachers. One of them is Saya Zenry. He is a graduate of the Teacher's College and during the holidays took time to teach Burmese to foreigners and earn some extra money before heading to the village to teach. There are very few male teachers in the country, because it does not pay much and demands a lot of work.

After almost a year of learning Burmese, I had to move to the north

of Myanmar and begin the mission with the Kachin people which meant learning another language. I never lost touch with my Burmese teachers. Once a year I get to spend a few days of break so I decided to pay my teacher a visit. And it turned out to be an adventure. This was in November 2019.

Traveling by bus is a common way the locals move around the country. I got on the bus all the way from Myitkyina transferring only upon arrival in Yangon to Pathein. With my limited Burmese I am still able to communicate and find my way. Eventually I arrived at the stop he gave

me, a small sleepy town by the river.

We went into the small town. Near the market is a small dock where boats come and go picking up passengers and cargo. Everything goes into the boat including the motorbikes. We moved up the river and ended at another dock. We waited until the motorbikes were unloaded. We then drove on the tiny road between rice fields. We passed by one of the two villages schools. But on the way, people were merrymaking and a loud blast of sound is heard—there is a big feast in the village monastery. People were making their offerings and dancing in

the compound. Myanmar is a Buddhist country. The majority of the people are practicing Buddhists.

We arrived in the village of Seik Gyi, where he lives and teaches. He introduced me to the family who looks after him in the village. He showed me his tiny hut where he sleeps during the week. For the night we went back to the city of Patheingyi which is another 30 minutes by motorbike.

The next day we went back to the village school. Having told him I wanted to wear the teacher's uniform, he kindly offered me his old one. I wore it to school like a local teacher. But before that we had to take a bath in the open. I took my *longgyi* out, wore it and took a bath like locals do. Longgyis are like sarongs or long skirts that are worn by both men and women in Myanmar. Filipinos also have them specially down south, and we call it *malong*.

After the bath, we took our breakfast and headed to the school. He introduced me to the school principal who turns out to be a Catholic. The children started coming into the rooms. One by one, they took off their shoes, arranged them nicely outside the door. They took their places in the classroom. Quietly, they sat in meditative position. They sat quietly for the next 15 minutes. Early on in their education, children learn to meditate in silence.

"Good morning children," Saya Zenry said. "Good morning Saya!" they responded. *Saya* is a Burmese word that translates to sir or teacher. Saya Zenry's class is a mix of Grade 3 and 4 pupils. The whole school combined only has 24 students and four teachers. He has a mixed class of eight students. So he has prepared for all subjects and for two classes. This is just one reason why teaching is not for everyone. Teaching was my very first job straight after college. I started out as an English tutor to Koreans for a few months and eventually

got a teaching job at a local private school. I only lasted for about seven months. But it was one of the most fulfilling experiences I have in my life. Although teachers do not get enough salary, teachers are highly respected together with parents and monks in Burmese culture. They are treated like gods. Saya Zenry explained that "Our parents raised us. Our teachers shared knowledge with us while the monks preached the Dhamma. For these reasons, they are considered blessings to us like God."

Saya Zenry asked me to introduce myself and teach his students. I introduced to them the English children's rhyme "Jack and Jill," which was a first for them to hear. Singing with the children, I remembered my teaching days, stressful but meaningful. The class had to end and we said our goodbyes. We headed back to his

Only through good and quality education can Myanmar progress and develop. That is why he wanted to be a teacher.

home. Then later that day we went to the monastery to celebrate with the villagers.

Today, Saya Zenry, together with many school teachers, joined the civil disobedience movement and stopped reporting to schools. Most children are not going to schools, too. It has been more than a year after the junta declared a martial law—taking control of the civil government.

After more than two years, I met again Saya Zenry who like many young people I know protested in the streets. I asked him why he wanted to become a teacher. He told me that it is a simple question but difficult to answer. He explained that he wanted and enjoyed sharing what he knows to the children. He wanted to change and improve

the education system of his country and raise the standard of education by forming highly qualified teachers to educate the children of Myanmar. Only through good and quality education can Myanmar progress and develop. That is why he wanted to be a teacher.

But he added that being a teacher in Myanmar is not an easy task. He explained that "There are not enough teachers for one school and not enough teaching aids. Education spending in Myanmar is very low. In developed countries, education spending is at the top. In Myanmar, education spending is still at the lowest. In addition, the education system is not good. This is a very frustrating topic for a teacher."

He shared that his greatest dream in life is "to make the world peaceful. I want everyone in the world to enjoy fully their human rights." But sadly, the political crisis in Myanmar is delaying the dreams of many young people including Saya Zenry. He added that the crisis has torn families apart. Some have died. Some were arrested. Some had to flee to liberated and safe areas. He lamented that "the army arrested many young men out of suspicion. Living conditions also become very stressful. I just want to leave Myanmar."

Saya Zenry like so many young people want to leave the country—to escape and to fulfill their dreams. But not all young people can find the chance or opportunity to leave the country. He is a bright young person wanting to bring change to his country by being a teacher. Let us continue to pray for him, for Myanmar and support the young people here.

"Good morning Saya!" is probably most what his students miss and want to greet him with again every single morning. 

Columban Fr. Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar (formerly Burma).

A Listening and Discerning Church

The Synodal Path

By Fr. Tom O'Reilly

We are familiar with adversarial debate in our government systems. The government is expected to present policies and pursue its agenda with vigorous determination. The role of the opposition is to expose with equal vigor the flaws in the government's positions and present alternatives. One enters negotiations to promote and defend positions, often having red lines beyond which one is unwilling to go. The whole process is driven by robust debate which usually produces winners and losers.

The synodal process is very different. We embark on a journey, seeking together the way forward for the Church. We speak and listen with the conviction that each one has something to contribute to the search and something to learn from others. We share openly and honestly, not ideas or theories, but our lived experience of Church life and mission – the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the successes and failures. We do this in the context of a global pandemic crisis which has exposed and amplified fault lines running through humanity and is challenging all to seek new ways of living together. Reflecting together on our experiences, we hope to discover processes which help the Church live in communion, achieve participation, and open itself to mission.

Attentive listening is more important than speaking. Pope Francis speaks of the “dynamism of mutual listening” which drives the synodal process. We listen to one another in the Church, including

those on the margins and those who have drifted away from the Church. We listen to voices outside the Church, paying special attention to the cry of the poor and excluded ones in our world and the cry of the exploited earth. Ultimately, all our listening leads to discernment, a sifting through what we are hearing to detect the voice of the Spirit indicating the way forward. This calls for periods of silent reflection and prayer. With the help of the Spirit, we hope for consensus or a harmony in which diversity is not divisive but enriching as we respond to our common baptismal call to be missionary disciples of Jesus.

We embark on a journey, seeking together the way forward for the Church. We speak and listen with the conviction that each one has something to contribute to the search and something to learn from others.

As we reflect together on our lived experiences at a time of change, we listen to the living Word of God in the context of the Church's faith tradition. In recent talks on the synodal process, Pope Francis has been reflecting on the Acts of the Apostles which he calls “the first and most important manual of ecclesiology.” In the story of Acts we get many glimpses of the early Church striving to remain open to the guidance of the Spirit in its internal life

and external mission. A good example is the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), the event which for centuries is taken as the model for synods celebrated by the Church.

The predominantly Jewish Church was at a major crossroads with the influx of large numbers of non-Jews. Some argued that Gentiles in becoming Christians must adopt Jewish laws and practices. Others insisted this was not necessary. The question gave rise to “no small dissension and debate.” (Acts 15:2) The breakthrough came when the participants in the Council shifted from an argumentative to a listening mode. They listened to Peter sharing his experience in receiving the Gentile centurion Cornelius into the Church (see Acts 10-11). Peter had been very reluctant to do anything contrary to strict adherence to Jewish ritual regulations. He needed a vision from God and the prompting of the Holy Spirit to change his mind. He was also “converted” by listening to Cornelius' experience of God. Only then did he share the Good News of Jesus with him. It became increasingly clear to Peter that the Spirit was at work in the lives of Cornelius and his household. Peter's role was to confirm what the Spirit was doing. He learned by listening that Jews and Gentiles are saved by the gift of the same Spirit, rather than any law, and this was the message he shared with the Council of Jerusalem. After Peter finished speaking, the meeting remained silent and listened to Paul and Barnabas sharing their experience of what God was doing in their Gentile mission.



James, the local leader in the Jerusalem church, pointed out that the experiences shared gave a deeper insight into what is said in the Word of God (Acts 15:15-18). He then went on to propose a way forward with which the whole assembly concurred. They reached a consensus which “seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). The decision was to press on with mission among Gentiles without imposing Jewish laws on them. Steps were also taken to foster common life between Jewish and Gentile Christians, while respecting their diverse cultures. Mission and communion go hand-in-hand.

The aim of the present Synod is to foster and develop the Church’s synodal nature – the people of God walking in communion to pursue a common mission through the participation of all. If this is to come about, we must heed the advice in the Book of Revelation: “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” (Rev 2:7) 

Columban Fr. Tom O’Reilly has served in Pakistan, Ireland and Britain. He holds a degree in scripture studies from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, and he has lectured in St. Columban’s Seminary, Navan, and in the Kimmage Mission Institute in Dublin.

The Synodal Process

Resources for the entire synodal process:

<https://www.synod.va/en/resources.html>

This includes an explanation of the Roadmap for the Diocesan Phase; the Preparatory Document; Tools for Facilitating the Synodal Consultation; Prayers for the Synodal Process; Explanation of the Logo and the *Vademecum* or Handbook for the Synod on Synodality.

Meet Two Columban Scholars!

Oscar Romero Program Scholarship

The Missionary Society of St. Columban would like to introduce two scholars at the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Illinois, who are recipients of the Columban scholarship for the Oscar Romero Program. We present their stories, in their words.

By Gabriela Bográn

I am 27 years old and studied at the CTU from 2018 through the end of 2021. I was born and raised in a Latina Catholic household in San Antonio, Texas. In my free time, I enjoy reading, writing, and baking with my secret ingredient: butter! I grew up with both of my parents' support, and I am the oldest of three siblings. When I was in high school, I realized I wanted to grow within my Catholic faith beyond my childhood understanding of it. So, for my undergraduate degree, I decided to attend the University of the Incarnate Word and double major in English and Religious Studies. It was during the last year of my studies that I decided to pursue a further education in theology. Hence, I made the decision to attend Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. It was at this school that I would major in ethics and minor in spirituality. I was very fortunate to receive a scholarship from the Missionary Society of St. Columban, and I am very thankful for their help.

My hopes for the future are to become more involved in my Catholic faith in the workforce. Originally, my plan was to pursue a career in academia as a theology professor. I am still very interested in that career but I feel that sometimes the plans we have do not align with God's plans for us. Finding

work was difficult after graduation, especially during a pandemic. However, with the help of my spiritual director, Sr. Judy Scheffler SSND, she was able to offer me an opportunity to apply for CPE training in 2022. I am thankful for this opportunity and should I be accepted, I will be able to study and eventually become certified to practice in hospitals.

My biggest challenges while studying at CTU were external distractions. As I was studying in school, I was plagued by many distractions such as financial distress and family emergencies. Both of these stresses made me lose focus and increased my anxiety to the point that it made me wonder if I should even finish my degree. However, no matter what decision I made, it would not solve my problems. Yet, I couldn't help but worry over them. Eventually, I was able to refocus and made the conscious determination that if I was going to succeed, I had to put these distractions aside.

My studies have reaffirmed my faith and my views of the church. They showed me that as time moves forward, so must the church. Of course, we must respect and obey the words of God, but as time progresses, so the church must do so as well. For how can we call ourselves the universal faith if we ignore the cries of our brothers and sisters around the world? My faith guides me, as a lay person, to help others and to acknowledge the new issues the world was not facing two thousand years ago. My faith urges me to speak out against the injustices that harm our neighbors of different cultures, ethnicities,

economic backgrounds, sexualities, etc. My studies have taught me not only to listen to their cries but also to stand by them and help them bear their cross.

Reading, baking, and spending time with my friends and family brings me joy. When I read, it allows me to relax and become engrossed in another world. When I bake, it eases away my stress and turns it into tasty treats. Plus, you can never have too much butter. When I spend time with family and friends, we laugh, yell, debate, joke and just become loud altogether; we are a loving and loud bunch. They are the most important people in my life, and I wouldn't have them any other way.

From what I understand, synodality is "the decision to journey together." Pope Francis has called on all of us, both lay and ordained, to "engage in communication and dialogue, to better understand our call to holiness and to feel the responsibility to participate in the life of the Church." As we faced the pandemic, it was one of the most emotionally and spiritually draining points in our lives. How we will persevere through it and as we hope to one day reach the end of it, depends on how we as a community communicate and respond. We cannot respond with fear-mongering and blame. Rather, as both lay and ordained Catholics, we must respond with compassion and understanding.

An opportunity for Hispanics in today's church is through the youth. The Hispanic youth are rising in numbers and therefore the Catholic Churches in the U.S. must place their focus on them. They are the future of the Catholic Church and how they participate in their faith is vital to it.



GABRIELA BOGRÁN



MANUEL GUEREÑA

However, this will also be a challenge to the church. If the church is to take this opportunity, they must truly listen and participate with the youth. They cannot just listen and not act. The Hispanic youth are the future as well as the progress of the church in the 21st century. My hope is that the Hispanic youth, both lay and ordained, will make a positive impact for the betterment of the church.

By Manuel Guereña

I'm 36 years old, and since 2018 I have been doing the M.A. Hispanic Theology and Ministry at Catholic Theological Union. I live in Mexico after spending 13 years in the Chicago area. I grew up moving from different cities, so I never lived where I was born. I remember my childhood moving all the time, being the new kid all the time. I did experience being an alien in my home country.

I didn't grow up as Catholic, but when I was a teenager, I had an encounter with Jesus at a charismatic youth group. That experience changed my life, and a few months later, in the summer of 1999, I received the

sacrament of Christian initiation and started to live a completely new life. In 2006 I moved to the United States with a bag full of dreams, but this new land was challenging. I didn't know the culture, the language, the traditions, and even the religion looked very different. My surprise was more evident when I tried to integrate myself into the Latin@ community; even Mexicans were other than I grew up within Mexico. It took me several years to just begin to understand the diversity, multiculturalism, multigenerationality, and multireligiosity present in the Latin@ community in the United States.

However, when I had the opportunity to start at CTU since the first class, everything made sense. Without a doubt, if you have the chance to study at CTU, your vision will change like what happened to me. One of my biggest fears was my limitation with the language. English is my second language, but I remember speaking Spanglish in my daily life, not English, not Spanish, but both. One of the first classes that I took

with professor Dr. Carmen Nanko Fernandez was precisely "Reading the Bible in Spanglish." This class blew my mind to realize that Spanglish is used regularly by the Latin@ community as a bridge that connects two worlds. The kids of the first generation of immigrants become the natural interpreters of their parents at a very young age. Latin@s in the U.S. live in two different worlds and are not fully belonging to any of those. This was true for me for thirteen years. Living in the United States as an immigrant, I sometimes felt exiled. Now I have almost three years without the possibility to return to my home, the place where I lived for a longer time in my life, sometimes I felt again that I'm writing from a second form of exile. Thanks to the opportunity to study Latin@ theologian, I learn many skills for the mission that can be applied in any part of the world. We Christians are all immigrants when we claim to go to spend eternity with God. I thank the Missionary Society of St. Columban to help me to cover the expenses of my education at CTU. You make it possible for me. ☩



I Am Weak

Meet Mr. Wakita

By Fr. Barry Cairns

There are some incidents in life, sometimes trivial, that make a deep impression. Here is one that stays forever vivid in my memory. The following scene happened 36 years ago, and the details are with me as if they happened yesterday.

It was early in the new year of 1986 in Chigasaki Church in the Yokohama Diocese of Japan. I was parish assistant and chaplain to the men's group. We were having a New Year party during which a new president of the group would be elected for a one year term.

To my surprise (and initial dismay) the men elected the oldest man in the group. He was Paul Toro Wakita. He was called upon to say a few words. This is what he said: "Thank you for electing me. I give thanks to the grace of God and my wife that I am a Christian. Since my baptism, God has been at work in me. For example – I now strongly believe that it is vital for a

follower of Jesus to acknowledge one's own human weakness. But that is not easy especially for we older Japanese.

Take me as an example. I was born in the southern city of Kumamoto, and my family was connected to the Hosokawa daimyo family. My pre-war schooling followed the Imperial

...to be a true follower of Jesus, the first step, and in the many steps later, we need to acknowledge our human frailty.

Rescript on Education. We were trained in the very Spartan atmosphere of bushido (the way of the warrior). To acknowledge that one was weak was unthinkable, almost un-patriotic! Rather, strength, power and endurance were emphasized. During the war, I was in the navy and lived this code.

After the war I married and later was baptized. But you see my problem! I had this deeply embedded emphasis on doing things with my own strength. But as I said, God has been at work in me. The older I get the more I am convinced that to be a true follower of Jesus, the first step, and in the many steps later, we need to acknowledge our human frailty. I need to say to myself, again and again: 'I am weak.' This takes courage. The more we acknowledge our powerlessness the closer we get to Christ who gives us strength in weakness! And so, with that in mind I accept and thank you for your nomination of me as your leader."

As often happens in a sharing like this, there was a pregnant moment of silence followed by enthusiastic applause. We were all touched. I still am! 

Columban Fr. Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.



LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

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*One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and
He will repay him for his good deed. Proverbs 19:17*

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Columban lay missionary Noh Hyein, better known as Anna (pronounced En-na), a teacher by profession, lives and works in the Philippines. After getting to know the women in her parish, and realizing how desperately poor they were, Anna, with the help of Columban benefactors, launched a candle making livelihood project called “Light the Life.” The women make candles and earn income for their families. The program also helps in the holistic development of the women, making them value their own self-worth. The women in the program make candles that light the homes of others, but they are lighting their own paths as well.

Contact us to learn about the many different ways you can give to the Missionary Society of St. Columban.



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The Wheel Is Turning

Round and Round

By Fr. Frank Hoare

Western foreign missionaries beginning with the Marist Fathers, have nourished the Catholic faith in Fiji since 1844. This era is almost finished. There are no Columban seminarians from the West right now; our seminarians are from former mission receiving countries.

But we are blessed that the young Catholic Church of Fiji where Columbans have worked for decades is now a mission sending Church. Although there are only about 80,000 Catholics in Fiji, there are now nine Pacifican Columban priests, eight seminarians and five lay missionaries on mission in different parts of the world. Those who were the subjects of mission are now the missionaries. The wheel of time is turning full circle.

But before the sands of time obliterate the footsteps of those who went before, it is appropriate to remember the pioneers and those who followed, and celebrate the legacy they left. Theirs is a legacy of diverse mission service and a tradition of relating closely with the people to whom they are sent.

The Pioneer Group

The first group of thirteen Columbans who arrived in 1952 were faced with many different challenges—climate, geography, underdevelopment and poverty, and a still-colonized multicultural country. They immersed themselves in the lives of the people—learning Fijian and Hindi at a time



when there were no language schools, and adjusting to the style and rhythm of the cultures and the people. This was a key that facilitated their efforts in the various ministries they were given or took on as the need arose.

The Columbans were very impressed by the indigenous Fijian people—their friendliness, ready smile, fine physique and noble appearance, hospitality, politeness, care for guests, their communal life and willingness to take life as it came. Fijian ceremonial and the solemn silence that accompanied it were impressive. Imposing, too, was the Fijian *bure* (house) with massive posts and beams lashed together with strong twine made from coconut hair. A few Columban missionaries remarked on the sure-footedness of the local horses which they rode from village to village over mountain passes and slippery mud and rock.

The young Caucasian priests marveled at the multi-racial congregations in the towns. They were

not put off by buses without windows, the dusty bus journeys and the relaxed approach to time. They were surprised at what an essential piece of equipment for school children the cane knife was—for cutting grass, chopping briars and branches and even peeling fingernails.

The Columban missionaries enjoyed the Fijian feasts at Christmas, Easter and for communal celebrations, with the mounds of food cooked in earth ovens followed by *meke* (dance) performances. The young missionaries themselves liked to challenge each other to climb a coconut tree or have a horse race upon arrival at a village. They also got great fun out of organizing a sports day, with small prizes for winners in the villages.

Responding to the Challenges

Columban missionary work in Fiji has developed and changed over the years since 1952. The early Columban missionaries established new parishes and schools. They opened and taught in a secondary school. Later they

became involved in the education of teachers, catechists, and seminarians for Pacific dioceses.

From early on they were concerned with the evangelization of non-Christians in Fiji. After the Vatican Council they saw the need of work for justice, peace and safeguarding the environment. Fiji has suffered four military coups, and Columban missionaries responded to them by working for reconciliation through intercultural and interfaith dialogue. They encouraged diocesan seminarians

and religious to be partners in this work for peace.

The Columbans also empowered the laity to be active Christians in small communities by listening to the Word of God, sharing faith and engaging in works of mercy. In recent decades they invited local young men to join the Society as missionary priests. They also welcomed young lay people to join them for some years on overseas mission.

Young Pacifican Columbans who now take up the missionary flame can

be proud of the missionary inheritance and training they have received. They are aware of the Columban tradition - learning language, respecting cultures, making friends with the people to whom they are sent and working with them for the Reign of God by resisting all kinds of oppression. The Pacifican Columbans will add to this tradition the richness of their own gifts as the wheel of time moves on. 

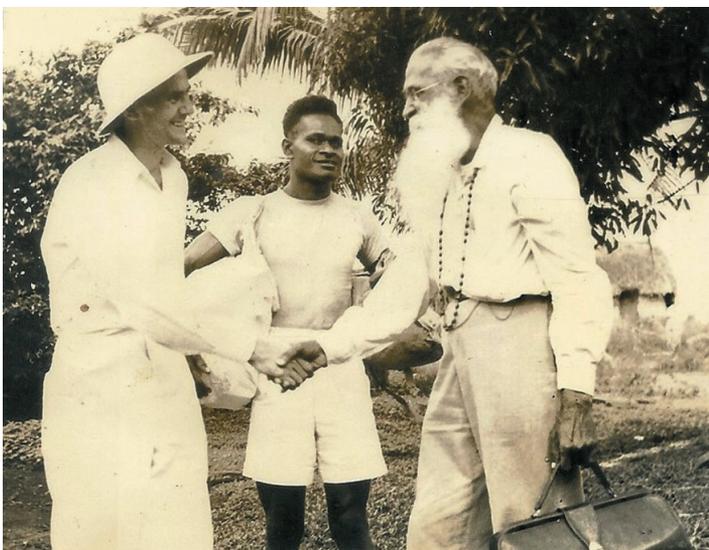
Columban Fr. Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.



Bishop Foley with Columban pioneer group



Fr. Dermot Hurley with Queen Elizabeth II



Fr. John Doyle with two parishioners



Fr. Arthur Tierney

Missionaries Are Human

Joy and Surprise

By Fr. Frank Hoare



Thirteen young Columban priests arrived in a hot, humid and hurricane-ravaged Suva, the capital of Fiji, more than 70 years ago on February 22, 1952. They were given a very impressive and traditional Fijian welcome. A few days later they were packed on a bus and sent on the six-hour journey to a town called Ba to begin learning the local languages. Fr. Martin Dobey remembered the enthusiasm. “We had a great journey. We sang on the bus all the way around...I myself got bus sickness. To make things worse my hat flew off, and I had to stop the bus to go back and collect it.”

Language

Foreign languages are a mine field. Fr. Dermot Hurley, the pastor Ba Parish, had to organize a Mass for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in the middle of 1953. He chose Fr. P.J. Kelly, who was considered the expert, to say the Mass in Fijian. Fr. Dermot

The cow got out one day and Fr Paddy demanded, in English, from a little girl to know who was responsible. The little girl said “Ko yau, saka” (it was I, Sir). “Then you tell Ko yau that I want to see him,” replied Paddy.

recalled, “He did a very good job. But when it came to the last words of his sermon they went something like this: ‘So then let us rejoice and be happy on this wonderful day, this glorious and joyful day, the day of the burial of our queen.’ The word for coronation in Fijian is ‘veibuli’ but P.J. said ‘veibulu’ which is Fijian for burial. The old catechist Valerio had a big laugh when he recounted the story to me...”

Language learning was particularly difficult for older missionaries who

arrived later. Fr. Paddy Laffan, a former missionary to China who arrived in Fiji in 1960 at the age of 62 years, was in the Yasawa Islands trying to learn Fijian in 1961. He found it difficult there without milk, so he bought a cow and kept it in a fenced enclosure. The cow got out one day and Fr. Paddy demanded, in English, from a little girl to know who was responsible. The little girl said “Ko yau, saka” (it was I, Sir). “Then you tell Ko yau that I want to see him,” replied Paddy.

Culture

Figuring out and adapting to a new culture was important too. Fr. John Doyle was appointed parish priest of a rural Fijian parish even though he had been studying the Hindi, not Fijian, language. “Nobody wanted to see the two assistant priests who had spent six months learning Fijian; they wanted to see the boss. For me it was a blessing in a way. Very early on, an old man came up to me and spoke for half an

hour. I asked Fr. J.J. O’Loughlin, who was listening, what he had said and J.J. told me in one sentence. “But that man has been talking for half an hour,” I said. “Yes, but he had to get himself settled,” answered Fr. J.J. Apparently, he had prepared his approach very carefully. His request only came in the last sentence. That was a great lesson in Fijian culture for me. If, when a Fijian man walks in the door, you ask him before he even sits down what he wants, you kill him dead. He has worked out in his mind how he is going to approach this problem so as to make the request as painless, diplomatic and gracious as possible. Fijians can teach us lessons in graciousness and tact, especially in their Fijian ceremonies and in their requests.

Fr. John later organized his parishioners to build a school dormitory. “We would load the timber on a truck once we reached the road. The Indian driver would sometimes complain about the weight of the timber being loaded on the truck. Then you would hear some smarty-pants say, *Me moku o Mitau* [Let’s beat up the driver]. The driver would be sufficiently intimidated then to proceed. Going up the hill to our location the truck would rear up with the excess weight of the long planks. Three or four youths would sit on the *bonnet* (front hood) of the truck to

Missionary experience keeps you humble. It is also a great teacher. St. Columban, missionary to Europe almost 1400 years ago and patron of the Missionary Society of St Columban said, “A life unlike your own can be your teacher.”

keep the front wheels on the ground. It was dangerous.” This was another aspect of Fijian culture.

Like most Columban missionaries in Fiji, Fr. Vince McCarthy came from an individualist culture with a democratic and egalitarian outlook. A Fijian man came to speak to him one day while he was sitting on a chair on the veranda of Nabala presbytery. Fr. Vince offered him another chair but, in normal Fijian style, the visitor sat on the floor. Fr. Vince repeatedly asked him to sit opposite him on the chair but to no effect. Finally he went over to his visitor and physically lifted him into the chair! When telling the story later, Fr. Vince winced as he said, “I could have satisfied my American democratic instincts by just sitting on the floor myself!”

Creative Responses to Frustrations

One source of frustration for the

Columbans in the early years was the Bishop as Fr. Martin Dobey recalled. “He issued a lot of petty edicts about our daily lives. You couldn’t leave your parish without his permission or spend one night outside your parish without his permission. One day he was sitting in the little sitting room in Lautoka parish in bad form when Fr. Arthur Tierney (from a parish miles away) comes roaring into the yard on his motorbike and stops within a half-inch of the step of the back door. He gets off with great flair. Bishop Foley looks up at him coldly and says, “Father, what are you doing out of your parish today?” “Oh, I’ve just come down for confession, my Lord.” Bishop Foley was completely nonplussed. He couldn’t reply. It might or might not be true. So he went into his room and sulked for four hours.

Fr. Arthur and the Bishop had a further run-in at another time. “He [the Bishop] received complaints about Fr. Arthur being downtown in Suva city all the time and not in his parish of Samabula. So he issued orders to Fr. Arthur not to go into Suva without his permission. Half an hour later the Bishop gets a call from Fr. Arthur for permission to get groceries from Morris Hedstron. Half an hour after that, he received a call for permission to buy some vegetables from the market. Fr. Arthur made five or six of these calls and Bishop Foley at last said, ‘Go to hell!’ which was the end of that edict.”

Missionary experience keeps you humble. It is also a great teacher. St. Columban, missionary to Europe almost 1400 years ago and patron of the Missionary Society of St Columban said, “A life unlike your own can be your teacher.” If the challenges and frustrations sometimes weigh you down the joys, surprises and fun compensate for them. 



Fr. Hoare with the current Columban formation group

Columban Fr. Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.



Two Communities

One Church

By Fr. Kevin O'Neill

The Catholic Church in China today continues to be a vibrant witness to God's love. Whether in large cities or rural villages, Catholics of all ages are active in their local Church communities spread across the 146 Dioceses in China.

The Catholic population of approximately nine million is tiny compared with the total population of 1.4 billion. The city of Wuhan where I lived has a population of 12 million people with only three Catholic churches, but in the rural areas, it is quite common that a whole village is Catholic.

Catholics rise at about 5:30 a.m., making their way from their homes through the narrow alleyways of their village to the church for morning

Parishes in China have various activities for their parishioners, such as Bible study or prayer groups.

prayers, which are chanted and often led by one of the lay leaders in the parish. After about 30 minutes, everyone returns home for breakfast before the day's work begins – parents work in the family plot of land, tilling the soil, planting or harvesting, depending on the season, and the children go to school. The elderly folk stay at home taking care of the infants.

After a day's work, everyone returns home for their evening meal, and the day finishes with Mass in the parish church a about 8:00 p.m. Sundays are a day of rest where more time is spent around the church catching up with each other.

Within the Catholic Church in China, there are two communities. One is commonly known as the “open Church community,” and the other as the “underground Church community.” Both communities belong to the universal Church, and both are loyal to the Pope.

In the cities, Catholics gather for Mass on Sundays, with many having to travel on crowded buses and trains for over an hour to get to their parish church, but there are daily Masses for those who live close to the church and wish to attend Mass during the week.

City parishes also have Masses for the foreign Catholic community. In Wuhan, the foreign community is made up mainly of university students from Africa and Asia. Every Sunday, approximately 200, mostly university students, gather for the Mass in English.

Parishes in China have various activities for their parishioners, such as Bible study or prayer groups, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (ROA) and social outreach groups to assist the poor. Dioceses have pastoral centres for adult formation, and many have retreat centers. Dioceses and religious congregations of Sisters also run hospitals and clinics, aged care centers, orphanages, centers for people with special needs and the homeless, as well as services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Columban missionaries first went to China in 1920, but in the wake of the 1949 revolution, the ruling Communist Party expelled all missionaries, with the last ones leaving in 1954. Columbans were able to return to China in the late 1980s with some teaching English at universities. Today, they continue to facilitate the placement of English teachers in universities across China through the Association for International Teaching, Educational and Curriculum Exchange (AITECE) organization, which the Columbans founded along with others in Hong Kong.

Columbans also work with people with special needs, teach in seminaries, assist with the ongoing formation of Sisters and priests, run retreats and help coordinate programs for training in spiritual direction and hospital chaplaincy. Through the generous donations of our benefactors, the Columban Mission Society is also able to offer scholarships for priests, Sisters and laypeople to study in China or abroad.

Within the Catholic Church in China, there are two communities. One is commonly known as the “open Church community,” and the other as the “underground Church community.” Both communities belong to the universal Church, and both are loyal to the Pope.

Why are there two communities in the Catholic Church in China? When the Communist Party came



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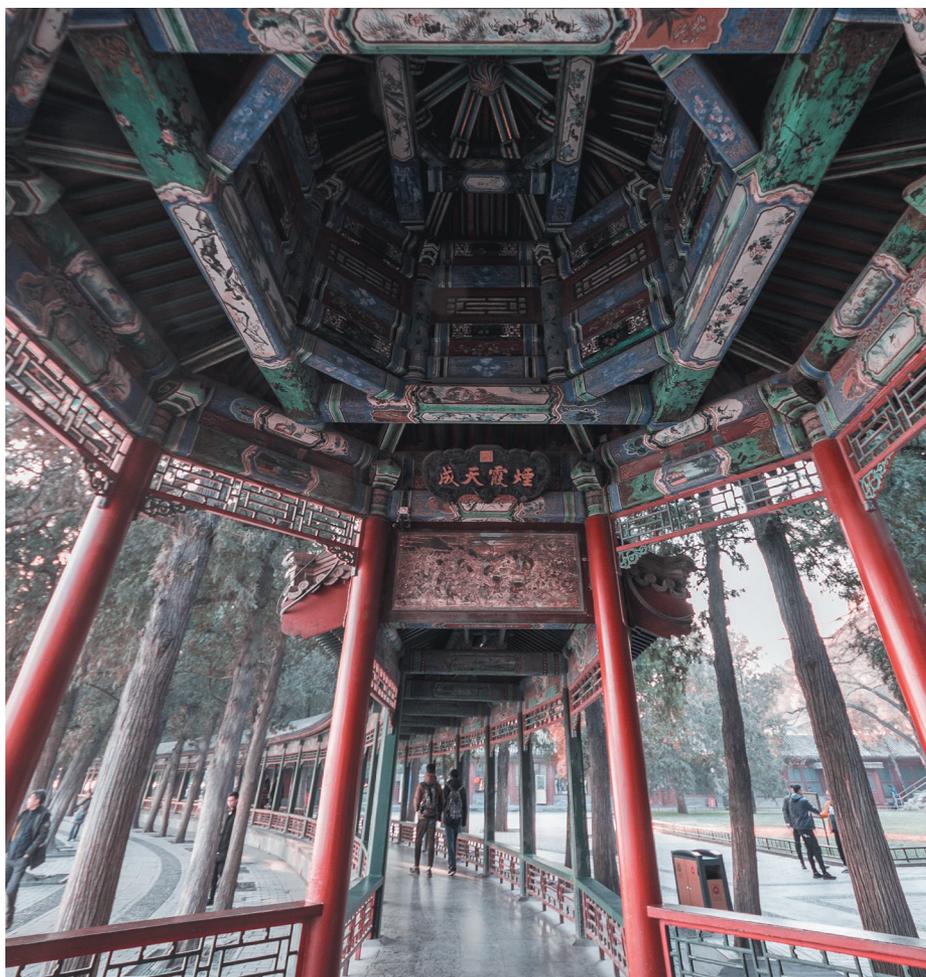
to power in China in 1949 it wanted all religions to be supervised by the Government. The Religious Affairs Bureau was set up and organizations within the Bureau supervised Christianity (Catholic and Protestant), Buddhism, Taoism and Islam. In 1957, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was set up to supervise the Catholic Church.

As the years went by, some bishops chose to work with the Catholic Patriotic Association to give the Church a public face, while others opted to steer clear of Government supervision in a search for religious freedom. The part of the Church that chose to work with government became known as the open Church or official or registered Church. The part that chose not to work with the association and not register with the government, became known as the underground, unofficial or unregistered Church.

In 2007, Pope Benedict wrote a letter to the Catholics in China. He said there is one Catholic Church in China, and it has two communities. While acknowledging the history that has led to their being two communities, Pope Benedict encouraged Catholics in China to journey on a path of reconciliation.

On several occasions, the young adults of a particular diocese invited me to gather with them. They belong to both the open and underground communities. On Sunday mornings, they gather for Mass with their parents in their respective communities and then on Sunday evenings come together at the cathedral of the open Church community for their weekly meeting.

In recent years, people in one rural Catholic village that has both



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communities decided to come together to build a new church, which is used by both communities. Currently, both communities have their Masses in the new church, however, at different times. The hope among some in the village is that the two will one day gather together for Mass.

While any reconciliation between groups of people can take

time, given their different histories and experiences, we pray that the Spirit will continue to guide the Catholics in China on the path of reconciliation. 

Columban Fr. Kevin O'Neill is a member of the Peace, Ecology & Justice Office, Columban Mission Center Essendon, Australia.



Of Such Legends Are Made

Santo Nino

By Fr. Jim Mulrone

Carving out of wood with little artistic merit, yet adorned in robes of kingly magnificence, the Santo Nino is a source of religious myth and fable dating back to the sowing of the first seeds of Christianity in Philippine soil just half a millennium ago.

Celebrated in festival and dance, the small statue of the kingly boy Jesus has become a symbol of the Christian faith opening its arms to embrace the disparate cultural and language groups that populate the Pearl of the Orient Seas and an expression of the bonds that connect the Christian people with their Muslim sisters and brothers.

Housed in Cebu behind tight security for the past 400 years of its turbulent existence in the Basilica Menor del Santo Nino, the Santo Nino has an annual outing through the streets of its hometown on the third Sunday of January.

In pre-COVID times, the city played host to crowds from across the country jamming the thoroughfares to catch a glimpse and a blessing, as well as make merry in the conviviality of a major fiesta. The festival honors the Santo Nino with the centuries-old dance known as the Sinulog. It is performed to a haunting drumbeat so foreign to the modern ear that keeping the rhythm of its one-step forward, half a step backwards challenges even the most dexterous of stalwarts.

However, while the dance may be soaked in tradition, the statue's fame peppered with earnest supplication and drenched with care and respect, the

popularity of its annual celebration is relatively new. Seized upon in the 1980s by the then-minister for Sports and Youth Development, David S. Odilao Jr., it was slated as a good expression of Cebu's cultural history. Odilao gathered a group of young people to dance the Sinulog around the basilica.

As the boy Jesus clothed like a king, the Santo Nino stands as a symbol of the transition from the religion of the natural world to Christianity. Shrouded in myth and fable, historians mostly believe it was presented by the Portuguese explorer sailing under the flag of Spain in 1521, Ferdinand Magellan, to Hara Amihan, later known as Queen Juana, consort to Cebu's raja, Humabon, as a baptismal gift.

Magellan's records suggest that about 800 people received the sacrament of baptism between his arrival on April 7 and his death three weeks later, which resulted from an altercation with the raja of Mactan, Lapu-lapu, on April 27.

The remnants of Magellan's crew managed to get back to Spain, but it was another 44 years before the Spanish returned to Philippine shores. A contingent of conquistadors, akin to pirates in government uniform, arrived on April 28, 1565, under the command of Miguel Lopez de Legaspi.

In the marauders' usual friendly manner, they sprayed the village with cannon fire from their ships and later one of them, Juan Camus, discovered the statue of the Santo Nino stacked in a box along with several other idols when searching the smoldering

ruins. Historians claim that during the intervening 44 years the people continued to dance their traditional Sinulog, no longer in honor of their former idols, but in recognition of the Santo Nino.

Popular mythology illustrates the determination of the Filipino people to claim the Santo Nino as their own. It is said that on two occasions it was shipped to Spain as a present for the king. However, when the box was opened in Madrid, it had miraculously fled and reappeared in its home in Cebu.

Another attempt was made to present it to the pope, this time under lock and key, but once again, it hot-footed its way back and was safely ensconced in its rightful home when Vatican officials received the package.

Other legends attributed the statue's existence to a deal done with Chinese traders by Spanish Franciscans, but a more attractive one claims that a log of wood was fished out of the water by a hapless fisherman. Locals discovered that the log could dispel birds ravaging their crops, make it rain and increase fishing hauls, so they carved it into the Santo Nino.

Such stories notwithstanding, today the Sinulog is danced in churches as a symbol of religious linkage and heritage. Those privileged to carry a replica of the statue in procession often dress as a Muslim woman to illustrate the interreligious relationship between Christianity and Islam. ❏

Columban Fr. Jim Mulrone lives and works in Australia.

In Love We Grow

Radiate God's Love

By Bernie Durangparang

St. Paul describes love as the highest of all the gifts (1Cor 13:1-13). Its qualities include patience and kindness. It is always ready to excuse, trust, hope and endure whatever comes. We know from experience that loving in the ways that St. Paul describes is not always easy to do, but something we have to practice. In fact, just as we are not born fluent in our language, we are also not automatically learned in the art of loving for both are acquired skills. On a very deep level, though, we know that to grow in love is the better way to live our lives, for in loving we become, we grow and mature, and our spirits expand, whereas not to love means that we become small, closed off to others, to life, and to God.

We experience different types of love—affection, friendship, romantic and charity—at different points in our lives. Since love is ultimately from God, each of these four aspects of love must also come from God, and bears great fruit when God is at the center of our lives and at the heart of our relationships. Perhaps the common element in each of these aspects of love is that they are other-centered. The focus is the care, respect, dignity and

tender reverence that we offer to the other person, or other people, whoever they may be.

“How did I show my love to you as my family?” I asked everyone of them. Three of my sons sent their answers through texts, probably because they are not comfortable expressing it to me personally. Still, I was touched by their answers.

One of them replied, “You are very supportive especially in our needs. You are a caring father. You trust us and teach us to be responsible. Sometimes I am stubborn, but still you love me. Thank you for being patient with me.” “Thank you very much for your love and care especially at the time when I was so sick,” was my wife’s reply. I was really touched by their answers.

I encourage my children to be responsible and remain respectful to each other. I joke with them at times, and they do the same with me. As a father I have to be balanced: reprimand them if needed and affirm their actions if they did good.

In the season of Advent and Christmas, we are reminded that it is God who loves us first and foremost. Love is a gift from God. Therefore, we should always remember that God’s greatest gift of love was Jesus, our

Savior. Jesus was born fully God and fully human, and taught us how to love by living with us on earth and setting an example.

Difficult times especially call for our love. God is asking us to be stewards of His creation; we are not here to exploit and destroy it. Jesus has taught us to love everyone, regardless of color or race. He even taught us to love our enemies. We are to welcome strangers into our homes, feed those who are hungry, clothe those who are bare, and give drinks to those who are thirsty. In trying times, Jesus especially challenges us to show His love to the vulnerable and the victims of injustices.

May we continue to share His love to our neighbors, most especially to those people whose families are deeply affected by this pandemic and other natural disasters. As Mother Theresa said, “Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.” May we continue to radiate God’s love to everyone. 

Bernie Durangparang has been working with the Columban missionaries in the Philippines since 1983, first as a working student, then in 1996 as Vocation and Mission Animator for Mindanao up to the present.



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Sunday in the Rain

Is This the New Normal?

By Fr. Patrick Colgan

Heavy rain began in Ba, Fiji, on the night of February 4 and continued right through Saturday and on/off on Sunday until about midday. The town was inundated. Somehow, we were able to celebrate Mass in the parish church at 7:30 a.m. on Sunday morning and even conducted two baptisms! I cancelled my other two scheduled Masses for that Sunday, knowing that both villages were impassable. Instead, a number of us went to visit our parishioners whom we knew were in three schools turned into emergency evacuation centers.

In one school, we had ten parishioners with their catechist from Nadruvu Village, who had chosen to keep selling their produce in the market on Saturday despite seeing the bad weather coming. Their weekly trip to the market is their main source of income, and with schools opening this week after a one-year hiatus, they were willing to take the risk, needing money for their children's school supplies, uniforms, etc. We had given these people tea and shelter in the basement of the presbytery on Saturday until the police opened an evacuation center, where we then brought them. The place was already full of Catholic people from a neighboring parish who had also chosen to keep selling their produce on Saturday at the market and then couldn't get home.

As we visited, we noticed that most were already leaving, because the government had ordered the clearing of all schools in preparation of resumption of classes and exams on Monday (this directive was changed later in the day, and schools remain closed because of the uncertain weather). The parishioners of Ba



Baptisms at Ba

seemed to have no money for transportation, so I took them to a house in Vunisamaloa (about four miles out of town), through two quite deep floods on the main road from Ba to Navala.

As regards the second school, there were about 40 people there from the village of Votua (well-known for flooding), to whom we lent a two-

I have had a number of Sundays like this recently in Ba, having to cancel Masses and Sacramental services, in favor of direct aid to flood evacuees.

burner stove, propane, and two cartons of cookies. They eventually cleared out at 2 p.m., going back home in a combination of boats and a large police truck. Another small group were sheltering at Namosau Methodist school to whom we donated food rations from our cupboards.

The situation in Votua village was, as usual, quite dire. There were

59 evacuees (14 families) sheltered at the primary school on Saturday night through to Sunday. By Sunday afternoon, the ground-level kindergarten was finally cleaned, and all the evacuees were able to go home. Luckily, power and water supply remained in most parts of Ba over the two days.

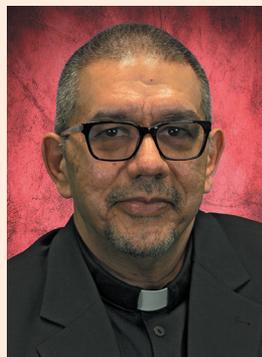
I have had a number of Sundays like this recently in Ba, having to cancel Masses and Sacramental services, in favor of direct aid to flood evacuees. It is challenging my idea of what a priest's "major" job in Sunday should be— say Mass, or get my hands wet and dirty helping others? Maybe there isn't a contradiction? I'm still trying to figure it out. The evacuees in the second school talked of how touched they were when the Hindu teachers there dropped their cleaning of classrooms in preparation for Monday, to start cooking food for their almost 100 "guests." Perhaps those teachers "did" Sunday in a way that was very pleasing to God – theirs and ours? ☩

Columban Fr. Patrick Colgan lives and works in Fiji.

Faces of Mission

As a child, my image of the faces of mission were predominantly priests who courageously ventured into unknown territories and established parishes, schools, hospitals and community centers. They engaged with the locals and learned the customs and language. Then there was a smattering of religious Sisters who taught in schools or worked as nurses in hospitals/clinics. At least, that is what I used to believe were the only faces of mission. Today, the faces of mission have expanded to include lay men and women and services beyond the traditional parish model.

One of the most impressive faces of mission I have encountered was a former Columban lay missionary from Korea, Columba Chang. I first met Columba in 1997 in Manila, Philippines. It was Mission Sunday, and she was to share her missionary vocation in one of the Masses. The Malate Church, which the Columbans have served since the 1929, holds about 1,000 people. It was filled on that day. During the Mass, Columba shared a conversation that she had with her parents while on vacation in Korea. Her parents expressed their great pride in her for being a lay missionary. However, they pointed out that she needs to retire from her mission, come home, get married and start a family. This was a common cultural expectation for women. Columba replied, "No! I cannot because I am already in love!" Surprised, her parents inquired, "With who? What is his name?" Columba firmly stated, "I am in love with the Filipino people! That is why I cannot come



FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Chris Saenz

home." The entire assembly in the church stood up and cheered for her. It was a remarkable affirmation of her love for them. I suddenly realized that I couldn't top that. When she walked out, I looked at her and jokingly said, "You are a politician! If you wanted to be mayor of Malate, you would be elected tonight!" She looked at me and said, "That's not me!" True, her sharing was humble sincerity that expressed her missionary vocation. Since then, whenever we encountered each other, we always laugh about that moment.



Columba had worked and lived in one of the poorest areas in the Philippines, Smokey Mountain. Smokey Mountain was Manila's largest dumpsite where the poorest of the poor made their livelihood by picking up garbage. Its name was coined from the smoke caused by the garbage. Later, Columba would work with AIDS patients in Manila. Years later, she switched her mission country to Myanmar but had to leave due to political unrest. After 30 years as a Columban Lay Missionary,

I always remember Columba for her missionary commitment to those she was sent to, and her great love for them. Columba showed that a lay missionary can be just as valuable as any priest and religious Sister.

Columba left the program to focus on her health in Korea. I always remember Columba for her missionary commitment to those she was sent to, and her great love for them. Columba showed that a lay missionary can be just as valuable as any priest and religious Sister. In this issue, we honor those like Columba who have answered the call to be a missionary be it ordained, religious or lay.



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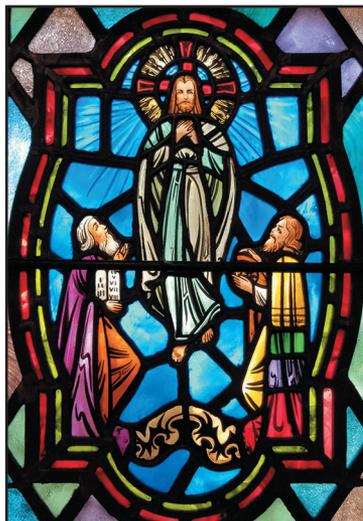
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