ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

2023

ANNUAL REPORT

AUSTRALIA

Front cover: Members of the Columban Regional Council of Oceania, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Maha Shawky, Columbans and co-workers in Australia.

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Regional Director of Oceania

Greetings everyone. My name is Fr Peter O'Neill. I was appointed as the Columban Regional Director of Oceania in November 2022. Our Region of Oceania consists of the three countries Australia, Fiji and New Zealand. I work with a team of four Regional Councillors whom I would like to thank for their generosity in accepting their new leadership roles.

Regional Director of Oceania, Fr Peter O'Neill | Vice Regional Director of Oceania/Councillor, Fr Felisiano Fatu | Regional Councillor, Fr Tom Rouse | Regional Councillor, Fr Euikyun Carlo Jung | Regional Councillor, Fr Patrick McInerney

In March 2020, Pope Francis announced the theme for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023 would be "*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*." Inspired by the Pope's invitation for the entire Church to reflect on this theme and journey together in synodality, around fifty Columban priests, students, lay missionaries, co-workers and Companions in Mission participated in our Columban Synod for the Region of Oceania which began in September last year and concluded in March this year. The core aim of our Synod was to come together to discern what the Spirit wants us to do in the Region of Oceania for the next five years and to foster transformative change through exploring our future aspirations and hopes.

This year we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Columbans in Fiji. We thank the people of Fiji for warmly welcoming many Columban priests, students, lay missionaries and priest associates to work collaboratively with them in the areas of parish ministry; education; interreligious dialogue; peace, ecology and justice. We thank our many Fijian co-workers and Columban Companions in Mission for their ongoing faithful and loyal support. At the annual Australasian Catholic Press Association Conference, we received awards for our Columban Art Calendar, The Far East magazine and the Columban Daily Prayer Book. We thank you, our Columban supporters, for purchasing our Calendar every year to help raise funds for Columban Mission. Through your generous donations we have provided funding to the Columbans in Pakistan to build 100 homes for the victims of the horrific floods in Pakistan and we continue to support Columban projects overseas providing a place of shelter for migrant workers and trafficked peoples,

education for children from impoverished homes and those escaping war and conflict as well as healthcare for the poor and marginalized. Archbishop Peter Comensoli granted the Columbans permission to visit parishes and promote The Far East magazine in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. We began this ministry in August last year. Throughout the year we have received around 260 new subscribers to The Far East magazine. During the year we continued to broaden our mission education and fundraising through social media. We published our new prayer book *Lord, Handle Me With Care* and Columban Fr Charles Rue's *Lenten and Season of Creation* educational resources. New articles appear daily on our Columban websites and face book pages sharing the stories of Columban missionaries who stand in solidarity with the poor and the exploited earth.

After long periods of isolation during the past two years due to COVID, in 2022 we returned to public gatherings in Australia and Fiji for our work in Interreligious Dialogue and Peace, Ecology and Justice (PEJ). It was good to meet people face-to-face again. It made us realise the importance of personal encounter. Several talks were given on interfaith to various audiences - clergy, teachers and schools. The Suva Youth Interreligious Dialogue Forum organised different activities, and gatherings of the Western Sydney Women's IntHERfaith Initiative were held once again. The Interfaith Commission of the Diocese of Parramatta, which we support, held its first meetings. Our PEJ office was invited to give presentations on *Laudato Si'.* Our Columban Season of Creation school competition received over 200 submissions from primary and secondary schools in Australia and Fiji. The students were invited to reflect on the Season of Creation theme *'Listen to the Voice of Creation'* and to share their reflections through art, writing or videos. The Region of Oceania sent a delegation to the United Nations Ocean's Conference that took place in Lisbon, Portugal in July 2022. The delegation brought faith-based Oceanian voices to negotiations and provided valuable opportunities for ongoing networking, advocacy and action.

We continue to be actively committed to fostering communities of safeguarding that recognise and uphold the dignity and rights of all children and adults at risk. In October last year, our Australia safeguarding audit indicated we have fully implemented or substantially progressed in the implementation of 96% of the indicators which are relevant to our operations. Let us continue to pray for peace in our world especially in Myanmar and Ukraine. May we be instruments of God's peace and love in our families and communities. May God bless you, our benefactors and all our loved ones.

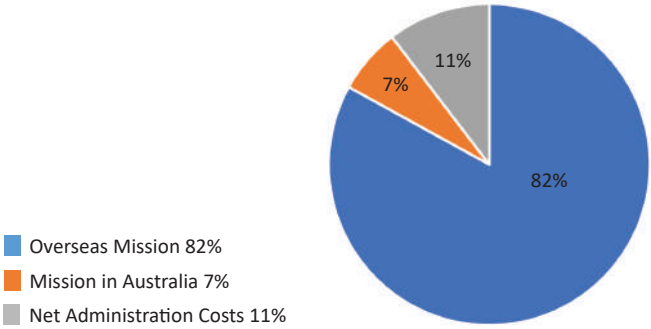
FR PETER O'NEILL
Regional Director of Oceania

Financial summary

During the year ended March 31, 2023, Columban benefactors donated $3,466,683 (2022: $1,871,282) to support the work of Columbans in Australia and overseas. The decrease in total donations received in 2023 can be attributed to a significant bequest revenue reduction. (According to the figures presented in the previous sentence there was an increase in total donations.) The 2023-year bequests comprised 68% (2022: 34%) of donation income.

The pie chart below provides a high-level breakdown of how donations received in the 2023 year were expended.

Application of donations received in 2023 year



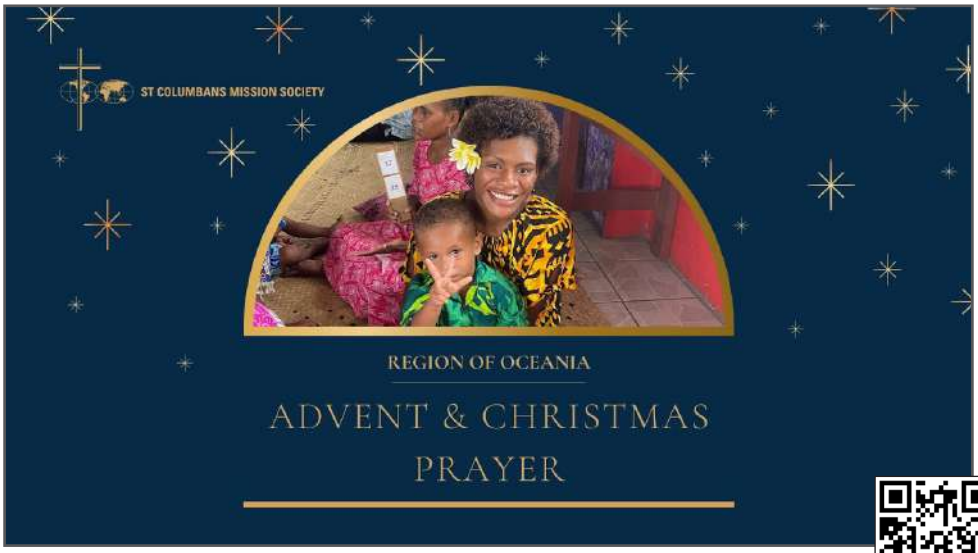
Overseas Mission Funds are remitted to the Society's General Council. The General Council allocates the funds received from Australia, Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, USA and South Korea to the overseas mission units that require financial support.

Mission in Australia expenditure covers the work of Columbans in Australia. Income earned by Columbans and any contributions made to the Society by Columbans is used to reduce Mission in Australia costs. Also included in the financial support is the work of Peace, Ecology and Justice, the Columban Centre for Christian Muslim Relations, the cost (net of subscription revenue) to publish The Far East magazine and the surplus from the sale of the 2023 Columban Art Calendar.

Net Administration Costs include the expenditure to administer the Society and its membership and the activities of the regional office located at Essendon in Victoria. Interest income has been allocated against this cost.

Thank you

We thank all Columban friends who generously supported us during the 2022/23 challenging year.



https://bit.ly/427DtEz

Your Columban Legacy - Gift in Will

St Columbans Mission Society has been able to work with the poor in many countries throughout Asia and South America because generous people had the vision to contribute to our work through a gift in their Will. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of all those who left a gift to the St Columbans Mission Society during the 2022/23 year - https://bit.ly/47zYnA9

Vocations

Missionary priests and lay missionaries are as needed today as ever they were in the past to bring Christ to the nations of the Earth. As Columban benefactors and friends, you can help promote vocations to the Columbans through your prayers, and by actively promoting vocations amongst young people - https://bit.ly/3II9so1

SCHOOL COMPETITION

2022 Columban School Competition flyer designed and distributed to schools encouraging them to participate.

https://bit.ly/3BXiGcb

Primary School students

https://bit.ly/3OFXoHp

Secondary School students

https://bit.ly/428KFjP

Columban Season of Creation School Competition: This was a new initiative, launched in the May PEJ ebulletin. Primary and secondary students were invited to reflect on the Season of Creation theme *'Listen to the Voice of Creation.'* Approximately 200 submissions were received from eight primary and four secondary schools from Victoria, NSW and Ba, Fiji. Letters were sent to all teachers from participating schools along with certificates of appreciation for all students. Winners received a certificate of award and prizes. The PEJ Office provided the content and materials for students and teachers and corresponded with participating schools throughout.

Winning students chat with Columban Fr Kevin O'Neill and Sr Caroline Vaitkunas.

One of the PEJ goals in the Strategic Plan for the Region of Oceania includes joining with people of faith to respond to issues. To this end, we are engaged with several networks where news and resources are shared, and relationships develop. Our participation provides the opportunity to share Columban concerns and experiences concerning PEJ. As a result, we receive invitations to provide articles for the Archdiocese of Melbourne website and give talks to groups.

In October 2022, Sr Caroline Vaitkunas rsm and Fr Kevin O'Neill gave a presentation on the Columban charism and *Laudato Si'* at a teacher's Professional Learning Day in Melbourne and in November, Sr Caroline gave a presentation to a parish on Pope Francis' Encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*: *On Care for Our Common Home.*

Following our involvement in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, COP15 which culminated in December 2022, we continue to raise awareness about biodiversity loss, climate change and environmental devastation in website articles and The Far East magazine. We are taking part with other Columbans in meetings with the international multi-faith *Faiths for Biodiversity* group whose aim is to translate the international framework into local contexts for advocacy and education.

Fr Peter O'Neill served as a member of the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) National Committee for three years until March 2023. He is ACRATH's representative on the Australian Government's Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme Agriculture Committee for seasonal workers coming to Australia from the Pacific and Timor-Leste. In this capacity, Peter wrote five submissions to the Government's Consultation's on various matters relating to the wellbeing of seasonal workers and attended several online discussions with government representatives.

As a member of the ACRATH Advocacy Team, Peter joined an online meeting with Minister Tony Burke to discuss the implementation of a National Labour Hire Licencing Scheme and the ratification of ILO Convention 189 Decent Work for Domestic Workers. Peter was present at the 2011 ILO Conference in Geneva when this Convention was approved.

As a member of the Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) Justice Committee, Peter helped to organise and facilitate the CRA 2022 National Justice Seminar *Now is the Time!* held in October.

ACRATH (WA) members, Carol Mitchell, Kathy Fagan, Sr Ann McGlinn and Sr Marie Therese Ryder with Regional Director of Oceania, Fr Peter O'Neill, before his talk titled *Human Trafficking in Asia*.

 Photo: Amanda Murthy

Peter is the Chairperson of the steering committee for the ACRATH and ACMRO (Australia Catholic Migrants & Refugees Office) national network *Parishes Providing Pastoral Care for Seasonal Workers*. Peter provided updates on the PALM Scheme at the network's quarterly online meetings.

In November 2022, Peter was the guest speaker at the ACMRO Conference in Canberra for Catholic Immigration Directors. He gave an overview on the PALM Scheme and ACRATH's advocacy work in this field.

Peter was one of the presenters at a Forced Marriage Workshop for the senior students at Corpus Christi Seminary, Archdiocese of Melbourne. He gave input on the forced marriage offences and penalties in the Crimes Legislation Amendment Act 2013 and the Canons applied to forced marriage in Canon Law.

The Columbans in Essendon continued to provide free accommodation for men seeking asylum through its network with the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project in Melbourne.

Fr Kevin O'Neill returned to his mission in China in March 2023. He was a valuable member of our PEJ Team for two years during the pandemic.

Columban Fr Kevin O'Neill's farewell at the Columban Mission Centre in Essendon.

Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations (CCCMR)

Consultation on IRD for the Synod of Bishops

On February 24, 2022, CCCMR held a consultation on interreligious dialogue for the Synod of Bishops. To make it genuinely interfaith, we invited a Rabbi and a Muslim scholar to share what they expected from Catholics in terms of attitudes and behaviours towards Jews and Muslims. It was inspiring to see Bishop Vincent Long and other Catholics listening attentively to the Jewish and Muslim guests. The interfaith dimension of this consultation was so ground-breaking that the event was widely reported in Columban, diocesan, national and international news, including the Synod's e-news.

Interfaith Commission

The most important interfaith development since the Centre moved to Blacktown four years ago is the establishment of the Interfaith Commission of the Diocese of Parramatta. Columban Fr Patrick McInerney is a mentor and consultant for the Commission and CCCMR is a great interfaith resource for them. The first meeting was held on April 9, 2022, and they have been meeting bi-monthly ever since. The members were officially commissioned by Bishop Vincent Long in a Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral on September 18, 2022. For media report see: https://bit.ly/3YxisD6

The members of the Interfaith Commission of the Diocese of Parramatta with Bishop Vincent Long (centre) and Columban Fr Patrick McInerney (right) at St Patrick's Cathedral on September 18, 2022.

Interfaith Iftar

On 20 April 2022, CCCMR and the Diocese of Parramatta together hosted the annual Multifaith Community Iftar Dinner. Fr Patrick McInerney welcomed all the guests and shared a Christian reflection on the meaning of Ramadan and Easter, highlighting the abundance of God's mercy. In his welcome address, Bishop Vincent Long explained the importance of interfaith for the ethnically diverse, multicultural and multifaith society of Western Sydney. Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammad, the Grand Mufti of Australia, spoke on the benefit that religion brings to humanity. For a report see: https://bit.ly/3OMKpRU

Talks on Interfaith

Fr Patrick McInerney has been giving talks on Islam, Christian-Muslim relations and interfaith in general to various audiences. On May 18, 2022, he addressed the clergy conference of the Diocese of Parramatta on the topic, "*Mission, Dialogue as part of Mission, and Synodality*". On May 24, he was one of a panel of three for the annual ACU/PISAI Rome Lecture. The topic was, "*Human fraternity and ecological conversion: Muslims and Christians in dialogue*". The video is available at: https://bit.ly/3OwAFfv

On May 26, he shared with the Mission Team of Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta on "*Mission, Interreligious Dialogue in Mission, and the work of CCCMR*". On June 22, he had a full day with the seminarians at the Holy Spirit Seminary, treating *"Tradition, Mission, Synodality"*. On November 3-4, he presented three workshops at the Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta's symposium, "*Catholic Education for All: Building a Culture of Dialogue"*. Clergy, teachers, and seminarians are all important collaborators for promoting interfaith at the local level in parishes and schools.

Shoah Memorial Service, by Fr Patrick McInerney

On May 31, 2022, Fr Patrick McInerney gave the keynote address at the Shoah Memorial Service arranged by the NSW Council of Christians and Jews. It was an extraordinary privilege, challenge and responsibility. It was the first time in many years that a Christian had been invited to give the address. It was a very daunting task. On previous occasions, survivors of the Shoah and children of survivors had spoken. Knowing he could not

Columban Fr Patrick McInerney

match them; Fr Patrick told his own story of conversion to Jewish-Christian relations. His talk is available on the Columban website at: https://bit.ly/3Q6JJYg

Plenary Council of Australia

Columban Frs Patrick McInerney (left) and Trevor Trotter (right) at the Plenary Council.

From July 3-10, Fr Patrick McInerney attended the Plenary Council as a *Peritus* (Advisor). Columban Fr Trevor Trotter, being a Major Superior, attended as a member. Columban Fr Noel Connolly was remembered as the public face of and protagonist for the Plenary in the early years of the Facilitation Team. Three Columbans out of 30 in the country contributing to such an historic event! 10%! Columbans punching well above our weight! Just shows the esteem and reputation regarding mission in which we are held. Fr Patrick McInerney gave a five-minute presentation on "Mission", a foundational exhortation laying the basis and direction for the Plenary (and all church life and action) in a trinitarian account of *missio Dei*. The text is published on the Columban website: https://bit.ly/3JNmpMu

YTU Nostra Aetate Interfaith Webinar Series, by Fr Patrick McInerney

Over four nights in September and October, Yarra Theological Union and Garrett Publishing combined to present an interfaith webinar series to honour the anniversary of the publication of *Nostra Aetate* on October 28, 1965.

It covered the four world religions named in that Vatican document. The four presenters were Sr Mary Reaburn, a Sister of Sion, on Judaism; Fr Albano da Costa, an Indian SVD on Hinduism; Fr Thien Nguyen, an SVD from Vietnam, on Buddhism; and Fr Patrick McInerney, on Islam. They treated, perspectives on God, principal beliefs, women, and what we can learn from the respective traditions.

Book Launch, Theology and the People of God

On November 18, 2022, Fr Patrick McInerney attended the book launch of *Theology and the People of God*. Edited by Anthony Maher, it is a tribute to Rev Dr Gerard Kelly, the former President and current staff member of the Catholic Institute of Sydney. Those who lectured at the Institute during his tenure wrote chapters on their area of expertise, covering all the major areas of theological endeavour. Columban Fr Noel Connolly contributed the chapter, *Mission: Mother of the Church, Mother of Theology*, and Fr Patrick McInerney contributed the chapter, *Interreligious Dialogue*. This book is highly recommended as a very accessible introduction to theology https://bit.ly/3VT61Pf

Sisters partake in Dialogue of Action

Women from different faiths.

Western Sydney Women's IntHERfaith Initiative is an interfaith initiative of CCCMR. On November 22, 2022, in a simple yet notable "dialogue of action", women from different faiths came together to generously donate and pack a total of 65 handbags for women in crisis through the Share the Dignity "*It's in the Bag*" donation drive. Share the Dignity works with thousands of charities Australia-wide to provide toiletries and sanitary products to women and girls who are homeless or fleeing domestic violence or generally doing it tough this Christmas. Included in the bags were notes of love and support handwritten by the women while they packed.

Rabbi Addresses Clergy Conference

Rabbi Dr Benjamin Elton

On February 21, 2023, a historic event took place. Rabbi Dr Benjamin Elton addressed the Clergy Conference of the Diocese of Parramatta. Fr Patrick McInerney proposed this idea to the Conference organisers who readily agreed. Rabbi Ben shared the Israelite/Jewish perspectives on Passover through the different eras. It was very good for the Catholic clergy to hear the ancient Jewish accounts of Passover, out of which have grown the Christian account of the Paschal Mystery in Jesus Christ. Rabbi Ben provided much food for reflection which hopefully will inform the priests' Lenten and Easter preaching.

Multimedia Productions 2022 - 2023

Prayer Book - Lord, handle me with care

A promotional video advertising the re-design of the Columban prayer book, Lord, handle me with care. This video showcases the 36 page book including eight general prayers, accompanied by scriptures and reflections for each.

https://bit.ly/45ui6QF

Schools supporting the Season of Creation with the help of Columbans

This video demonstrates school students around the world, in the countries where Columbans work, supporting the 'Season of Creation', with the help of Columban mission.

To help celebrate the 'Season of Creation' and the theme; *'Listen to the Voice of Creation'*, school students worked with Columbans to promote, educate, and understand the true meaning of caring for creation, 'our common home'.

https://bit.ly/43p5Vmn

2022 Mid-Year Appeal

This video demonstrates how Columban fundraising can assist those living in countries where we work where major disasters are occurring. The recent typhoon in the Philippines, the cyclones in Fiji, and the floods in South-East Queensland and Northern New South Wales, along with the underwater volcanic eruption in Tonga. https://bit.ly/3QvYZAw

Biodiversity: Our ocean - our land - our life

In this video, Columban JPIC coordinator in Fiji, Tevita Naikasowalu, demonstrates the impact of biodiversity in Fiji and the affect it is having on the ocean and the land. He speaks of the responsibility that the Oceanian people have to protect where they live.

https://bit.ly/3WxcwJl

2022 Columban Christmas Appeal

This video focused on the appeal theme, 'Let us contemplate the humility of the Son of God born into poverty. Let us imitate him by sharing with those who are weak.' Pope Francis

As missionaries, Columbans are always looking to Jesus as the model missionary. He too was a person sent on a mission. The video reminds benefactors of this at Christmas and encourages them to donate and to support.

https://bit.ly/437vbxA

How the Columban Subanen Christmas Cards are made

In this video, Columban Fr Vincent Busch, provides a comprehensive overview of the process involved in creating the Subanen crafts. Fr Vincent introduces the talented Subanen Crafters and highlights their crucial role in bringing these crafts to life.

https://bit.ly/3WwszHj

2023

ST COLUMBANS MISSION SOCIETY

Gift in Will

'Do what you can'

Bishop Edward J Galvin

Remember the Columbans in your Will

We cannot take our earthly possessions with us, but we can so dispose of them that our good works will continue after we are gone. By leaving a gift to Columban missionaries, in your Will, you become a partner in our work, leaving a lasting legacy for the future. Why not speak to your lawyer about it?

For more information contact us:

PH: (03) 9375 9475

E: bequest@columban.org.au

www.columban.org.au

SUPPORT OUR MISSION

AUSTRALIA: www.columban.org.au