

From the Director

Mission is simple

This week 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 realisation 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 summarises 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. Look at the hard work of missionaries and their people working in Chile or Australia or anywhere. The planning and the campaigns in Fiji and New Zealand and everywhere else require never-ending effort and creativity.

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. Of course, being kind to my sister in Myanmar or to my brother in China, at this time, could be very risky. But that is what we are called to try to do.

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?"

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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 neighbour" is the Gospel message, the next question is "Who is my neighbour?" Francis' response is "Whom are you going to make your neighbour?"

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 neighbour. 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!

While being a missionary may require only simple acts, it can be very difficult to reach across the barriers that divide us as people. The political polarisation across the world, the huge disparities of wealth, the exploitation of people, the plight of refugees, can all be challenged and changed by kindness.

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



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