

From the Director

The Acts of the Apostles

Pope Francis always has something interesting to say. For instance a couple of weeks ago he suggested that the most important book to read if we are talking about renewing the Church is the *Acts of the Apostles*.

In this time of Pentecost maybe we should have this account of the early Church on our reading list. The beauty of the *Acts of the Apostles* is that it shows that the early Christian communities had plenty of conflicts and struggles. Maybe we should not be trying to make the perfect Church, maybe we should be working with the Holy Spirit to allow ourselves to be led like the people of God were through the desert.

Earlier this year I had the good fortune of spending three weeks with our Columban missionaries in Fiji. I had been there a few times before but this was my first extended stay. In my job as Regional Director of Oceania one of my responsibilities is to sit down and have a one on one talk with every Columban in the country. This involved older Columban priests who had been working in the country for years as well as young Filipino women who had just completed a three year term living in the villages as lay missionaries.

I came away with a very positive impression of the commitment and achievements of the *Columban Society* over the years. We could not have done it, of course, without our supporters. So this story of good news is also your story. Thank you for all that you do for us.

What was quite a surprise for me was the three parishes that we have there. For those of you who know Fiji we have a parish in Raiwaqa in Suva, another in Labasa and another in Ba. They are spread across the country. Ba and Labasa are certainly spread. The villages with their small chapels are up in the hills far from the Pacific Ocean and all those images of the country that attract the tourists from Australia and New Zealand.

I travelled with a Columban priest and celebrated Mass in one of these small chapels. The singing and the prayer was very impressive. Of course being Fiji, after Mass we had to have some kava to drink. Not knowing any Fijian I missed a lot of what was being said but there was enough English spoken so I could join in the conversation. At one of these sessions one man spoke up and said "Father you have to remember the catechists. The priests only come here about once a month but it is the catechist who is with us all the time."

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I knew what he was talking about because I had been accompanied for a few days by a catechist. The community would agree on sending one of their men off to Suva to spend some months training to be a catechist. They would come back and be a religious leader in that community for the rest of their working life. A wonderful commitment by dedicated people. The strength of these Christian communities was due to the work done by them. Here in Australia we are talking about laity in the Church. In Fiji we have great examples of this very thing.

Pentecost is all about the Holy Spirit and the rest of the *Acts of the Apostles* shows how the development of different communities in Asia Minor was due to the docility of people to the promptings of the Spirit. In the communities in Fiji one of the most common practices is to use *Lectio Divina*. People gather and someone reads the Scripture passage over a few times while everyone listens and pays attention to what is happening within them. As we all know, the same Scripture passage says something different to us each time we read it.

Believing that the Holy Spirit is with us at these times we find our own spirits responding to the Word of God. In this we are being fed and led. The Spirit is continuing the work of the *Acts of the Apostles* in the Church in Fiji today and indeed in all of our hearts. To listen and to follow is to be a missionary disciple of Jesus and the way forward for each of us and for all of us.



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