

From the Director

Stay in touch

It is nice to hear someone say to you, "Make sure you stay in touch". You might be leaving to move to another place or to go on mission somewhere overseas. Whatever the occasion it is good to be invited to stay connected to those who tell you to stay in touch.

In a time of pandemic, the message is not about touch but about not touching. It is about self-isolation and staying at home. The result is that we have become more aware of our need to 'be in touch'.

Touch is such a powerful thing. Babies need touch. The effect of a hug is wonderful. However, others use touch to abuse and the refusal to shake hands is hurtful. How we are touched makes a big difference.

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We notice in the Gospels how many people were healed through Jesus' touch. The woman, who just touched the hem of his garment, was also healed. Warmth, love and affection are conveyed by touch.

In many different ways I have been reminded of this need to stay in touch over these past months. Here in Essendon we have a couple of Columbans who are mad keen to get back to their people in Chile and Peru. In Suva there are three lay missionaries from the Philippines who have finished their term in Fiji and want to get home to be with their families.

There is a Columban in Brazil who is trying to get on a plane to come back home to Melbourne. Another Columban is in quarantine in Sydney after travelling from Rome. This is true for so many Columbans across the globe. All of them want to stay in touch.

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Social distancing has affected the way that we work. Part of the joy of work is to be able to meet and be with other people. Now that we are having less face to face meetings, we notice that we are missing out on the energy and the nourishment of being with and working alongside our co-workers.

We have moved to Zoom, Teams, Skype or WhatsApp. Yes, these are ways for us to stay in touch but "it is not the same". We have to concentrate more when using this way of connecting and we miss the fun that is part of most meetings. There are benefits in that we do not have to travel for meetings, and we do save time, but as a way of staying in touch it is not the same as face to face meetings. Social distancing is distancing!

Last week we had a Zoom meeting where every Columban who is on mission in Australia, Fiji or New Zealand was invited to join a sharing on the effect of coronavirus on their missionary work. It was the first time we had attempted this in the new Region of Oceania. There were 32 people on the meeting. It was great. To be able to meet, even for one hour, on the web was a plus for us. Not everyone knew each other before this event. The virtual gathering did help us to stay in touch!

Being on mission means staying in touch with people. It means reaching out to other people. It means forming new communities of connection around the world. Our vision of the world and its peoples is like that of God's. We are in touch with God and our universe and gradually we come to know this deeply.



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