

# Much to be grateful for

FR FRANCIS FERRIE



*Columban Fr Francis Ferrie (Frank) shares his vocation story with us.*

When I was a child my family lived in Essendon very near to the house that was, and still is, the headquarters of the Missionary Society of St Columban in Australia and New Zealand. Sometimes our family attended Mass at the Columban house and we came to know the Columban Fathers well. Some of them helped out in our parish and among them was Fr Jim McGlynn who was the Columban Superior at that time.

When my grandfather was dying Fr McGlynn came to anoint him in the evening and stayed with us until my grandfather died at four in the morning. I remember his presence with us at that time very vividly and the strength and comfort he gave us. Later at the time of World War II some Australian and New Zealand Columban missionaries in Korea who had been detained by the Japanese army were released in exchange for Japanese prisoners of war. Fr Philip Crosbie was one of those Columbans who were exchanged. He could not return to Korea until the end of the war and so for a few years became our parish priest. I was then a secondary school student and heard from Fr Crosbie many stories of life in Korea and the Diocese of Chuncheon. It was then that I felt the call to become a priest and to become a Columban Missionary like Fr Crosbie.

In the first year in the seminary in 1949 Fr Austin Sweeney, who had been on mission in Jeju in Korea since 1936, came to our seminary when on his first holiday home. He spoke to us about Korea with many stories about the island of Jeju. By that time I was very interested in Korea and was always thrilled to hear more

stories about it. I also had a cousin who served in the Australian Army in Korea during the Korean War. So now when I look back on it I realise that there were many signposts pointing me towards mission in Korea. So my appointment to Korea after ordination in 1955 was to my liking.

One of my interests from the time of my youth in Australia was the labour apostolate and for a time I was involved as a member of the Young Christian Workers (YCW) Movement. When I arrived in Korea the YCW was just beginning to become active in the Church there. When I had the opportunity in the parish of Sokcho on the east coast of Korea I gathered the young workers in the parish and set up a YCW group. My hope and motivation was that those young people would develop their leadership skills and reflect a Christian attitude in their places of work and in society.

I believed that this was a very important ministry for the future of the church in Korea. Every summer over a period of six years national training camps for YCW members gave me the opportunity to meet other YCW chaplains and members and to learn from them about the problems of workers and the development of the labour apostolate in Korea.

My YCW involvement also gave a lot of meaning to my work as a missionary priest. It is always a special joy for me these days when I occasionally meet people again who were young YCW members that I knew back then.

Early in 1980 I was appointed to the staff of the Columban seminary in Sydney and that gave me the opportunity to engage in part-time

chaplaincy work with the Catholic Korean migrant community there. Returning to Korea again in 1985 I found that in the meantime a good number of young Korean priests had been ordained for my former diocese of Chuncheon.

As I looked further afield and after a short stint at the Caritas House Apostolate in a very poor area of Seoul I was offered a parish in the Diocese of Jeju, the island which I had heard so much about from Fr Austin Sweeney many years before. Thus began a long and enjoyable period of ministry among the people of Jeju in a number of different parishes.

While I was there my mother died and I invited my father to come and stay with me in Korea for a holiday. He came and liked Korea so much he came back many times and was 88 years of age at the time of his last visit.

Now it is five years since I officially retired from parish ministry. But not totally retired either. For some time now there has been a sizeable community of Filipino, Sri Lankan and Vietnamese migrant workers and migrants living and working in Jeju and I now have the privilege of supplying Mass and the sacraments for them. It seems that God the Creator and Father of all keeps finding opportunities for us to cross boundaries of race, nationality, language, culture and economic status to share the good news of his love and life for all.

The journey I began as a child attending Mass at the Columban chapel so long ago continues on and truly gives me much to be grateful for.

---

*Columban Fr Francis Ferrie has been a missionary in Korea since 1956.*