

"As the Father has sent me, so am I sending you" John 20:21

te-KAULO TU

FOR PACIFIC MISSIONARIES



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Columban Publications





Editorial

Fr. John McEvoy -
Country Leader

As this 1st digital issue of eKaulotu 2021 goes to press –I send greetings to you from Nasese. As we start the Holy Season of Lent, may it be a time of renewal and spiritual recovery for us who have struggled and experienced suffering during the hardships of recent months. Let us continue to keep our minds on the hope of Resurrection.

The dominating feature in this issue of e-Kaulotu is how inclement weather conditions, since before Christmas has affected us here in Fiji. As a result, many people have and are still suffering because of the widespread flooding and strong winds from Tropical Cyclones ‘Yasa’ and ‘Ana’ and to a lesser extent ‘Cody’.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Columbans in the Parishes of Labasa and Ba which were badly affected especially by Tropical Cyclone Ana on 31st January 2021. Reports from Fr. Carlo and Fr. Pat together with the photos they have sent in to us were shocking, terrifying - showing us how much damage this widespread flooding has caused to huge areas of these parishes and villages.

Even the joyful celebration of Fr Aminiasi’s Ordination was affected by Cyclone Yasa and had to be postponed from the 19th December until the following Tuesday 22nd December.

But in spite of this – the Ordination and 1st Mass celebrations of Fr Amini’s were memorable, dignified and a great occasion for the Columbans in Fiji and Oceania.

Fr Willie Lee has been stranded in Kiribati for almost a year now because of Covid regulations. He has been generously giving his time to parish ministry there. His article in this issue describes his Christmas in St Anthony’s Parish, Kuria Island.

Joseph Cella, the American Ambassador to Fiji became a staunch friend of Columbans in the Suva area over the past 18 months. However, due to a change in administration in the USA, he and his wife Kristen and family of 7 children left Fiji on the 21st January, 2021. We were sad to say goodbye.

Xavier College in Transition: After many years been administered by the Columbans and then by the Montfort Brothers, for the Archdiocese of Suva, the College will now be administered by Christ the King Parish, Ba. Fr Pat Colgan tells the story.

Like many other places in the world – Covid 19 has affected the economy of Fiji. The hospitality industry which was the back bone of our economy has collapsed. As a result, there is widespread unemployment and growing poverty in the country. A frightening headline in a recent issue of the Fiji Times stated that there are 258,000 Fijians living in poverty at the present time, this is a quarter of the entire population of the Country. Surely this is a challenge for the Fiji Government but it will also demand a response from us Columbans who have Justice and Peace as one of our Missionary Priorities.

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Our Experience was like the family of Noah in the Book of Genesis

By Fr. Carlo Jung

On the 17th of December 2020, Severe Tropical Cyclone Yasa (Category 5), moved across Fiji. This was the most intensive tropical cyclone to hit Fiji in 2020. It struck most parts of Holy Family Parish, Labasa. About 10 Catholic houses were completely destroyed because of the strong winds. Quite a number of Catholic families also have lost their roofs as most of houses here in Fiji are covered with roofing iron. As this happened towards Christmas, we felt like the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph when they had no room to stay when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. On the 31st of January 2021, Severe Tropical Cyclone Ana hit Labasa. TC Ana lashed Fiji again with a continuous downpour. All the lower areas of the parish including parish buildings and the presbytery were underwater for more than a day. The Presbytery was about 1m underwater, and lower areas were completely flooded.

The last time Labasa was flooded like this was back in 2003. All of us were able to evacuate to double-story buildings and schools for a week. Our experience was like the family of Noah in the Book of Genesis.

In our Parish, most people are farmers. These 2 massive cyclones damaged their root crops. It will take 6 months to 3 years to recover and for them to harvest root crops again. The majority of parishioners have expressed that they are completely exhausted, financially and emotionally. I have been visiting communities and individual homes to assist them emotionally and spiritually.

After experiencing these 2 massive tropical cyclones, our parishioners are slowly recovering. The parish runs Holy Family Primary School & Holy Family Secondary School and they are still closed until further notice.



Since the first cyclone, all parish activities are focused on recovering and picking up the pieces. The Fiji Government & other Non-Government Organizations have been providing emergency food rations.

The Parish has been providing one 20L water container to each Catholic family. The Parish Youth have been going around the communities helping people to fix and clean their homes, and even building temporary ones.

Just a week after starting the new academic year, many of our school children have lost their textbooks, exercise books, stationaries, and even school bags. Some of the students have lost their new school uniforms. Another project of the parish is providing school bags. St. Vincent de Paul Society is providing school uniforms and stationeries.

Our next parish projects are:

- 1) To continue to provide 20L water container for storing water for emergency use.
- 2) To continue to provide school bags for the school children.
- 3) To provide 55 Gallon Emergency Plastic Water Storage Drums to store rainwater for emergency use.
- 4) To provide Sun King Solar Lights for emergency use.

Holy Family Parish, Labasa needs to have a long-term plan in terms of preparedness during tropical cyclones season in the future. Currently, the Parish is experiencing significant financial difficulties. Therefore, we would be grateful for any kind of assistance or donations at this time.

Tropical Cyclone Ana disrupts Life in Votua Village, Ba.

By Gabby Ramoce



The new year had just begun for us. We welcomed our new head teacher of our school Ms Michelle Raqona from Toge, a village up in the interior of Ba. Parents and children were settling down to begin this new academic year with a lot of enthusiasm and eagerness on what the year would bring. All this ended on Thursday night the 28th January, 2021 as a heavy downpour continued to lash Votua into the evening and throughout the night.

Within hours we heard the beating of the 'Lali' warning the people that the mouth of BA river had busted and water was rushing through the village carrying debris with livestock and belongings. The power was off and the village was dark and quite. All you could see were night lambs and torches as elders and children were evacuated to the school.

I stood helplessly with my wife and four children on top of the table watching the water gushing quietly inside our house taking everything it could. "Forget about everything else- just make sure you are safe", I told my wife.



The children carrying their beddings to the evacuation centre

Our strength comes from a loving God



The men on guard at the school

I could see fear and sadness in the eyes of my wife and tears flowing from the cheeks of my children. I remember Fr Teakare's homily,

“In all challenges and difficulties we face in life we should know where our strength comes from. Our strength comes from a loving God who will never forsake us at any time.”

After 24 hours the water receded. The water level was 2 metres above the ground. Many of us lost our belongings and property. Root crops were destroyed. But we are so thankful to God that no life was lost. I thought 2020 was hard on us with Covid 19 and TC Yasa.

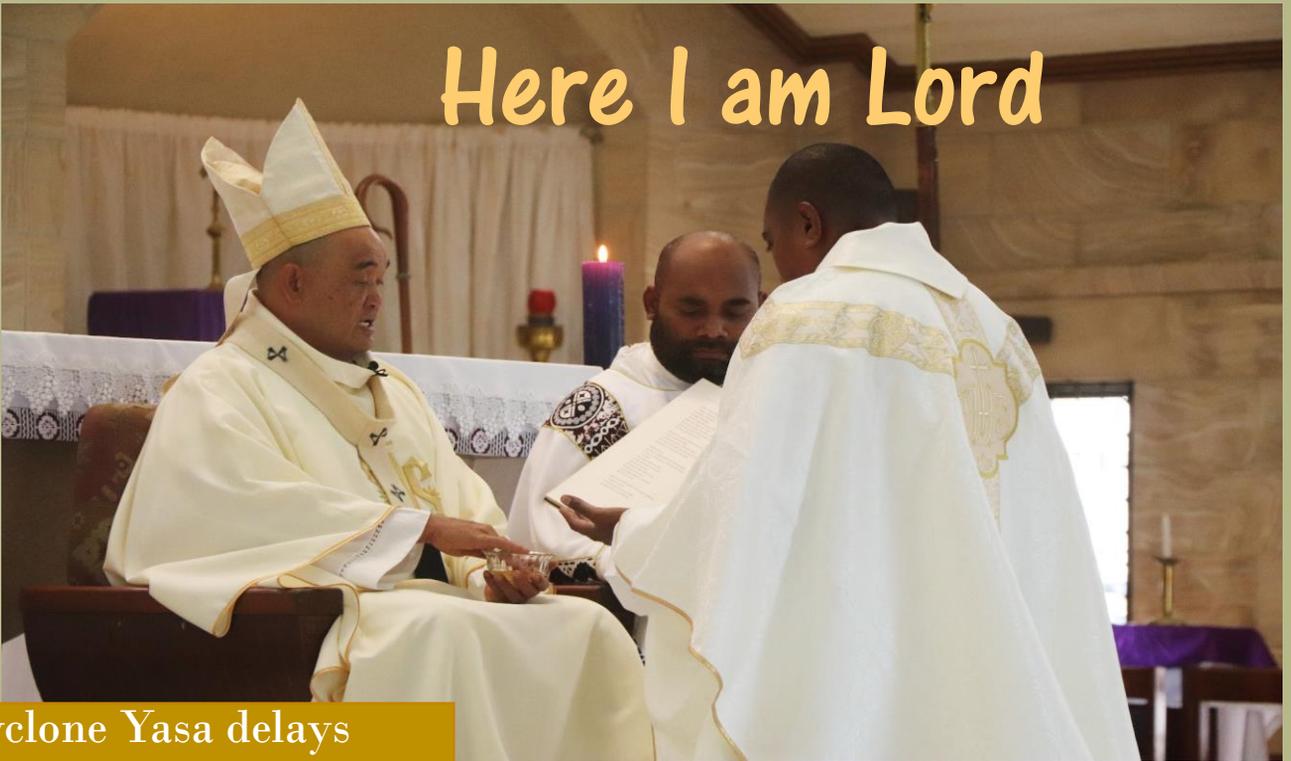
But this, the great flood and 2 more cyclones forecast and due to hit Fiji in few days' time made me wonder what 2021 has in store for me and my family?

We can't do much but to be prepared. I believe this has reminded us of the Pope's encyclical "Laudato Si" and our need to care for the Earth. It's time to fight for the preservation of Mother Earth or we might just be victims of our own actions. Please do keep us in your prayers during these trying times.



By Gabby N Ramoce – Votua, Ba

Here I am Lord



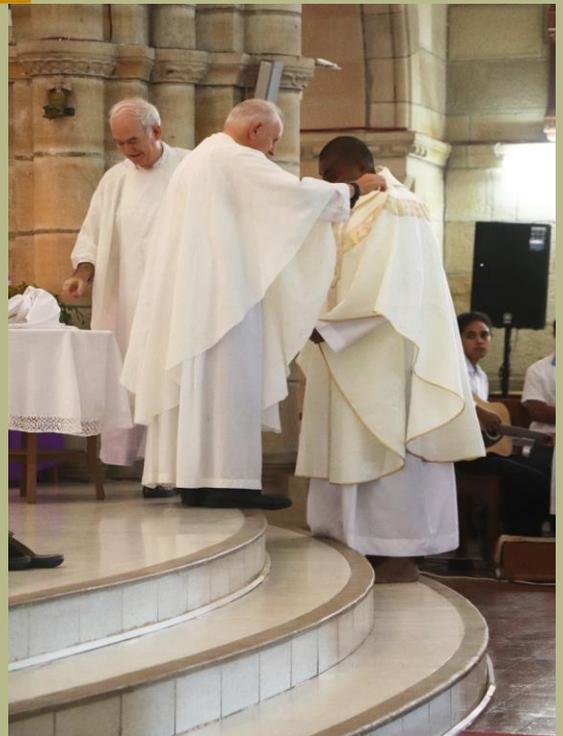
Cyclone Yasa delays Fr. Aminiasi Ravuwai's Ordination

By Fr. Donal McIlraith

Anointing with Chrism

Fr. Aminiasi Ravuwai is the eleventh local priest ordained for the Columbans in the South Pacific. Fr. Amini was born in Suva where his father was an army officer. He is the 4th of 10 children. After Secondary School he studied to be a teacher and taught for several years. Later he joined the Pacific Regional Seminary with 150 other students, then he did his Spiritual Year in Manila. He later spent two years on mission in Peru. He has been appointed to continue missionary work in South America.

His ordination was scheduled for December 19th, 2020. Two of his sisters had returned from England in spite of Covid and had finished their quarantine. The family and the Columbans were busy getting everything ready. This is Cyclone season in Fiji. On Monday till Wednesday 15th December, news came that Cyclone Yasa was forming and was heading north. By Thursday it had upgraded to category 5 cyclone. This was the same strength as Cyclone Winston in 2016, the most severe we have ever experienced. Winston had done terrible damage and this one looked like its path would come close to Suva.



Vesting of the new priest by Fr. Donal McIlraith and Fr. Frank Hoare



Fr. Amini gives his first blessing to Fr. Teakare

Fr John McEvoy, the Columban Leader in Fiji, dialogued with the Archbishop and decided to postpone the ordination to Tuesday December 22nd. Cyclone Yasa made land on the other main island, Vanua Levu on Thursday night and did terrible damage there resulting in four deaths. Mercifully Suva - with half the population of Fiji – was spared.

By Tuesday, 22nd December, Suva had returned to normal and so a great crowd gathered at the Suva Cathedral to witness Fr Aminiasi's ordination. He was ordained by Archbishop Peter Loy Chong, STD. At the start of the homily the Archbishop asked Fr Aminiasi, "Why did you decide to become a priest? Why did you join the Columbans?"

The reception after the Mass was at the Pacific Regional Seminary. There a *sevusevu* or gift of Kava was offered to the newly ordained priest. At the end of this he was asked to say a few words and he replied to the Archbishop's questions. "As I taught", he said, "slowly the idea of becoming a priest was getting stronger. I kept it secret as I looked around at the various congregations, especially the Salesians. Lanieta Tamatawale, my first cousin, was then in charge of the Columban Lay Mission program in Fiji".

One evening when I visited her with my brothers she said, "There is a 'Come and See' tomorrow why not go. I had no idea what a 'Come and See' was but I liked it and the others that came after it - and here I am today." Taking part in the ordination was fellow Columban, Fr Teakare Betero, ordained last year, who had served in Peru with him and who is himself waiting to take up his new appointment in the Philippines.

The first Mass the following day was held at Fr Aminiasi's home Parish of Don Bosco. It was also crowded, in spite of the Cyclone and other difficulties. His family did most of the cooking and served all the people very graciously and generously. All of his nine brothers and sisters were there and it was a very joyful occasion for their family and the Columban family in Fiji.

There was a little sadness also as neither of his parents had lived to see this day. He will minister in the parish of Labasa on the storm hit island of Vanua Levu until, we return to normal and he is allowed to travel back to South America



A New Normal For Mission

By Fr. Pat Colgan

Christ the King Parish Flea Market after the flood

For the past number of months, threat of floods and/or hurricanes has been talked of in the local media, and a number of false alarms came and went. However, the second half of December marked a seriousness in the government warnings, and we began to notice the signs of extra-hot and - calm days, sea birds in places where they normally aren't, and then a definite pick up in wind. Schools were ordered closed on Friday 11th December, and we were told to prepare for a Category 5 super typhoon called Yasa. There was widespread panic in Ba, because we had been so devastated by a similar TC5 'Winston' in 2016, and we were told we were in the direct path for landfall. However, the pandits were wrong, and the province of Bua in Vanua Levu took the brunt instead.

We were able to have a reasonably normal (if wet) Christmas, and sent two trips of foodstuff, clothes and money to the Caritas Fiji office in Suva for distribution to those affected in the North. 2021 then rung in, and we were once again warned of an impending hurricane, called Ana. She began life as a Tropical Depression and Ba was 'in the direct line'. We closed schools, offices and suspended Masses again. This time, the big effect for us was flooding. The town is situated around the Ba River, a low-lying muddy estuary, which meets the sea at our villages of Votua and Nawaqarua.

The playing fields of St Teresa's Primary School were inundated, and so was the Parish Flea Market, on the other side of Elevuka Creek. Votua Catholic School (2nd floor) once again became an evacuation centre for many families. I was able to get there only yesterday (1st Feb.), taking long detours because of 2 fallen electricity poles, and walking the last half mile by foot to the village.

To my surprise and relief, Votua looked clean and reasonably dry, though they will be without electricity for many days. The situation in our major hill village of Navala is worse. After 70 years, their concrete bridge was swept away, and until the government finds the money to fix it, we will have to wade, swim or sit in a tyre, guided over by the villagers, in order to say Mass there.

Our parish hall has now twice hosted ‘climate evacuees’ (during Yasa, 67 people for 3 days, during Ana, 10 people for 4 days).

We feel for our fellow Columban parishioners in Labasa, Vanua Levu, who have suffered much worse than us in these last 2 weather patterns. It seems this truly is the “new normal” for mission in Fiji (at least for the 6 rainy months of every year). May God help us to face it with our people.



St. Teresa’s School playing field, Ba



Cleaning up after the flood



The harvest is great but the laborers are few

By Fr. William Lee

All I can do is, wait patiently

I have been in Kiribati since in March 2020, just before the Covid 19 Lockdown. I went to Kiribati to do Columban vocation promotion in the schools.

Usually during Christmas, priests are asked to go to the outer islands to celebrate Mass. It was Christmas Eve of 2020, I left Tarawa for the Island of Kuria. The only means of transportation to the island of Kuria is by plane. They don't have a priest on the island. I was looking forward to my two weeks on the island. The people were also looking forward to my visit.

Fr. William visiting the sick in Kuria

The catechists assigned to the island of Kuria and other islands in Kiribati do a great work in keeping the Catholic Faith alive in their communities and parish. It was a blessing for me to see how the people of Kuria have kept their faith and are living it out in the absence of priests.

Kuria has more than 12,000 in population. There are six communities. We celebrated the Feast of the Nativity where all the communities came together. We celebrated the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Baptism on the Sundays of the Epiphany of Jesus and the Baptism of our Lord. The people had the opportunity to renew their baptismal promises to their priestly, prophetic and kingly vocation.



Fr. William Lee with the Communicants in Kuria

I used the example of St. John the Baptist's message for the people at the St. Anthony's Parish, Kuria that is to prepare the way for Jesus in our families and communities and to know Christ better with a deeper faith and commitment. We usually gather at the Maneaba after the Masses. Maneaba is centre or heart of any Kiribati community. It is a sacred place where the people find comfort and a have sense of belonging.

During my time in Kuria, I have come to know the people better, learn more about the Kiribati culture through daily interactions. I have a Mass book in Kiribati, this has also enabled me to improve my pronunciations with the help of the catechists and other parishioners. I have improved my language skills by celebrating the Mass in Kiribati. Some people who had left the Catholic faith are now returning to church. The people really appreciate hearing a foreigner speaking their language. I still continue God's mission here in Kuria e.g. celebrating community Masses and visitation to the sick and elderly. One of the things I learnt during this Covid lockdown is that, I had to go back to the to the basics of a simple lifestyle.

This is something not new for me. Fetching water from a well in Kuria is something similar to fetching water from the river in the farm back in Fiji. I have learnt a lot from these experiences in Kuria. It will be useful for my future Ministry as a Columban Vocation Director in Kiribati and among the Banaban community back in Fiji or working with Banaban Tertiary students.

My two weeks on the island have now become two months. I was told that the plane has broken down. All I can do is to wait patiently. I just have to be thankful to God, for he had other plans for me. I am happy where God has left me and I am so grateful to the people of Kuria for looking after me well. The harvest is great but the labourers are few.



Fr. William with the catechists after their retreat



Fr. Donal and Fr. Frank sings Isa Lei for the Cella family before their departure

American Ambassador to Fiji- Mr. Joseph Cella

By Fr. John McEvoy

Fr. Donal McIlraith was watching EWTN News on July 27, 2018 and saw that the next appointed American Ambassador to Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu and Tonga would be a Mr. Joseph Cella – a Catholic. The next day, Donal wrote a letter welcoming him to Fiji. He and his family arrived on December 16, 2019. It took him and Donal some time to meet up. Eventually they met, and the family were invited to The Columban House for the Celebration of St Patrick's day 17th March 2020. What a shock we got when this young family man and his wife Kristen arrived with their 7 children – ranging in age from 14 years to a toddler of about 8/9 months old. No need to say that the place was transformed and the sombre and more elderly invitees with their cocktails and yaqona drinks were forced to change their traditional mood and be entertained to the antics of the children. They would put the Von Trap Family of the famed Sound of Music film into the shadows!!!

The evening was the starting of a great relationship between the Columbans in Fiji and the Cella Family. The residence of the American Ambassador was just about a kilometre away from the Columban Central House in Suva. Joseph who is a daily Mass goer came to our community 7.00am Mass nearly every morning often accompanied by a number of his sons and daughters. They would do the readings and serve Mass whenever present. They often stayed for brewed coffee and breakfast - We in turn were invited to their residence for birthday parties, for Easter and Christmas celebrations. The children were always the centre of attraction and engaged with one another, their parents and us Columbans so well and natural, something rarely found in families nowadays. Joseph shared with me: "It is a blessing, an honour, a joy and a privilege to represent the United States of America, building and fortifying bridges with people from all sector and strata.

I have a couple of friends who are former ambassadors who described the nature of the work, and it is everything they said, and far more, which even escape words. It is exhilarating work, and is the greatest job I have ever had, to date. Serving in this role offers a unique opportunity



Archbishop Peter Loy, Fr. Jim Ross, Ro Temumu Kepa and Mr Joseph Cella on St. Patricks Day in Suva



Fr Donal with Mr. Cella and his son Josefa

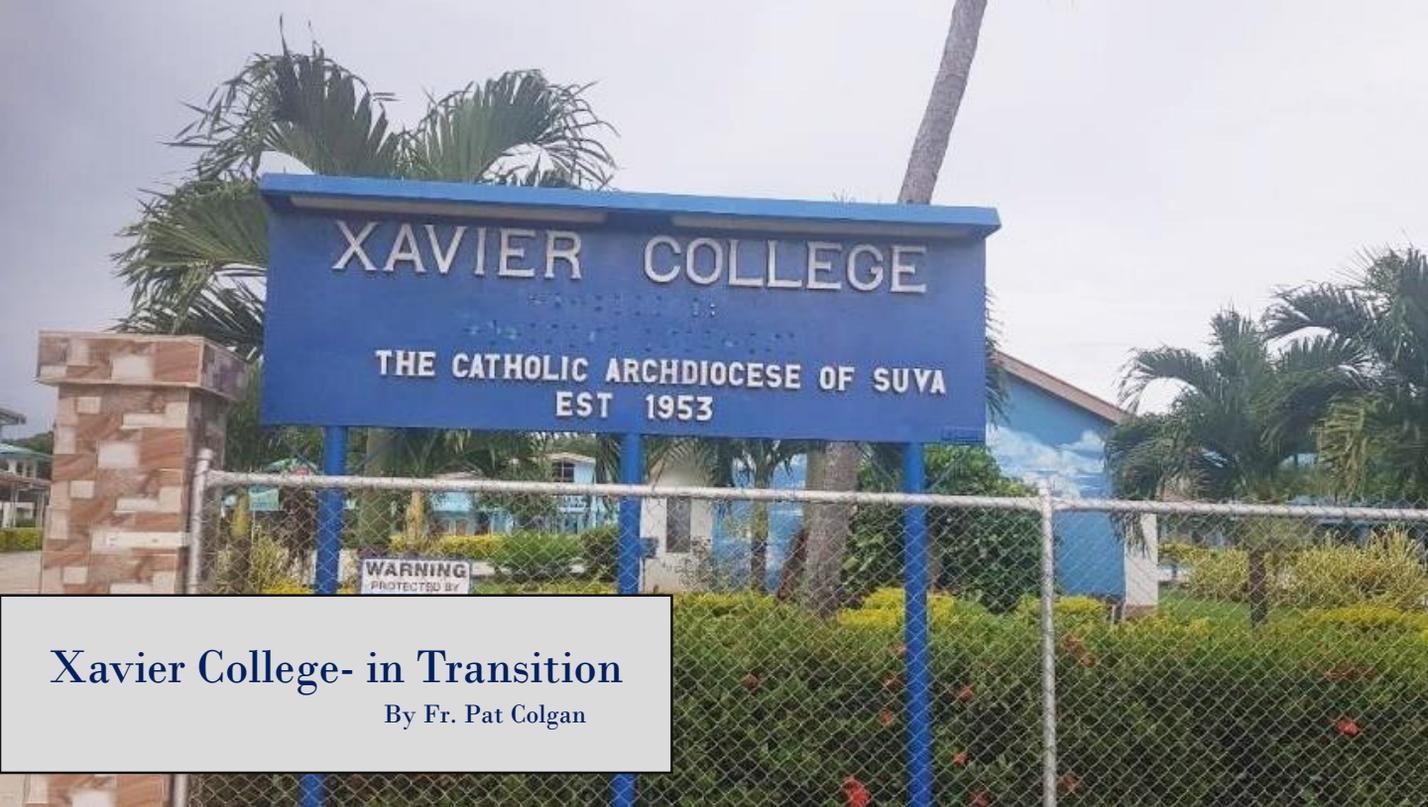
to share God's love with all of those I encountered, without proselytizing.”

With a change of Government in the USA, Joe’s short term of about a year and a half came to an end. He and his family departed Fiji for their home in Michigan on Thursday 21st January. As an ambassador he endeared himself to many people in Fiji of all races and religions. He achieved so much by being out among the people at every opportunity he got – visiting schools and disadvantaged communities throughout the country. He hosted many events for a cross section of all races in Fiji, both at the residence and also at the Embassy itself. One of his staff described him – ‘being out of the office more in the 1st month of his term of office, than his predecessor was during his entire term of office’.

Joseph Cella and his wife Kristen – are humble and spiritual individuals of Italian decent from Michigan, in the USA, that one would meet in a lifetime. We the Columbans miss their graciousness, their generosity and of course their children. The same can be said of the hundreds of Fijians whom they befriended during the short time they have been here in Fiji.



Mr. Cella , Anthony, John Paul, Francesca, Dominic, Rita Rose, & Mariana with Fr. John at their residence in Suva



Xavier College- in Transition

By Fr. Pat Colgan

Xavier College was established by the Catholic Archdiocese of Suva in 1953 as a boys' school to provide Christian education, particularly to Indian youth in the western part of Fiji and was entrusted to the Columban Fathers at the request of Bishop Foley SM.

The latter saw education, particularly of the poor, as key to the possible conversion of the many Hindus, Moslems and even Chinese in Ba to the Catholic faith. Many conversions did in fact occur and all who studied there have enormous respect for the Columbans, Marist Sisters and Christianity in general. The first lesson in Latin started on February 12, 1953 followed by the second class which was grass cutting. Columban Fr Michael Cryan was the first principal to the 25 pioneering students. He was followed by fellow Columban Fathers Tom Henaghan, Eddie McColgan, Colm McGovern, Tom Daly, Otto Imholte, (Tom Daly, again) and Dan Ahern.

Other Columbans who taught there were Jim Gavigan, Kevin Fleming, Ted Gerkin, Pat O'Sullivan, George Gear, Martin Croghan.





Final day of Brothers George, Francis and Saji ...with Fr. Pat Colgan and Mrs.Margie Muller

Particularly loved by the students was

Fr Vincent Batchelor of Cohuna, Victoria, who was a teacher for 10 years and Chaplain for almost 20, after the departure of the Columbans. In 1970 co-education was introduced and in December 1987, the Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel took charge of the College. Now there is a roll of almost 900. The College has excelled in national quizzes and also on the sports field – athletics, table tennis, rugby and soccer.

They ask for your prayers as the parish steers the College in these challenging times - pandemic, climatic and economic- to a future open to the new, as well as faithful to its original motto: “United in God”.

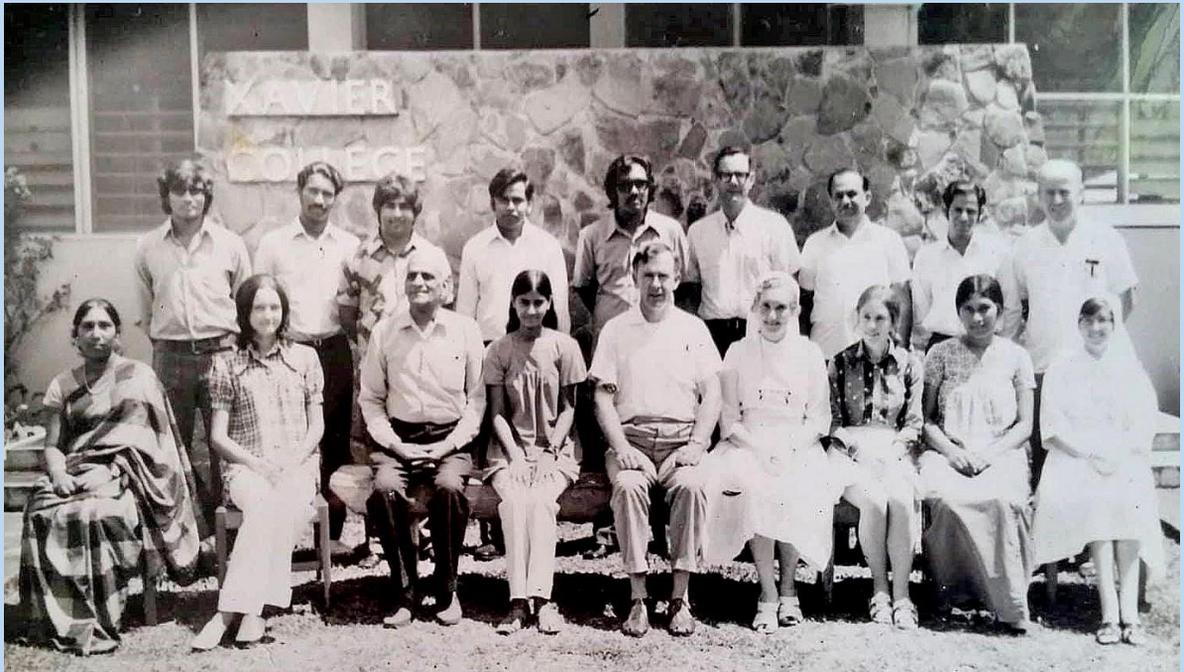
Xavier had provision for boarders for many years - up to about 1980, when the dormitory was turned into a computer room.

Boarders came from places like Navala, Vatukoula, Navunibitu, Nadi, Lautoka (before the establishment of St. Thomas' Secondary School).

Among the students were a number of future priests: Fr. Veremo Dovarua, Fr Lewis Henry SM and Fr Arthur Leger, SJ, as well as others who work in the local business community, overseas judiciaries and even at NASA!



Xavier College



STAFF PICTURE FROM 1974 (centre, front is Fr Thomas Daly, Principal); other Columbans present are Fr Ted Gerkin (4th from top right) and Fr Ed McColgan (top, right), and Marist Sisters Mary Frances Boyle and Carmel Conron. On Tom Daly's right is Ms Krishna Yaqub, a long serving secretary of the School, and then Swami Baskaran Nair, a Hindu priest whose family now reside in Vancouver. He used to give religious instruction to the Hindu students in the school and help with the students' annual retreat. (Photo by Fr. John McEvoy)



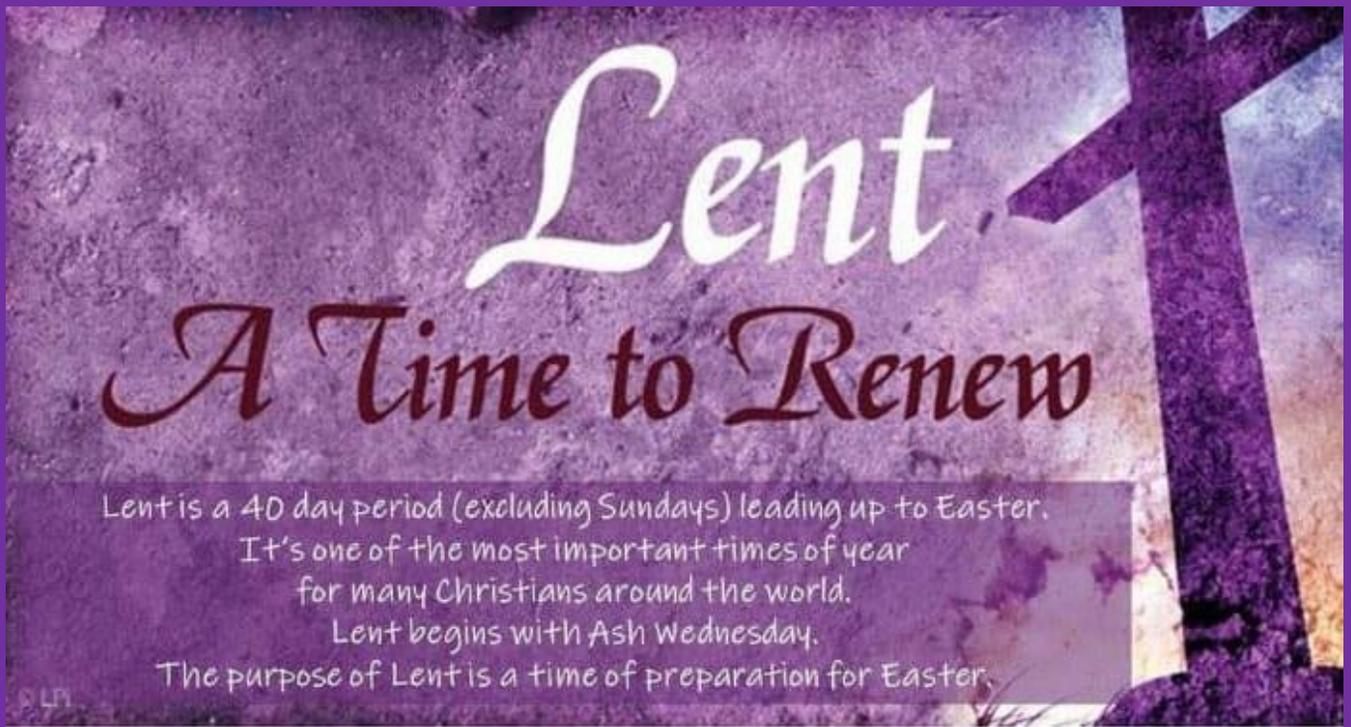
Fr. Nilton Iman at a school Mass in 2019



The Cella family with Fr. Frank at their residence



Fr. John with the Korean Catholic Community in Suva



Jesus revealed to his disciples the deepest meaning of his mission when he told them of his passion, death and resurrection, in fulfilment of the Father’s will. He then called the disciples to share in this mission for the salvation of the world.

In our Lenten journey towards Easter, let us remember the One who “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). During this season of conversion, let us renew our *faith*, draw from the “living water” of *hope*, and receive with open hearts the *love* of God, who makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. At the Easter vigil, we will renew our baptismal promises and experience rebirth as new men and women by the working of the Holy Spirit. This Lenten journey, like the entire pilgrimage of the Christian life, is even now illumined by the light of the resurrection, which inspires the thoughts, attitudes and decisions of the followers of Christ.

(Pope Francis)

When (to Fast and/or Abstain)?

Days of Fasting and Abstinence
(Canon 1251)

Days of Abstinence
All Fridays through the year (and the time of Lent) are penitential days and times throughout the entire Church.
(Canon 1250)

Heavenly Father,

**Heal Your people, the humanity of this earth,
cleanse us and strengthen us toward You.**

**We are weak, but You are strong, and in our
weakness Your strength is revealed.**

Amen.



**Fr. Iwane Gukibau sharing a meal at their new soup kitchen
in one of their communities- Tunnales, Lima, Peru**