From Drought to Hope: A JPIC Visit to St Thérèse of Lisieux

In the early hours of Monday, 26 October, the JPIC team, comprising Columban Lay Missionary Sainiana and myself, set out for Ba. We gathered at the Suva Bus Stand as early as 7:00 am to catch a bus along the Kings Highway, commonly known as the scenic route. Along the way, we observed the visible effects of drought across the western side of Viti Levu.



Caption: Year 8 students of the St Thérèse of Lisieux Primary School in Ba with the JPIC Team, after a session on care for creation and Laudato Si.

The familiar greenery of Tailevu and Ra had given way to barren fields, brown hillsides and bushfire-affected areas. It was a stark reminder of the prolonged dry spell and growing concerns surrounding a potential *super El Niño*. With the Fijian Government warning of an extended drought period, farmers and communities are already feeling its effects, making water conservation and responsible resource management increasingly important.

Our journey brought us to Ba Town for a scheduled visitation to St Thérèse of Lisieux Primary School. As this was my first visit, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the school sits directly beside Christ the King Parish Church, with the parish hall also serving the school. The parish was once home to the Columban missionaries before its recent handover to the local diocese. It was encouraging to encounter the enduring Columban legacy within the school and its wider community.





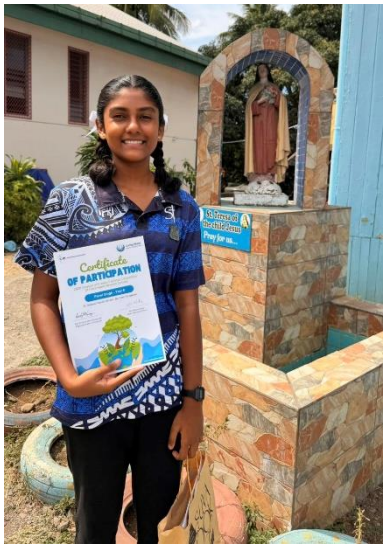
Caption: The students partook in a promise to care for creation, a commitment to loving on another through caring for creation, which was led by Sai.

We were welcomed by the Head Teacher of the school, Mr. Ronald Krishna, who also reminisced of his upbringing around Columban missionaries, with his family often hosting the missionaries whilst on the field. His faith was a gift to him by his grandparents who supported and adored the Columban missionaries, and he continues this today as well. We were encouraged by his welcome and that set the tone for our awareness session on the day.



Caption: (From Left) Noa Tuivunilagi (Columabn JPIC Coordiantor), Mr. Ronald Krishna (Head Teacher STCS), Sainiana Tamatawale (Columban Lay Missionary).

The visit also provided an opportunity to meet with Pavni Singh, a participant in the Columban Season of Creation School Competition, which invites students across Oceania to express their reflections on the annual Season of Creation theme through artwork, essays and poetry.



Caption: Pavni Singh pictured here with her certificate for participating in the Columban Season of Creation School Competition.

Pavni received third prize in the 2025 regional competition and participated again in 2026. We acknowledged her continued enthusiasm and appreciated her reflections on the indigenous values she cherishes, shaped by her upbringing in Navala, Ba, as an Indo-Fijian. Her experience was a beautiful reminder of the value of communal and traditional ways of living, and how we can learn from one another in caring for creation.

The students engaged enthusiastically in the awareness session, which introduced them to the teachings of *Laudato Si'* and our shared responsibility to care for our common home. The session concluded with Sai leading the students in a pledge to become better stewards of creation.

We sincerely thank Mr Krishna, the teachers and students of St Thérèse of Lisieux Primary School for their warm hospitality and for welcoming the Columban team. Vinaka vakalevu!