

MUSIC – A BRIDGE ACROSS BOUNDARIES

The Rector asked three Columban missionaries to take turns helping. I was helped by the six Columban seminarians in our Formation House in Suva when it came to my turn. None of us was ethnic Indian and we had various proficiency in the Hindi language – from none to quite good.

Our two guitarists were new to Hindi but they quickly learned to sing and accompany some Hindi hymns and parts of the Mass. We sang a communion hymn in three languages - Hindi, English and Fijian and included prayers of petition in the same three languages. I used visuals on share screen during the homily and we put the words of the readings and hymns on screen too so that viewers would be able to follow.

Two technicians from the Archdiocesan Communications Office did the video and uploaded the Mass from our chapel in the Formation House. The technicians didn't understand Hindi so a seminarian who did would signal when to change the screen.

It was the first Sunday of the Season of Creation. We had green plants and small shrubs in the chapel and the homily emphasized the climate crisis and the need for world leaders at COP 26 to make massive carbon emission reductions.

Although none of us participating live at the Mass were ethnic Indians we all appreciate the beauty and devotion of Hindi hymns. It was a very joyful celebration and hundreds followed it in Fiji and abroad on Facebook. We received many notes of congratulations.

It brought home to me how music is a most valuable path for entering another culture. It helps us learn the language and appreciate the spirit of its people. Local people appreciate foreigners who take an interest in their culture. Our musicians will have a great advantage when they arrive in a new culture as missionaries. They will quickly connect with the people through their music and song.

Fr. Frank Hoare is a member of the Regional Council of Oceania and the Formator for Columban seminarians in Fiji.