

# The Sower

A Newsletter of the Pontifical Mission Societies in New Zealand - MISSIONZ  
(and the Mission Benevolent Society - MISSIOAOTEAROA)



Issue 1 - April 2024



## CHANGES

My dear friends of the Pontifical Societies,

Tena koutou and greetings. Last October, the Congregation of the Evangelisation of Peoples (*historically known as De Propaganda Fide*), one of the Dicasteries that make up the Roman Curia in the Vatican, issued a decree appointing me as the new National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in New Zealand. The appointment came following the resignation of Fr Bernardo Espiritu SVD, who had given 12 years of sterling service in the role.

I am a New Zealand citizen but born in Malaysia. I once explained to a reporter who asked about my background, that in me, the East and the West meet. Then I jokingly told him that if I wanted to sound "exotic" I would say I am a "New Zealander who was born in Malaysia, with Chinese ancestry, some Irish upbringing and influence, and a Maori-sounding surname"! I graduated from Canterbury University with an honours degree in Engineering in the 80s. After a few years in the field as an

engineer, I worked for the Foundation for Research, Science, and Technology in the role of Programme Manager managing the funding of research in New Zealand. It was from there I resigned and entered the seminary. I attended Good Shepherd House (Christchurch), followed by Holy Cross (Mosgiel), and then to Rome to finish my studies at the Beda College while attending the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. I am a Jubilee year priest, ordained by Bishop John Cunneen in Christchurch in 2000.

I received news of the appointment only in November. After meeting with my bishop, Bishop Michael Gielen, it was decided I am to set up a new office in Christchurch and to avail myself to help with supply work in the Diocese. At the time I was the Parish Priest of the Parish of the Good Shepherd in North Canterbury, covering a large area with six Mass centers, two parish farms, and three presbyteries, there was much to be done to prepare for a handover to a new parish priest. That included personally painting the front of the church in Culverden, and the grotto of Our Lady in Hanmer Springs. At the start of February, when a new priest took over the parish, I started work in my new "office" in the Christchurch Curia. I found a home sitting and working among 18 boxes Fr Bernard sent to me. Even so, those boxes will soon move with me as the diocesan offices are moving to a new site at the corner of Moorhouse Avenue and Barbadoes Street, where the national MISSIONZ headquarters will be located.

I regret that this period of flux, and the birthing pain of setting up a new office, means there has been some confusion among people who want to contact the MISSIONZ Office. This newsletter serves to keep you informed.

The updated contact details for MISSIONZ are as follows:

### **Physical address:**

MISSIONZ (MISSIO AOTEAROA, its Fundraising section)  
c/o-The Diocese of Christchurch  
391 Moorhouse Avenue  
Sydenham  
Christchurch 8011

### **Postal Address:**

P O Box 4544  
Christchurch 8140

### **Website:** [www.missio.nz](http://www.missio.nz)

**Email:** [info@missio.nz](mailto:info@missio.nz)

**Phone:** 03-3669869 (ChCh Diocese),

**Cell:** 021-1737992

Blessings

Michael Pui

## THE GATHERING & FAREWELLING OF DIRECTORS

Sadly, the gathering of the three most recent national directors of PMS was the occasion of the funeral of one of them: Fr Paul Shannahan SM, who was the national Director of PMS until 2012. Fr Paul died rather suddenly last November, and his requiem Mass was celebrated at Sacred Heart Church, Addington, Christchurch. May he rest in peace, and may God say to him: "*Welcome good and faithful servant, come and inherit the Kingdom prepared for you for the foundation of the world*".

Before his sudden death, I had been trying to connect with Fr Paul to speak to him about my new role. But Fr Paul never answered the phone. I guess Fr Paul will now respond to my messages from heaven. Fr Bernardo and I were among the concelebrating priests at Fr Paul's Requiem. The occasion of the funeral became a time for me to meet with Fr Bernardo for the first time, hosting him in my parish to help prepare me for the task that awaited me.

(Photo of the late Fr Paul Shannahan SM and  
Fr Bernard Espiritu SVD)





## REGIONAL MEETING OF PMS DIRECTORS OF ASIA AND OCEANIA



In a sign of providence, I had the opportunity to gather with national directors of PMS of the Asia-Oceania region in Vietnam in February – just after starting in my role. It was originally a meeting of the directors of the Asian countries, but under the directive of Rome, it was extended to directors of Oceania too. In addition to the insights I've been able to gain from Fr Bernardo, chatting formally and informally with people who work in similar roles in this part of the world gave me a real head start in understanding some of the opportunities we have, but also some of the challenges.

The formal meetings were held in the Diocese of Xuan Loc, Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). Our host was very generous, and we were treated like royalty. We stayed in the Diocesan Centre, a large area that is also the site of the Minor and Major seminaries, a convent, a huge Cathedral-looking church, and a three-story building for meetings and quarters for guests.

We kicked off the first day of the meeting giving formation to the seminarians about the work of PMS. From the second day onwards, each director presented their efforts in inspiring people to get into the missionary spirit in their countries. It became clear to me that one of the challenges that we directors need to address is the tendency of many people to associate the work of the directors simply with the collection of funds on Mission Sunday; there is much more to that in what we do, including working to animate and inspire children and adult into the spirit of mission through prayers and sacrifice to help the Church take the Gospel to the ends of the earth (c.f. Matt 28:19).

Two Vietnamese bishops gave us several insights into the history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam and the challenges it is facing in our modern times. I could not help noticing how the Church is 'booming' in Vietnam, simply by attending Mass in the parishes and interacting with parishioners, seminarians, priests, and religious. Despite Catholics not having full freedom in a Communist state, the Vietnamese have statistics to boast about, including for example;

### 2022 Statistics

- Catholics 73 Million or 7.3 % of population (Ho Chi Minh City, I was told, is 1 in 3 of residents)
- Bishops 51 (29 active, 22 retired)
- Priests 7,346 (5,455 Diocesan, 1,891 Religious)
- Seminarians 4,621 (11 seminaries)
- Religious 28,808 (4,357 men, and 24,451 women)
- Lay young Catechists 72,450 (mostly under 30!)

I could not help drawing a parallel between how the Vietnam of today is like the Ireland of old, supplying the world and New Zealand, with priests and religious.

It was also heartening for me to 'join the dots' to see how a small seed planted by those with good missionary spirit contributed to today's 'boom'. One big factor in the 'boom' is of course martyrdom. As Tertullian said; "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians" (Apologeticus, L. 13), and indeed there have been many in Vietnam, including a group of 117 in the 19th century canonized by Pope St John Paul II in 1988. I discovered that five of those canonized were sent to the Asian Regional Seminary in Tanjung Bungah, Malaysia. No doubt that happened with the support, **financially, spiritually, and in prayer**, of various people with a missionary zeal, including donors from all around the world. And today, New Zealand has benefited from the "catholic boom" in Vietnam.

At the meeting, we also addressed a couple of questions raised by the president of PMS, Archbishop Emilio Nappa. Issues about a Congress that were being explored with the Asian Conference of Catholic Bishops were also discussed, including the clashes with many other major events like the Jubilee year 2025.

Although I was originally reluctant to go, having just walked into a new role – I came away inspired by many people I met, including an elderly priest Fr Dominic Ngo Quang Tuyen who was imprisoned for 13 years of hard labour simply for teaching the idea of freedom in 1982. I also now have with me a collection of stories I want to share around parishes to inspire people to get into a spirit of Mission. I look forward to meeting my colleagues again at the yearly general Assembly in Rome in May where, among other things, we will contribute to the discussion of the Pontifical financial support of the various missionary efforts around the world. My first connection with them will prove invaluable.



Photo: Directors of PMS having an exchange with the Seminarians



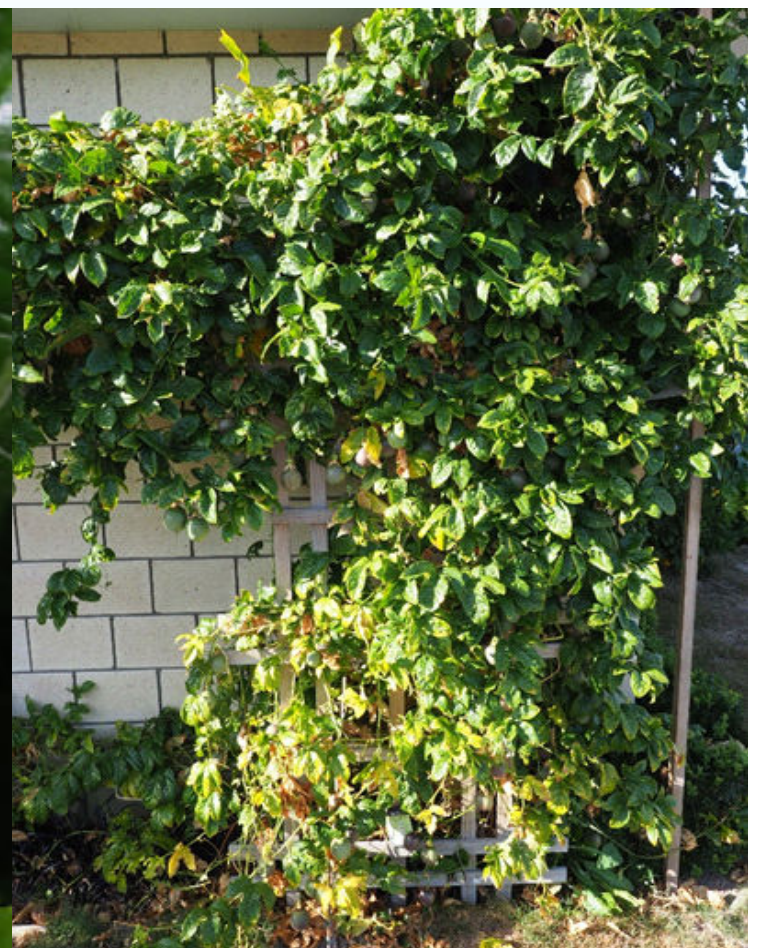
Photo: Directors of PMS after Mass in the Cathedral in Ho Chi Minh City with Fr Dominic Ngo Quang Tuyen (imprisoned for 13 years)



## CULTIVATING A PASSION FOR THE MISSION!



*The flower of the passionfruit*



*Prolific growth against a hot sun baked wall*

Did you know that **passionfruit** got its name from our Catholic heritage?

The fruit has a beautiful flower with five stamens, and around 1700AD, its flower was named by missionaries in Brazil as '*flor das cinco chagas*' or "flower of the five wounds"; to illustrate the five wounds of Christ. It was a way to teach the indigenous population about the Passion of our Lord Jesus. The name passionfruit comes from the passion flower's Latin genus name, *Passiflora*.

For a long time, passionfruit was only known to Kiwis mainly as an ice cream flavour or ice cream topping! Eventually, the fresh fruit started to appear in the supermarket. Last year, the tiny flavour-packed fruit fetched an exorbitant price of \$5.99 each!!

I have been growing passionfruit plants successfully in various parishes I have served. It is a tropical fruit, and the only way to plant them in the cooler climate is to shade them against frost in winter and to have them grow up on a trellis against a wall basking in the sun all day. After many bumper crops, I have been giving away both the passionfruit and plants to friends and parishioners. Recently, in discussing some of the fundraising projects with friends, more so to raise awareness of the importance of getting into a missionary spirit, an idea was suggested: "Why don't you sell the passionfruit plants?" Eureka! Something tangible to explore.

At the moment, I have nearly 100 plants potted. They tend to slow down in their growing during winter but will start to grow again in spring, ready to be planted. If there are any volunteers to help with a Mission Sunday "Passion for Missio" sale in September/October 2024 somewhere in a parish or venue around Canterbury, then please make contact to explore. If this takes off, we can go wider afield. Remember, big things have small beginnings. This is about cultivating a passion for mission.

**(Mission Sunday this year is 20th October)**



*Bumper crop!*



## ADMINISTRATION

I am emailing this first newsletter to those whose email address is in the system I inherited. At this stage, e-mailing could be a means of weeding out old email addresses to help me update our database.

I am also including a hard-copy of this newsletter with the end-of-financial year receipts that I am posting to all donors. In the mail out there should be a copy of a complimentary Prayer Booklet.

If you receive **both** this newsletter in the email form and hard-copy this time, please bear with me, until such time I get all the systems updated. Anyone who would like to receive this newsletter can make a request by emailing me at; **info@missio.nz**

If you receive the hard-copy of this newsletter with your receipts, and you have an email address, please could you provide me with it so that we can cut down postage costs in the future? On this occasion, it is simpler for me to post a hard-copy of the receipts. To update our database simply email your;

**Name:**

**Address:**

**Phone number:** (*only for queries, when needed*)

(*You can read about the Privacy Statement on our website: [www.missio.nz](http://www.missio.nz)*)

## SUPPORTING THE MISSION



There are many ways to support the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS).

Firstly, **pray** for the fruitfulness of their work, and pray that I as National Director, am effective in my role in inspiring people to support them. Secondly, **do something** to promote a spirit of mission in every Christian. If you can **financially support** the work of the PMS please do so. Read my story about Vietnam (previous page) and you will see how God is never outdone by our generosity.

On top of the once-a-year Collection in October (Mission Sunday) I hope to organize mini-promotional campaigns throughout the year. Many are already regular donors (from monthly installments to yearly). Some have left bequests in their wills to support the PMS. Some send in stipends for mass intentions for me to pass on to priests who do not get much or any financial support.

You can go to our website to donate, or contact me directly with credit card details, or simply Direct Debit:

**MissioNz/MissioAotearoa**

**06-0411-0021447-00**

**(Please add your name or the Missio Friend Number as reference)**

Blessings.

*Michael Pui*

P/s: -Thank you to all the Volunteers—Santa helpers of the PMS! - who helped put this newsletter and receipts in envelopes for posting,

