



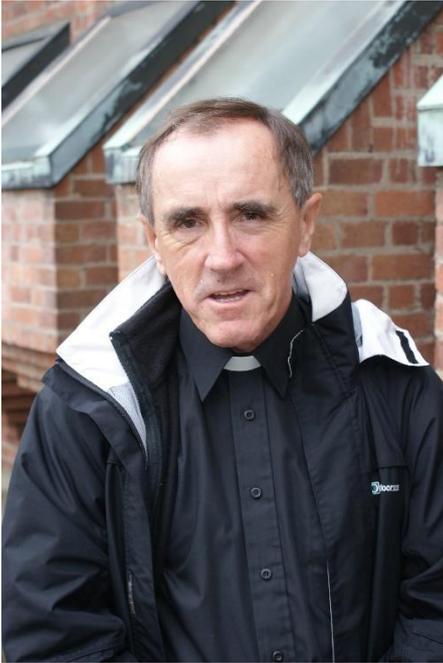
## The Parish of St. Patrick's

Chapel House: 30 Low Craigends, Kilsyth, Glasgow G65 0PF

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Rev Fr Alan Meechan SVD was ordained in St Patrick's Kilsyth on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> June 1986 by the then Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, Keith Patrick O'Brien. See the photos of his ordination in Kilsyth below.

Fr. Alan is a native of Kilsyth and a member of the Divine Word Missionaries. He is currently based in the Philippines. We have asked him to write to us, when he can, to keep us updated about his work. He has given us some copies of photos of his mission parish and his work before he had to leave and return to the Philippines. See below for photos of Fr Alan's work in the Philippines and some letters he has sent to us to let us know the kind of work he is involved with.

Fr Alan returned to Kilsyth for 3 months at the end of 2013 and was in St Patrick's Kilsyth for Christmas and New Year for the first time since his ordination. He was also here for the opening of the new Parish Hall and a visit from Archbishop Leo Cushley on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

As Christians, we are all called to evangelise. For many Christians however, evangelisation is always difficult for fear of being rejected or thought of as odd in today's world. We, all too often, hide our light under a bushel. Put simply

although we are all called, many of us don't have the courage to reach out in God's love to our family members, our work mates or members of our community.

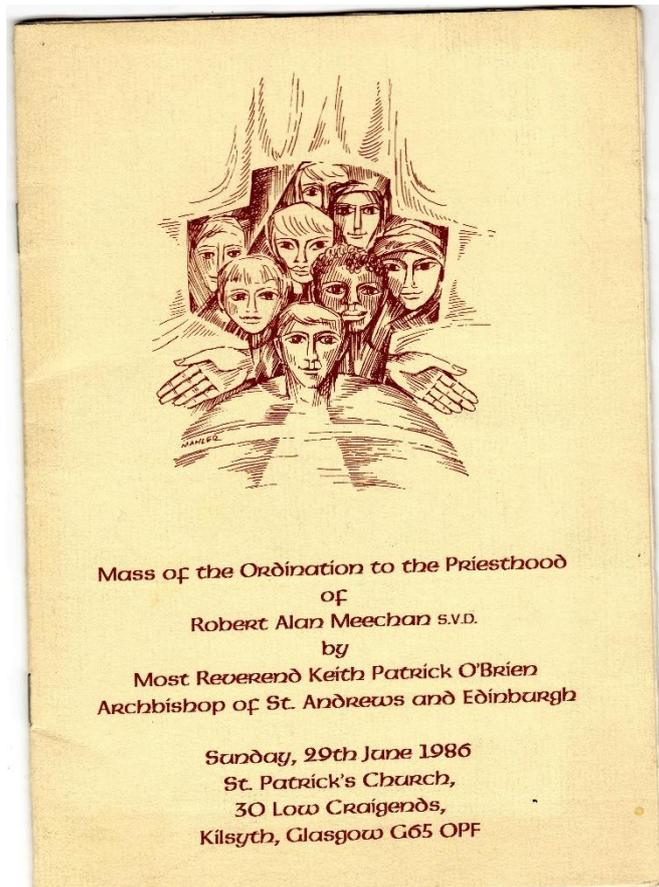
Imagine then the courage that it takes to leave the wealth and comforts of western society, to leave your family and friends and to reach out to those in far off lands who are poor, marginalised and struggle with day to day life. The Devine Word Missionaries are an order of courageous men who leave everything behind and reach out in God's love, and on our behalf, to bring the Word of God to some of the most difficult to reach and poorest areas of the world.

At St Patrick's Kilsyth we are blessed in having a vocation to the Devine Word Missionaries in Fr Alan Meechan who is currently posted to Inarawan in the Philippines. Fr Alan has written the passage below and taken some photographs to allow us to learn more about his work and the people in Inarawan.

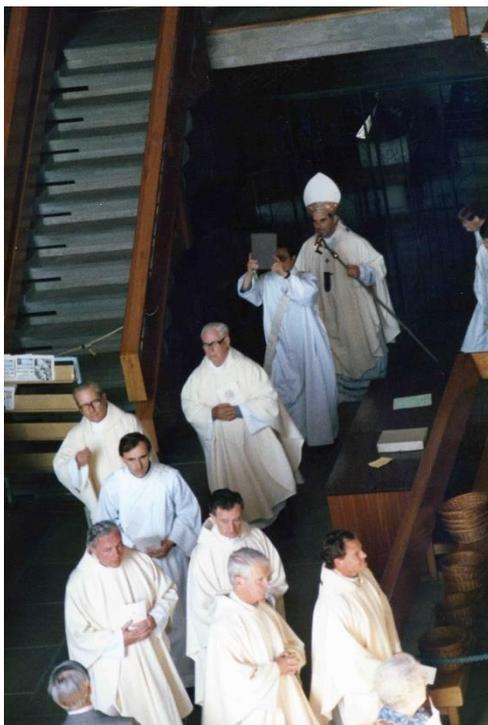
Even if we are not blessed with the courage to evangelise ourselves we can pray for those who do. Please pray for Fr Alan Meechan and all the Devine Word Missionary Priests in their work of bringing the Devine Word God to those in far off places.

If you feel that you would like to make a donation toward the work that Fr Alan is undertaking then please send it in an envelope to: Fr Alan Meechan, Care of the Parish Priest, St Patrick's RC Church, 30 Low Craigends, Kilsyth or simply drop an envelope through the Parish House door marked for "*Fr Alan Meechan*".

Some photos from Fr Alan Meechan's Ordination at St Patrick's Kilsyth on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> June 1986



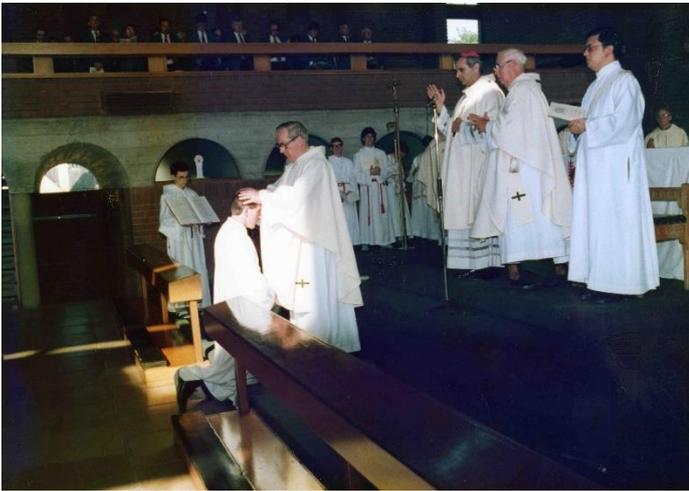
The order of service from Fr Alan Meechan's Ordination at St Patrick's Kilsyth



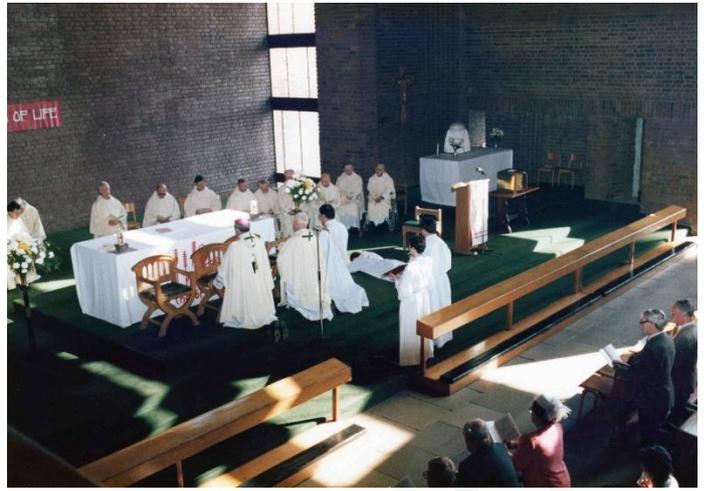
The entrance procession



Fr Alan Meechan robed as a priest at the end of his Ordination Mass



Fr Alan receives a blessing from Fr O'Connell pp



Fr Alan prostrate before beside altar



Fr Alan enters the sanctuary as a deacon candidate and will leave the sanctuary as a priest.



A full house at St Patrick's for the ordination service.



Fr Alan concelebrates Mass for the first time surrounded by his brother priests.



More of the congregation present that day.



The ordination service.



The congregation.



Fr Alan with his family and his provincial superior.



Fr Alan with priests and altar servers



Fr Alan with his mother, surrounded by friends and family in the parish hall after his ordination.



Fr Alan with priests and seminarians from the Devine Word Missionaries with the ladies who helped with catering.



Other members of the congregation enjoy the post ordination celebrations.



Sister Agnes and Canon McGarvey are present too.

### **A Missionary in Mindoro – Fragmented Observations on a visit home to Kilsyth, October 2013**

**by Fr Alan Meechan SVD.**

When I first came to the island of Mindoro in mid-1987 after some months in Manila, I was appointed as assistant in Socorro, a medium sized Parish in the centre of the island with a sickly Filipino Parish Priest. After two and half years I was suddenly transferred to Bulalacao, a rather wild parish in the south of the island with a communist insurgency problem, where I stayed on my own for seven years. This was followed by almost three years in Inarawan, a relatively remote, recently founded village parish which was desperately poor and where the people suffered greatly from recurrent flooding of the river. I was then transferred to San Maraino, another parish in the south of the island, where I spent the next six years. During this time Inarawan was closed as a Parish. It now became part of the larger Barcenaga, twelve miles away. On leaving San Mariano four years ago I was surprised to find myself appointed as assistant in Barcenaga with responsibility for Inarawan.

Apart from our interprovincial noviciate and a college with a very high reputation, there are no specifically SVD apostolates or parishes in Mindoro. SVD's serve in diocesan parishes or ministries and SVD missionaries in Mindoro are on exactly the same level as diocesan clergy. They have the same benefits, the same respect and the same is expected of them. Only, the foreign missionaries and those with parents in the USA are allowed to have some months' home leave from time to time, although many diocesan priests also go abroad for various reasons.

The diocesan clergy is still quite young. The oldest (apart from the bishop himself) is only 1 year older than I am. Some diocesan priests have died due to illness or accident, but only now is there a policy being formed for them, and also a retirement house for which there was no need in the past.

Some years ago, there was the feeling that the missionaries should leave Mindoro because the diocesan clergy was already established, but in recent time our bishop, the first non SVD one, has acknowledged that there is still a need for the foreign missionaries. He invited us to retire in Mindoro, rather than elsewhere, suggesting activities in which we could still be involved, even in retirement: *'I hope you die here!'*

Many years ago, when I was working in Bulacao, a very difficult parish, a visiting priest in Manila asked me how things were. I said, *'There are far too many problems!'* to which he replied, *'There are always problems in the parish and the only way to deal with them is to take things easy.'* I've followed this advice for a long time and it has served me well, particularly in adjusting to the different world view, attitudes and habits of the people with whom I am living. I no longer rush into situations and expect a quick, simple solution, instead, I tend to act more slowly now and deliberately, allowing things to happen rather than forcing them to happen. Some time ago I heard someone say, *"He celebrates Mass very slowly"*, and the reply was, *"He's slow at everything except for the bike!"*

On the mission you soon see your weaknesses. There is always the temptation to blame other people for what happens, especially when you are an assistant in a parish, but when you are alone or become Parish Priest, you may be able to blame the people, but really you eventually see that the fault lies with yourself – your ideal of a fruitful apostolate when you are completely in charge falls to pieces in the cold light of reality. You know however, that there will be future possibilities where you will have the benefit of the perspective of experience and perhaps more ideal conditions, but nothing is ever as good as has been hoped. Of course, nothing is ever as bad as you had feared either.

### **The missionary – the sign of hope.**

What greatly stuck me and even gratified me when I returned to Inarawan in 2006 was the attitude of the people. I heard one high school teacher say to her principal, “Father Alan used to be here and was always together with us in the parish youth apostolate. Then he was transferred to the south... but he has come back” The former parish priest had been suppressed and made part of a distant parish. Three times in the past the local priest has been taken away from Inarawan, with no immediate successor, and the people feel that they are abandoned and that they are not valued by the Church. They also feel that no priest wants to stay with them. Now they actually have a priest that has come back of his own accord! I have also noticed this recently when I came back home from leave. The fact that there is a priest in the area seems to mean for the people that the Church is interested in them, also that God has not abandoned them, Mass and the sacraments are celebrated regularly there.

Also, there is the fact that the foreign missionary is seen to be making an attempt to adapt to the environment in which he lives and works. When I came back once from home leave, one person said to me, “*You have grown fat and become white, but in a few weeks, you will become Filipino again.*” For me it would suggest that the people know that this country I have adopted is important to me.

A retreat giver encouraged us all to learn by heart the prologue of John’s Gospel. The Word became flesh and lived amongst us. I have always felt that as Divine Word Missionaries we should follow upon the incarnation of Jesus in our lives and mission.

Jesus became Jewish. I know that I could never become Filipino. St Paul the embodiment of the Church’s missionary thrust, tried to be all things to all people. I think I would be content just to be vaguely assimilated Mindoreño.

### **What I feel should happen in Mindoro, or at least in my place.**

For a long time I have felt that Church was far too large to have regular and continuous contact with all her members. Also, while there was a Chapel in every village, these were usually locked except for perhaps an hour every month. Was that the mission of the Church and of the priest, to go to each village once a month, just to celebrate Mass, preach, hear confessions and baptise? If that were so there would be no growth. The church would be priest-centred. This was an impossible situation. The people would gradually lose interest and the Church would weaken or die in that part of the world – or perhaps some sect would come along, which could be there constantly, or more often than a priest could. In which case the Church would again weaken or die in the area.

What would seem to be needed in the Parish is a ministry of presence. How do I achieve this? In a way I am doing this already by being there for the people, but that is not enough. I can’t be everywhere at the same time.

It would appear that this problem is fundamental to the response of the local Church to the situation in Mindoro. Of course, I have been brought up in Europe, in a totally different situation, and the local view was at first incomprehensible for me. I have for time been trying to answer this question for myself. I feel embarrassed that after many years in Mindoro I have still not come to terms with my situation. Or rather, perhaps I have in fact come to accept the situation, but I am not yet ready to put it fully into practice in my ministry. It has taken me a very long time to understand that founding small communities is apparently the only way to meet the problem in the Philippines and elsewhere. Perhaps this would be the way ahead also in the West. Pope Benedict seems to feel that it doesn’t matter if the Church is smaller so longer as it is better. In Larbert, in central Scotland, where I once replaced a priest on holiday, I attended a St Vincent de Paul meeting. While the society’s work in Britain has been in many ways circumscribed by the state which now provided for most material needs, I was impressed by the apostolate of the members to elderly, sick,

lonely and housebound people in the area. Also, in the daily Mass community in my home parish I have discerned much goodness and care for each other among the people. Through these people the love of Christ reaches out to others who cannot attend, people who are working, the sick, the housebound, often people who would be a part of the daily worshipping community but for their infirmity or other commitments.

Inevitably, however, this community is comprised for the most part elderly people who were retired and therefore had the time to meet for Mass every day. Would such a community die out or would it be replaced by other people as they themselves reach retirement? I think the Church in Scotland is alive but, in some ways, it is a church of the elderly.

### **How do I see myself?**

I am part of a process which I do not fully understand myself, to work for the purpose of God in the world.

Sometimes I ask myself why I should be a missionary in Mindoro and not elsewhere. The Mangyan tribes people were the original inhabitants of Mindoro but they have been marginalised due to the massive influx of settlers from other islands in the Philippines. While no one can deny the magnificent work that the Church has done in the past and is continuing to do in the present, I think the great failure of the Church in Mindoro is that she has in the past neglected the Mangyans people, but the bishop told me that it was felt that my mission should be with the lowlanders. I do not know why I was not accepted to work with the Mangyans, but I feel this must be part of God's plan for me.

The vicariate is at present highly involved in education and development. I feel that I cannot be involved as much as I would like to, due to the language, culture, and, perhaps, attitudes and expectations of others working in the vicariate. Possibly this is changing now.

However, for some time I have seen my role in the vicariate as to search for God and at the same time to share this with other people. I think my contribution, for what it is worth, is valued by my fellow priests and by the people whom I am trying to serve. Recently I have found myself chosen as confessor for priests, nuns, seminarians, and perhaps this may become my main apostolate as I grow older.

Sometimes I feel that I should be working in my home country, especially when I see the difficulties of our local diocesan priests with the falling off in vocations. However, if I did go home, I would probably end up in our parish in Bristol, where I do not see any real need, although of course there is a need everywhere.

### **What have I done since I came to Mindoro?**

Since I came here I have always been in parish work. I have done little more than celebrate Mass in different places and been there to help the people when they needed me. I have noticed and been surprised by how many people contact me just to talk when they are worried. I have worked in four different places during the last 27 years (7 months at the start helping with the scavengers in Smokey Mountain, the big rubbish dump in Manila, and to a lesser extent helping the student teachers at the Philippine Normal College, in Manila). In Mindoro, I have usually been on my own, though I have been parish assistant 2 times. I also do a bit of confession/counselling at the novitiate and the local Benedictine monastery.

In my previous place, Inarawan, I have had the unusual experience of formerly having been parish priest there, but later returning as assistant parish priest. It was a fascinating and enriching experience to meet people whom I knew in the past but who are now, like me, more than 10 years older, with much experience accumulated in the meantime. I could see this both on the levels of the adults, often previously young people who were now married and settled, and of the small children whom I had baptised or who used to wave and shout when I passed by on the bike, but who were now at high school or even married and working already.

Recently I was moved to a new parish sandwiched between the sea and the mountains where everyone is engaged in either fishing or coconut harvesting. I found life much easier than in all other places where I had served, partly because I did not have any expectations of myself as the saviour of the parish or the people as my unquestioning helpers. Perhaps this has helped with the reawakening I have witnessed in the parish and the growth and enthusiasm as we prepare to celebrate the parish jubilee next year.

Fr Alan Meechan says Mass in St Patrick's Kilsyth on his 5-yearly visit home on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010.





St. Patrick



Fr Alan Meechan greets parishioners after Mass;



Fr Alan Meechan after Mass

My dear friends, (June 2008)

I'm sorry I've not been in contact for so long. With Easter over I should have been able to get a bit of a rest but things never work out that way.

May is always a busy time for us because there is a great devotion to Our Lady here, many villages celebrate their annual fiesta, and both the parish church and the villages have their daily Flores de Mayo celebration. Children, but also young people and adults sing, dance and offer flowers to Our Lady every day in the parish church or village chapel. I'm always amazed at the idea of 16 or 17-year-old boys offering flowers to a statue of Our Lady, and I can't imagine it happening in Kilsyth, but I think that often the young men are there not so much for Our Lady as for the young ladies! The Flores de Mayo culminate on May 31 with a procession through the streets, a special offering in the church, solemn Mass, a big communal meal and then often dancing or a variety show in the evening. It is a great social occasion and really brings the community together. Thankfully, the priests don't have to get involved in everything, though I usually try to attend at least one offering in each village – a couple of days ago in one village a very nice wee lassie grabbed me and made me offer flowers with her – but in the final few days it's murder trying to celebrate Mass in as many villages as possible. Some priests actually boast eight or nine masses on May 31, which is just not right. I had six once but I'm making sure it won't happen again. I had four yesterday, plus more than four hours of travel between the chapels, while my parish priest, who never preaches a sermon, had six.

Some weeks ago, I heard that Fr Karl, a German priest in a parish across the river, had decided to go home to look after his aging mother. A couple of days later the Episcopal vicar for clergy and religious chased me up and asked me to replace Karl. I'd already had time to think and I was able to give him the reasons why I thought I shouldn't leave my area

– nobody else wants to go to Inarawan, I would be the fourth priest there to be suddenly removed in fifteen years without an immediate replacement, I've just got started on certain programmes which as yet couldn't easily be put in the hands of the lay leaders, who would lose heart anyway if they were left alone again, etc. I know it sounds as if I am on an ego trip and making myself out to be indispensable, but I've thought and prayed about it for some time and I honestly feel it was the right thing to do.

The other priests of course think I'm daft to refuse my own parish. Karl said to me, "You'll enjoy it there, it's small, no problems, and you'll have your own cemetery!" A cemetery makes a small parish financially secure. My parish priest has been trying to get me to accept: "Don't worry, I can adjust my schedules (35 villages and a couple of diocesan committees) so I can look after that area too." I discussed it with two of my leaders and they asked me not to tell anyone else because what little progress we've made so far would come to an immediate halt if the people knew they might be left on their own again.

I bumped into the vicar general in the cathedral one day and he told me they would respect my decision. Later, when the bishop came to the area for confirmation and was duly shocked when he saw the damage the floods had done to the place, he took me aside and said he could perfectly understand my wish to stay, but that something would have to be done about the parish house where all the doors and windows are rotten and where the silt now comes up almost to the windows. I did not say anything, knowing that the vicariate has never been very good at helping with priests' houses in the past – they expect the priest to find the money somehow himself – but then he went on to say, "I'll see what we can do for you, just let us know what you will need." Our catechist told me to hold him to that but I've a feeling that the best he'll offer me when the time comes is a loan that I couldn't possibly repay. I am a bit worried about the house – and the whole village – because the government has not repaired the dyke that burst on the river, so it looks as if the severe flooding in the months after Christmas will come back with the approaching rainy season. However, the formation centre we have been slowly building, largely with stipends from Kilsyth, will soon be complete, God willing. It looks as if two community organizers who were to come and live there might not come after all, it is on slightly higher ground than the parish house, and if necessary I can move there. In the four months after last Christmas the parish house was repeatedly flooded, sometimes up to the waist, and I used either to sleep in upstairs houses nearby or else escape on the bike to the home parish. You can take a bike through a flood much more easily than any other vehicle.

I'm more worried about the coming floods for the people's sake. In some places last time their land was simply washed away and deposited as silt elsewhere and the place where they used to plant has been turned into a stony desert. Making a living is now very difficult for them and it looks as if things will get worse in the near future. This is a very good reason why the Church shouldn't abandon the people at this time.

I have to go back to Calapan tomorrow – I'm taking Masses in the home parish at present – because though I got two injections I've to get extra vaccine, put it in the fridge and take it with me to get injected with it on certain days during the next month or so. It's a lot of bother, but they say it's a lot more trouble dying from rabies. The bite on my ankle doesn't look as if it's going to get rabid, but I've been bitten five times in the last ten years, including a bad one by the bishop's dog. It was disposed of shortly afterwards because it had bitten too many of the bishop's visitors. The people who ate it showed no ill effects, so I knew I hadn't got rabies from it. However, one Eucharistic minister I knew recently died after being bitten by the dog of the parish priest in my previous place, and I think I'm tempting providence if I don't finally get myself injected. I'm supposed to observe the dog for two weeks, to see if it dies, but I don't want to go near that brute again! Maybe you remember you got me an address on the internet so I could order a dog deterrent. I got it before I left London but I'd left it in the house last Tuesday. I'll make sure I take it on my home visits in future. I'll see if I can get this e-mailed tomorrow – I won't add to it because it's far too long already. I promise I'll try to write more frequently and briefly in future.

Thank you and God bless.

Fr Alan.

My dear friends, (January 2008)

Christmas is always a memorable occasion here with a lot of unexpected things happening, and it now seems I wrote to you not at the end but in the middle of things. Although the weather in the previous days had been such that we thought the rainy season was ending early, the rain came down heavily again the day after I wrote to you, especially in the evening, and there were jokes about the floods coming back. The next morning water did in fact start coming into the chapel house at 5 o'clock, we made sure everything was high up, and before long the house and the church were knee-deep in water. It seems that a flow of water about the size of a fairly large river came from the broken dam about 2 miles south and went straight through two villages, including ours. It separated into four or five branches, following the different streams in the village, flooding the whole place. Our area is both flat and low-lying, but we are about five feet higher up than the main part of the village, and by the afternoon the flooding was stabilized in the house. There are concrete barriers at the base of our two doors to stop water coming in, but really, they only stop it going out, so I thought I'd better make a start in getting the water out of the house. I knew it would take ages to get the house cleared, especially since I was alone, but if I didn't do anything nothing would happen, so I kept on going. Of course, it was not long till people passing came in to help and by evening the house was for the most part free of water. We left the chapel and by Saturday it was free of water and a number of us cleaned it in time for Mass on Sunday.

Down in the main part of the village all the houses were flooded up to waist-height and I pitied the people who had no split level or upstairs part and so had to spend their next few days in the water, unless they could go off to relatives till the water had gone down. As the road went out of the village towards the villages of Tagumpay and San Andres, where I had to travel by water buffalo through another flood two weeks before, the water got deeper, and I couldn't even take the bike – it would have meant carrying it for most of three kilometres. Tagumpay, Batanes and San Andres are still cut off. The navy brought in inflatables there, but they couldn't use them because of the rocks and the current. My visits there are postponed for the time being and I'm doing extra work in Barcenaga, the home parish.

On the other side of Inarawan where the road goes off to the villages of Mahabang Parang and San Luis, the situation was at its worst. The flood here followed the course of our local river which was now about four hundred yards wide and very deep. The road, which was particularly low lying, has been regularly flooded in the past and recently the provincial government built a sort of dyke to carry the road out of the village. This dyke now served as a dam with water piling up about ten feet on one side of it, passing over the top in a very strong flow which could easily sweep you off your feet. The noise of the water could be heard all over the village. Our high school, originally opened by the Divine Word Missionaries in 1993 and abandoned for some years after a horrible flood, was swamped. Though the water has gone down in the past few days there are still no classes and the pupils and teachers who have turned up are trying to clean the place. Yesterday they got hold of a mechanical shovel and were trying to clear out the pipes below the dyke in the hope that the water would go down. Six of my Mass centres have been cut off but I managed to get to three by bike, carrying it through waist high water and changing into dry clothes at the chapel. I still can't get to the other three. We were cut off from the outside world for two days but now the road going out is free of water. I can get around easily by bike but I'm not risking bringing our old jeep near Inarawan because of the state of the roads since the flooding. However, the weather is getting better, you can now often see the mountains again, hopefully by the end of the month the rivers will be low enough to cross and I'll be able to get to the home parish by bike in 45 minutes. This place is really beautiful when it is not raining, the mountains serving as a backdrop to the rice fields, but it rains far too much here, and the rainy season itself is really awful.

I'm sorry, as usual I'm going on for far too long, and I've got Mass in a barrio this afternoon, so I'd better stop now.

Thank you for everything, and God bless,

Fr Alan.

My dear friends, (December 29, 2007.)

I'm sorry I have not been able to write for a long time, but I have been very busy in the run up to Christmas, and a lot has happened. However, I've got my sermon sorted out for tomorrow, I'm in Barcenaga, the mother parish, to collect some things, having come by bike because the road is very bad and the jeep is falling to pieces, and I'm going to wait till about 4pm when it is cooler before going home, so I've got a couple of hours to spare, and I'll try to get something down now for you and sent off on Monday, if I can get in to the city for a short time to e-mail it.

After our last abundant harvest, the land was left a short time before it began to be prepared for planting. Then whenever I passed by I could see people ploughing with water buffalos and hand tractors and fixing up the pilapils, the low earth dykes that separate the rice beds. In certain corners you could see squares of a very vivid green, where seedlings had been planted close together temporarily before being transferred to the fields. Planting itself began about a month ago and is now still going on. Bundles of seedlings are tossed into the field to land about perhaps a couple of yards from each other. Then gangs of 10 - 20 people move in, each person takes up a bundle and plants individual seedlings in rows about six inches from each other, working very fast. It's very tiring work, they're almost bent double the whole day, but it is a living for the people.

While the planting is going on we are preparing what we hope will be another kind of abundant harvest. In the past few years the Church in the Philippines has been particularly concerned with the fact that we do not reach many people and has been trying to give emphasis to the place of the family in the Church. At Christmas the vast majority of people do not get to Church – if they did the churches would burst at the seams.

Every parish has a number of village chapels in addition to the parish church, ideally each with its own church council and served by a Eucharistic minister every Sunday, with the priest visiting each village for Mass once a month. However, in my area we have eleven chapels and only one active lay minister who takes two chapels on a Sunday. I have Mass every Sunday in two more chapels, but the seven others have till now been used only once a month when I went to visit them. In an attempt to remedy this situation, I have begun revising missalettes which come from Manila, and sermons from the bishop's office, simplifying the language, and producing an easy to follow Sunday service each week, using the readings of the Sunday and with a sermon or sharing. This can be used by lay people, for example, the man or woman who is in charge of the village church council, with other members of the community involved in reading, commenting, singing the psalm, reading the short sermon, etc. It means a lot of work every week but for the first time I am seeing almost all of our chapels open and being used on Sundays. Few people attend at present, but it's a start, it is very important that the local church community meets to pray every Sunday, and it's much better than letting our chapels lie empty. For the first time ever, there has been a daily Christmas novena service in practically all the chapels in my area.

I can see many problems ahead, notably of discouragement, tiredness and perhaps differences of opinion among leaders, but I hope to develop what's being done and always to be there to lead and encourage the people, eventually helping in regular training sessions and recollections, with material from the diocese. The bishop had previously a vague plan for commissioning lay ministers of the Word, people who can lead a service when there is no Eucharistic minister, but so far nothing definite has emerged. I am trying to get things going from the grass roots, and perhaps what is being done now in my area will eventually be formalized at diocesan level. Meanwhile I am taking care that we remain in harmony with the mind of the Church.

We will never have enough priests and while there are still many villages without Eucharistic ministers, this idea should lead to our people being better looked after, not only through Sunday liturgy but also caring for each other in their local communities. Even though I have quite an area to take care of the names of people who can't attend Mass though illness or disablement are mentioned for prayer at the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy in the central village of Inarawan. Our local unofficial census which I started when I first came is not all that accurate, but I am already benefiting from it in my ministry. While I cannot yet say that all the sick or bereaved are being regularly visited and helped, I've got hope for the future. At least I'm beginning to know the people, which is something very difficult to achieve in a missionary situation.

I began my Christmas season with a bit of an accident. One Saturday early in the evening I was coming back to the village on the bike in the dark after a couple of weddings in the Barcenaga. The road has been in a terrible condition

since the last harvest was taken out of the area and the bike is quicker than a vehicle because you can zigzag and avoid the big puddles and potholes which are full of mud and water, sometimes knee-deep. I had just avoided a puddle on my right when suddenly another cyclist appeared in the beam of my light. He too had been avoiding a puddle on his right and now we were heading straight for each other. In addition to our twisting and turning to avoid the puddles, the road was winding so I didn't see him until he was straight in front of me. Like most cyclists here, he had no light. I couldn't move back to the right, so I swung into the trees on the left of the road, braked and put my foot down. I thought I had got out of his way, but he ploughed right into me, his handlebar hitting me hard on my right cheek, though it was not too painful at the time. He fell off his bike, sat down at the side of the road and began to cry and scream. I was worried at first but then remembered that in an accident it's often the least seriously injured who is the noisiest. I made the mistake of saying I was surprised he had run into me, and this seemed to hurt him more than the accident did. He maintained I had run into him and that he was in the right because he had been on the proper side of the road. It never occurred to him that we were both avoiding puddles, that he had no lights, he apparently did not break, and that even then he should have seen my powerful halogen light from a long way off. By this time, I realized he was hardly hurt at all, a couple of gashes on his fingers only, but he was behaving like a spoilt child, and I thought he was drunk, except I couldn't smell anything from him. He insisted that I had smashed his bike, the tyre had come off, and that I accompany him to his house which was not far away so that his wife could decide who had hit whom. I didn't quite understand his dependence on his wife, but I was in a risky area where many people belong to a fiercely anti-Catholic sect. I had had a run-in with them about eight years ago when I was prime witness to the murder of a Catholic, and the bishop had said, "No, you are not going to testify; these people are ready to kill if necessary." Therefore, I thought it best to accompany him. If I didn't I might have difficulties, there in the future. On the way to his home some of his neighbouring relatives saw us and joined us, both Catholic and sectarian. One said, "Don't worry, Father, we'll make sure it's all right." I got the impression that he is a bit of a problem in the area, and they didn't want any trouble. I've often felt in the past that after the murder word was put out among the members of the sect that I wasn't to be harmed, and even after eight years they were following this up. When we got to the house he was very upset because his wife was not there. With the help of some of the neighbours I fixed his bike, talked to him and comforted him, later, using oil to massage what he said was a sore bit of his back at the base of the neck. I took care not to suggest that either of us was in the wrong. By the end he was smiling and at that moment his wife arrived and said, "I'll deal with him, Father, you've got a long way to go so you'd better be getting on." I checked a couple of days later and he was all right, though by then I had a beauty of a black eye and a doctor later found I had two fractures round my right eye socket. I had a bit of pain especially at the beginning of the Christmas dawn novena, but the fractures now seem to be healing. I'll get myself looked at in Manila next month. At least it didn't keep me off the bike. I notice when I pass by that place on the bike that the people are now especially friendly.

During the novena dawn Mass period I had every day in our village morning novena Mass at 4am (confession before Mass) in Inarawan, where I stay, and evening novena Mass at 7pm in another village. I usually got back to Inarawan about 10pm which didn't give much time for sleep, though after the morning Mass, usually over by about 5:30am, I could sleep for a bit before going out to visit other villages or to the mother parish where I helped at weddings and funerals. The parish vehicle broke down on the second and third days of the novena, so I didn't trust it anymore and went everywhere by bike. My parish priest was not too demanding, probably because of my accident, he didn't expect me to go too often to Barcenga, which is some 12 miles away over a terrible road, so my Christmas was fairly relaxed, compared with last year. We had only one typhoon which burst a dyke on one of the rivers. The flooding did not reach my village, but I was nearly swept off my feet at one point when going to visit two remote villages. On the way home, I travelled through the flood, complete with bike, sitting on top of sacks of rice on a trailer pulled by a water buffalo, the first time I'd done this for years.

Apart from that we managed to get through Christmas without any problems and I actually thought the rainy season was going to end without us being flooded, for the first time in fourteen years. However, on December 26 and 27 heavy rain caused all of Inarawan to be flooded, including the church and chapel house. Three villages were completely cut off, boats were got from the rescue services to help people get in and out and there were even a couple of helicopters ferrying people for a short time. I got through to two of the villages on Dec. 28, carrying the bike through the almost waist-deep water and being careful with the current. I'm luckier that I am taller than most people here. The floods have

for the most part gone down now, the church and chapel house have been cleaned up and we are ready for the Dec. 31 evening Mass and the Mass and baptisms on January 1. However, a lot of Inarawan is covered in thick black mud. Still, it will make the fields more fertile. People were asking me today if I thought there would be more flooding and I said no, which was tempting Providence. January should see the end of the rainy season, but you never can tell here.

God bless and Happy New Year!

Fr. Alan.

Inarawan,

My dear friends, (October 2007)

Again, we are in the rainy season and already have had a number of typhoons. Even for the few people like me who do not work on the land our life here revolves round planting and harvesting. Now is harvest time, the second I have seen since I came back from Scotland, and most of the rice crop has already been gathered in. We have had a very abundant harvest this year.

Every morning you can see people going off to work, covered from head to toe to protect them from the sun, each carrying a karik, a short, thin sickle which they use to cut the stalks. Most farmers now own or rent a small diesel threshing machine costing about 700 pounds, which is mounted on 2 wheels and brought into the field behind a water buffalo, but the cutting and binding of the stalks is done by hand and is very tiring. The people fill sacks straight from the thresher and then these are loaded onto a cart pulled by a water buffalo which takes them to the side of the road where they are stacked to await the arrival of the contract jeep.

A jeep is a long, sturdy vehicle, a cross between a military jeep and a small bus with sides that reach only halfway up from the floor to the roof which is supported by struts. It has a door at the back and benches along the inside walls for passengers, a bit like in the old Glasgow Subway. The benches are taken out and tied onto the roof when rice or other produce is to be carried. Jeeps, heavily loaded with sacks of rice both inside and on the roof, leave our area and travel over the rough road for almost 10 miles till they finally get to the asphalt road going to the city with its rice mills and seaport.

The road is full of ruts and potholes at the best of times but now it has been made much worse by the heavy rain and the regular passage of the jeeps which groan and lurch dangerously as they slowly and laboriously bear their loads towards the main road.

Sometimes I arrive at a village for Mass but find only old people and children there because the others are away at the harvest. The same people are called over and over again to help with the harvest in different fields. Of course they have to struggle to make their living in a place which has no social security or free health care, and the rice has to be got in when it is ready, a sudden cloudburst could ruin it.

The same is happening with the formation programmes that I am trying to get going in the villages, mainly a series of bible studies and sharing

with growth through developing themes. At present I am concentrating on the leaders of each village pastoral council, but it is very difficult to do anything when I can't be sure that they will all be there. However, I'm hoping to get the programme really off the ground when the harvest has been completely gathered in and every is happy and relaxed, and when the rainy season is at its height and people can't do much outside. I'm finding that more and more of the examples and material in my sermons and teachings is related to the planting and harvesting of rice. Jesus' parables and teachings are always down to earth and closely related

to the everyday life of the people, and I think I am finally beginning to learn to use Jesus' methods. During the past few weeks the people have continually been looking at their fields and those of their neighbours with expectation, and this gives a good base for teaching about the Kingdom of God. Rice is more real to them than mustard seeds. When the rice

is first harvested, or when it gets to the mill, a small amount is taken out of the sack, handled, smelt and even tasted, in an attempt to assess its quality and value. We are all familiar with the grain dying and producing an abundant harvest, with Jesus as the first fruit and the people seem to understand when I try to relate this with the testing of the rice.

The harvest is now almost over, and some people are already planting again, though most will wait till December when the rain will be more or less constant. We are all praying that there will be no more typhoons like the ones last year that destroyed many fields and buildings and once flooded our whole village to a depth of 3 feet. Although not everyone is a regular churchgoer, all the people here have a very strong faith in God and prayer, and we would all be grateful if people in Kilsyth could sometimes say a wee prayer for the rice farmers of Inarawan.

Thank you, and God bless.

Fr Alan Meechan SVD.

### Some memories of Fr Alan Meechan in Kilsyth



Fr Alan Meechan as a Boy Scout in St Patrick's Kilsyth



*St Patrick's Kilsyth*  
*150th Anniversary*



ST PATRICK'S PARISH COMMUNITY INVITES  
**Rev Father Alan Meechan SVD**

TO JOIN US AT OUR 150TH CELEBRATION MASS  
ON  
TUESDAY 17TH MARCH 2015 AT 7.00PM

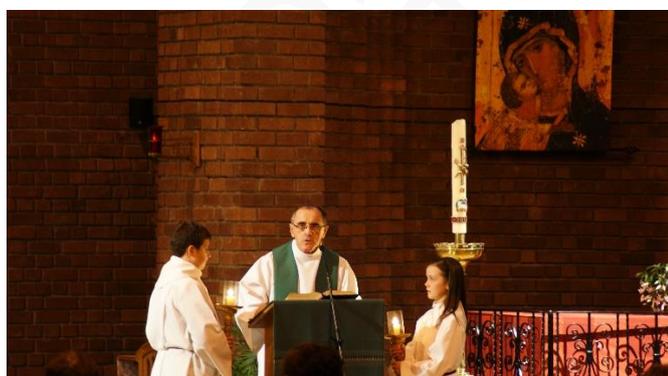
THE MAIN CELEBRANT WILL BE  
HIS GRACE ARCHBISHOP LEO CUSHLEY

THEREAFTER TO THE PARISH HALL FOR REFRESHMENTS

R.S.V.P. BY 31ST JANUARY 2015

St.Patrick's Catholic Church, 30 Low Craigends, Kilsyth, G65 0PF  
Email: admin@saintpatrickskilsyth.org.uk

Fr Alan Meechan's invitation to join us for the 150th Anniversary of the Parish in 2015. Sadly Fr Alan was unable to attend.



Fr Meechan on 6<sup>th</sup> Nov 2013 at Mass with Archbishop Leo Cushley in Kilsyth to declare the new parish hall open



Some photos Fr Alan has shared with us from his Parish Work in the Phillipines



Fr Alan Meechan in his Chapel at Tagumpay.



The local parish pastoral council.



A meal after Mass with the local parish.



Inarawn pastoral centre.



Inarawn old parish house.



The new chapel house on stilts to prevent flooding.



Inarawn Chapel.



Inarawan Chapel.



Chapel Entrance.



Inside Inarawan village Chapel.