

## **Pakistani Government rewards Church people**

### **Catholic priest, nun receive country's highest civilian honor**



More than 600 people gathered in Karachi for a special Mass on Sunday to congratulate a Catholic priest and nun who were among this year's 27 recipients of the country's highest civilian award.

Earlier, Sindh governor Dr Ishrat-ul-Ibad had handed Sitara-e-Quaid-e-Azam prizes to Australian priest, Father Robert McCulloch, and an Irish nun, Sister John Berkman Conway, for their "untiring efforts in the development of the country in the fields of education, health and promoting interfaith harmony."

Fr McCulloch of the St Columban's Mission Society who served in Pakistan for 33 years led the celebratory Mass at St Anthony's Church in Karachi.

"I am thankful to God, the way he used us and it's an honor for the Pakistani Catholic Community that the government has recognized our services and awarded us," he told the gathering.

During his 30 years in Pakistan Fr McCulloch has opened homes for the terminally ill, teamed up with Hindus and Muslims to provide medical care for the poor and ran the Catholic Center of Academic Excellence for boys in Hyderabad.

His efforts have seen Catholic boys play a vital role in helping develop society and the country.

He also served at the National Catholic Institute of Theology as a professor for 27 years.

The priest has now been transferred to Rome and is serving as the Procurator General of the Missionary Society of St Columban's.

Sr John Berkman Conway, meanwhile, is an Irish missionary who has served as an educator in Pakistan for almost six decades in Convent of Jesus and Mary Schools in Murree, Lahore and Karachi.

During that time she has touched the lives of many Muslim, Christian, Parsi and Hindu girls, which has fostered interfaith harmony among women.

The 81-year-old was a teacher of several high-profile Pakistani women including Benazir Bhutto, the country's first female prime minister and Asma Jahangir, a famous human rights activist.

"I was surprised, when I heard about the award. It was really unexpected," she said on Sunday.

"Over the last 59 years I have tried to promote moral and ethical values of acceptance, forgiveness, kindness and obedience, Sr Berkman added.

"The literacy rate in the country is still not high but parents are now more willing to get their daughters educated," she smiled.

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