



Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

May 2024

COMBATING Exploitation and Poverty

C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Combating Exploitation and Poverty



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MAILING ADDRESS:

Missionary Society of St. Columban
1902 N. Calhoun St.
St. Columbans, NE 68056-2000

TOLL-FREE PHONE: 877/299-1920

WEBSITE: WWW.COLUMBAN.ORG

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PUBLISHER

FR. CHRIS SAENZ
DIRECTORUSA@COLUMBAN.ORG

EDITOR

KATE KENNY
KKENNY@COLUMBAN.ORG

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

MARCI ANDERSON
MANDERSON@COLUMBAN.ORG

RENEA STEELE
RSTEELE@COLUMBAN.ORG

DYANNE WENDLING
DWENDLING@COLUMBAN.ORG

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

KRISTIN ASHLEY

EDITORIAL BOARD

DAN EMINGER
KATE KENNY
ERNIE MAY
JEFF NORTON
FR. CHRIS SAENZ

The Missionary Society of St. Columban was founded in 1918 to proclaim and witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Society seeks to establish the Catholic Church where the Gospel has not been preached, help local churches evangelize their laity, promote dialogue with other faiths, and foster among all baptized people an awareness of their missionary responsibility.

In So Many Words

By Sr. Abbie O'Sullivan

All My Trust

If I could stand before the crucifixion of Jesus on Calvary what would I feel or think? What would I do or say? What would you do or say? The connotation of the word crucifixion in the Old Testament was terrible and dreadful. This type of execution was reserved by the Romans for those who were found guilty of sedition against the State.

Public criminals, traitors and rebels were also meted out this same type of punishment. It was the most ignominious of deaths. It stripped the human person of his dignity and of all that he was entitled to. The Book of Deuteronomy Ch. 21 says, "If a man is found guilty of a capital offence you must put him to death by hanging him on a tree." Elsewhere it says, "Cursed be anyone who hangs on a tree."

Jesus hung on a tree — two beams of wood, one vertical and one horizontal. The soldiers even opened His heart with a sword lest any vestige of life be left in His emaciated body. But even then, after all He had suffered, He whispered, "Come back to Me with all your heart."

For a moment let us look at the crucifix. This is perhaps one of the greatest acts of faith we can ever make. It is the deepest contemplative prayer we can ever lose ourselves in. We are looking at the Son of God who freely became human like us and who suffered intensely for me and you. He knows our needs and sufferings. When we look into His sad and weary eyes, we hear Him say, "Was there ever any suffering like Mine?" His arms are wide open inviting us to, "Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will refresh you."

*But even then, after all He had suffered, He whispered,
"Come back to Me with all your heart."*

Let us make the effort to return to Him. He knows us better than we know ourselves. What a great sense of security and belonging we can have as we quieten ourselves and look into His face. His sad eyes are full of compassion and mercy imploring us to accept His tremendous love. We don't have to say or do anything. He knows our needs.

Let us allow our worries and anxieties, our sorrows and sufferings be absorbed into His. Then the everlasting peace will flow into our hearts and souls. Jesus seems defeated. He has lost everything and has been abandoned by many. Why believe in Him then? Surely because He overcame death and rose again from the tomb in His glorified Body and returned to His Father.

He opened the way for everyone to rise from the dead and be united in the Heart of the Blessed Trinity for all eternity with all our loved departed ones who are waiting for us. They are already in the heart of the Trinity.

Sacred Heart of Jesus I place all my trust in You.

Columban Sr. Abbie O'Sullivan provided this reflection.





My Pentecost in Birmingham

In Our Time

By Gertrudes C. Samson

The Sunday Feast of the Pentecost in 2023 fell on May 28. What is the Feast of Pentecost some people might ask? As described in that Sunday Gospel Reading in John 20:19-23, it is the commemoration of that late Sunday evening, 50 days after Jesus's resurrection, when Jesus Himself stood among His disciples greeting them "Peace be with you." Jesus said "Peace be with you" not just once but twice, and at the second time He said "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Then He breathed on them and said, "receive the Holy Spirit." To me, those words of Jesus in the Gospel reading "peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you" is a commemoration and affirmation again of my being missioned here to Birmingham, Britain.

As I pondered that Pentecost Sunday at the Catholic Church, I realized that after being sent here on mission in a multi-cultural and inter-religious community of Birmingham, as a Columban lay missionary with

a team who promotes dialogue and good relationship between people of different faiths, I now live the spirit of Pentecost differently in my everyday life.

After almost thirteen years here on my mission in Birmingham, I am now very much at peace in being with people of different faiths to whom God sent me to know, serve, and love. Just this year during the period of Ramadan, our Columban Inter-religious Dialogue (IRD) team here in Birmingham were invited to several mosques of different denominations to join them in their "Iftar" meal which is the Muslim breaking of the fast.

People of other faiths also invited us for other occasions, gatherings, ceremonies, workshops, and seminars. At Fatima House, this year too, we also had a joint celebration of Muslims Eid al-Fitr, Sikhs Vaisakhi, and Orthodox Easter. Like when I visit other places of worship, I also bring some friends from other faiths to our Catholic Church.

One of the Surprises of the Holy Spirit

My fiancé Kush, who was raised as a Hindu when he was a child, was with me at that Pentecost Sunday Mass. Like me he does not mind visiting other places of worship. His Mum is the same. I saw a photograph of her lighting a candle inside a Catholic church when she was still able. Kush even queued for a blessing from our parish priest during the communion as he usually does when he goes to Mass with me.

Upon entering the church, Kush always touches the ground with his hand and touches his hand to his head like he does when entering any place of worship. He said, "The act of touching the threshold of a place of worship on entering is symbolic, to receive with humility the dust from the feet of our fellow worshipers so that we may impart the wisdom of their spiritual journey on us too." This is one of the surprises of the Holy Spirit for me too. I never thought I would meet my fiancé through the Interreligious dialogue (IRD) in mission.

After that Sunday Mass at the Catholic Church English Martyrs we both traveled a few steps to another place of worship in Sparkhill, the Sikh Temple Guru Nanak Gurdwara, to join their Community Meal called *langar*. Then in the afternoon we went together with his Mum to the Hindu Temple Shree Laxmi Narayan Mandir to attend the celebration of the inauguration of the completed Mandir “facade” of the Hindu Temple.

Joining people of other faiths in their gathering and celebration is now part of my everyday life both in relation to my ministry with the Columbans and in my personal life with Kush and his family.

Kush is a British citizen and grew up in my mission area. His Parmar family, whose ethnicity is from Gujarat India, migrated to Birmingham from Kenya, East Africa, where he was born, when he was 7 years old. And so, my mission which is interreligious dialogue, intercultural living, and reaching out to asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants is part of the day-to-day reality that he grew up with, and many of his friends are refugees and migrants themselves. In fact, he mentioned to me that his best friend at the primary school was a refugee from the Vietnam war and they are still in touch with each other. In that sense I realized that Kush was immersed in the area where I am missioned earlier than me, as early as when he was child.

Welcomed and Respected

Kush and I are both chaplains. We are both part of Multi-Faith Chaplaincy of West Midlands Police in Birmingham. For many years Kush was a volunteer for Samaritans who respond to calls for help to prevent crisis or do crisis management.

Wherever we go, people naturally gravitate to us. An example of this is when we went to the Registry Office



I also practice meditation which is to me, as a Christian, is like being still in the presence of the Lord, seated with my eyes closed and just focusing on the breath of life that God gave me.

for our marriage license inquiry. One of the staff suddenly came to our room asking if there is anyone who can speak Urdu and Kush gladly volunteered to be a translator and help the person in the other room.

He was also a volunteer for the Missionary of Charity Sisters of Mother Teresa when they still had their convent in Birmingham, and so his Mum visits their convent with him and they also visit their house. His family was familiar with Catholic missionaries in the past before they even met me and my co-lay missionaries from Philippines, Rose and Jayjay, who introduced us to each other.

I am welcomed and respected both as a person and a missionary by Kush and his family, relatives, and friends. He is happy and thankful that I have faith because it is what brought our lives together, although he describes himself now as non-denominational with his own Vipassana insight meditation practice.

Kush is happy for me to continue as a Columban Lay Missionary. He knows that I love serving God through the Columban mission. In fact, he supports me consistently behind the scenes in his own way as I do my work as a Columban missionary and CLM Coordinator in Britain.

I am happy that he practices Vipassana meditation, because I know it continually helps him to be a better person. Sometimes I join him at the Buddhist temple, Edgbaston Vihara Sangha where Kush leads the meditation on Thursday nights. I now integrate meditation in my own practice each day too.

After visiting the Buddhist temple, I prayed and read my “Our Daily Bread” which is a Christian devotional booklet that has scripture reading and contemporary stories and explanations.

I also practice meditation which is to me, as a Christian, is like being still in the presence of the Lord, seated with my eyes closed and just focusing on the breath of life that God gave me going in and out of my nose for at least fifteen minutes. It helps me calm down, think better afterwards, and carry on, especially when the going gets tough in my life as a missionary.

The Spirit Enabled Them to Speak

The first reading of Acts 2:1-11 on the Feast of Pentecost, describes what happened: “When the day of Pentecost came, when all the believers were gathered together in one place. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and

began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.”

It also described what happened to the people who witnessed it, saying they could understand the languages the others were speaking and they were left in amazement and wonder.

Many times I find myself in amazement and wonder from how interreligious dialogue is a normal part of our everyday conversations, sharing with each other stories from our faith or moral lessons from which we can draw inspiration.

We are from different backgrounds, but we could understand what we were sharing with each other. These stories were life-giving to us and helped each other to grow and be a better person.

Definitely, I can also see the Holy Spirit at work in his life too and hear the voice of the Holy Spirit through him. There were times that I faced challenges as missionary so when he asked me one time how I was, my response to him was, “I felt like I am falling and floating and I do not know if I will continue to float or hit the ground and shatter to pieces”. Kush then offered me words of wisdom saying, “You know why you feel like you are floating? It is because Jesus is holding you.” What he said lifted my spirit that day.

There was a time when all the difficulties that were going on in my life seemed too much and did not make sense. As a response, Kush shared with me, “Ger, there is story about a bookmark inserted into a Bible and the person looking at it thought this seems like a mess of threads that does not make sense. But when the person flipped up, on the other side it says ‘God is love.’” I suddenly remembered that indeed God loves me and was working behind the scenes all the time preparing something beautiful in my life.

There was another time when Kush knew I was feeling down, so he suddenly



mentioned the lines of my favorite poem, “Do it Anyway” by Mother Teresa. My tears fell, realizing that I could unexpectedly and clearly hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking from someone who was raised up from another faith, to uplift my spirit.

“Nostra Aetate” (In Our Time)

The Vatican II document, “Nostra Aetate” (In Our Time), is what gave birth to the Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) that we are practicing today. It is the Latin name by which the Second Vatican Council’s “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” is known. It formalized an expanded attitude of dialogue and respect toward the major non-Christian religions of the world: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

When Fr. Tim Mulroy, the current Columban Superior General, visited Birmingham in 2022, he congratulated me about my engagement with Kush. I said to him, “Father, he grew up in Birmingham, but he is not a Catholic.”

He said, “Surely, he is a good man, otherwise you would not choose him.” I replied to him, “Yes indeed, Father, he is a good man,” and I told him a little about Kush’s background.

When Fr. Tim returned to Hong Kong and I greeted him on October 28 by saying, “Happy Nostra Aetate Day,” he sent me a message in reply, “Wishing you and Kush abundant blessings as you pursue the IRD journey together in daily life — and make real the spirit of Nostra Aetate in our broken world.” That message really touched my heart.

Truly indeed, that is the wish of both Kush and I when we entered into a committed relationship. We wished that in some way our relationship would be part of a testimony to show that people, although they may be from different faiths, can also love each other, and even marry each other, and live in peace.

A Long Journey Ahead of Us

At this point in time, Kush and I still have a long way to go when it comes to requirements for the different aspects of getting married legally in Britain, but in a surprising way, I believe that the Holy Spirit is continually facilitating our dialogue in daily life and making our relationship and love grow stronger day by day as we wait for God’s time. We do not know yet when will it be, only God knows. I also still need to apply for British Residency or Indefinite Leave Remain this year. I am encouraged by my colleagues and friends who got married but continue to fulfill, in their own way, the mission Jesus sent them to do. Please keep us in your prayers. May the Holy Spirit continue to journey with us to guide and help us. Amen! 

Columban lay missionary Ger Samson lives and works in Birmingham.



Help Future Generations with a Donation Today

Your gift helps people break the chains of addiction through Columban programs like the Rebirth Rehabilitation Center in Myanmar (formerly Burma).



Thanks to the generosity of the Columban donors we were able to complete and open the first residential center in the country for women suffering from addiction. In addition, the program provides vocational education training to help young men obtain jobs. We hope to expand this program and offer the men and women who come here a path productive employment and ongoing recovery.

By making a gift from your IRA, you can provide long-lasting support for the Missionary Society of St. Columban while enjoying financial benefits for yourself.

If you want to make help the Missionary Society of St. Columban spread the Light of Christ around the world, a gift from your IRA will make a tremendous impact on our mission. If you are 70½ or older you may also be interested in a way to lower the income and taxes from your IRA withdrawals.

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- Make a gift that is not subject to the deduction limits on charitable gifts
- Help further the work and mission of our organization

If you are 70½ or older, you can use your IRA to fulfill your charitable goals. You can use the "Make a Gift from My IRA" tool to contact your IRA custodian and make a qualified charitable distribution. We will acknowledge your generous gifts as a qualified charitable distribution, which may satisfy your RMD, if applicable.

For more information, please contact us at donorrelations@columban.org, call us toll-free at (877) 299-1920, or visit www.columban.org. The Missionary Society of St. Columban treasures your support and is committed to the stewardship of your gifts.

Small Steps

Embracing My Calling

By Song Janju F. Javier

Every first Sunday of the month, the diocese weekly newsletter advertised the Come & See gathering for prospective participants in the Columban Lay Missionaries. Most of those who attend the gathering do so after seeing the newsletter's promotion. It was in October 2021, amidst the peak of the pandemic, that I first participated in one of these gatherings. As face-to-face meetings were restricted, the gathering took place over Zoom. I vividly remember the unfamiliar feeling of

I was lost, not knowing where to go and how to live, having lost sight of life's ultimate purpose.

sharing through a monitor. My journey towards identifying with the calling of a "Columban Lay Missionary" and embarking on a spiritual pilgrimage was not solely prompted by the conventional methods mentioned above — browsing the sections about the gatherings in the diocesan

bulletins. There was a personal and special story behind it, and I wish to share this part with you.

About five years ago, I left Seoul, where I had lived with my parents for a long time and established my roots in my hometown of Chuncheon. Personally, it was a time of struggle, returning to the midst of the world after failing to fulfill the purpose I had set for myself in life. I was lost, not knowing where to go and how to live, having lost sight of life's ultimate purpose. I longed to seize even the

smallest opportunity to move forward, no matter what it might be.

During that period, my mother suggested that I meet a nun whom she occasionally met and had consulted. Although I initially declined a few times, I eventually went to meet the nun upon my mother's earnest request. There, I encountered Sister Margaret, a nun who resembled my grandmother — white-haired, petite yet strong, gentle, and had the appearance of a clear soul. Sister Margaret encouraged me to continue conversing with her in English, despite the challenge and difficulty of conversation in English. As our conversations progressed, I found myself peering deeper into aspects of myself that I had not seen before. The tasks I engaged in with Sister Margaret sometimes made me feel ashamed of myself and at times brought sadness, yet they were transformative.

Throughout that winter, I met Sister Margaret once or twice a month for conversations. Sister Margaret referred to herself as a member of the Columban Sisters and provided me with the name and contact information of the priest in charge of vocations for the Missionary Society of St. Columban. She also recommended that I reach out and consider attending the lay missionary gatherings affiliated with the Columban Mission Society.

Thanks to the unique connection with Sister Margaret, I am grateful to have been participating in the Columban Lay Missionary Come & See gatherings for nearly two years. This journey has led me to discern my vocation and to be invited to identify a missionary calling. Looking back, I cannot help but think that Sister Margaret was an angel sent by God to call me back from my wanderings and uncertainties.


Like many who dream of becoming missionaries, the title of



This journey has led me to discern my vocation and to be invited to identify a missionary calling.

“missionary” carries significant weight for me. I have come to understand through life's experiences that becoming the person we envision is far from easy. Our lives are filled with various aspects — challenges, adversity, humility and joy — that help us realize that the path to our desired life is not straightforward. As I engaged in these prospective participant gatherings, I did so not with the goal of becoming someone, but with the intention of approaching this journey with an open heart. Sometimes, I attended these gatherings seeking solace after a challenging month, while at other times, I listened to the stories of others, offering small comfort. In the beginning, I was focused on sharing my story, but as time passed, I became more comfortable and open-minded, able to lend an empathetic ear to others' stories. Through consistent attendance at these gatherings, peace gradually

settled in my heart, and with a growing sense of certainty, I took small steps towards embracing my calling.

After attending these gatherings for a certain period, I realized the need for a resolute commitment to a missionary life. I even proposed the idea of a pilgrimage program for this purpose to Anna Noh, who guided the gatherings in her role as the coordinator for the Columban Lay Missionaries in Korea. Later, when the situation of Covid-19 began to improve, I was delighted to hear about the upcoming Columban Society Invitation to Mission program in Taiwan. Through this mission exposure program in Taiwan, I hope to take another step forward on the path of Columban Mission in my life. In this brief yet profound journey, I pray that this precious time allows me to draw closer to the Lord. 

Song Janju F. Javier shared this reflection.

What Have I Learned?

A Columban Looks Back

By Fr. Al Utzig



Back in September 1990 I came home from Korea for a sabbatical after two terms as pastor of two parishes. It was a blessing for me to be able to attend a program at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. I had been asked in both places to build new churches and had worked hard to raise money to do that. In both places I left behind funds to start those projects, and the next Columban after me did the actual building. So, I was tired.

At the school we did the studies and so forth, but I really enjoyed the one weekend each month when one of the Jesuit professors offered to take

those interested camping in some of California's great national parks. Being from Pittsburgh, I had never experienced those big places — Death Valley National Monument, Mount Lassen Volcano National Park, Red Rock Canyon, Point Reyes, and the monstrous migrating elephant seals on the beaches not far away. I have very fond memories of these times. The state parks in Pennsylvania really couldn't compare.

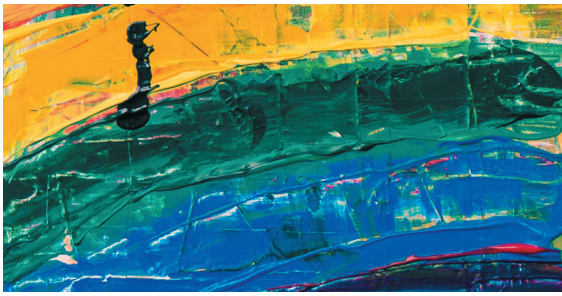
Among those doing the program with us were several gay people who were ready to “come out.” And they did so in very open and exaggerated ways. It gave me great joy to be with them, seeing that they felt free enough with all of us to be themselves. Jesus is all about freedom from fear. How many times did He tell us “Do not be afraid?” When I was in high school, I had the opportunity to meet an older man who was a drag queen. He was gay. Behind his back we called him names and made fun of him, but when I met him once or twice, I found him interesting and full of great stories of what it's like to be a drag queen. His life was very difficult with lots of suffering. I don't know what ever happened to him.

As the school year was ending at Berkeley, we were hearing about the Gay Pride Parade in San Francisco. It was something strange and unknown to me. So, on the day, I took the BART train alone to town and just stood there among thousands of people who had come for the parade. From the comments flying all around me, I was pretty sure there were plenty of gay and lesbian people there. Prior to going

to the parade, I had my trepidations, fears. Was I safe? Would I be molested? Or challenged? But once there among the crowd, the joyful, celebratory mood put me at ease. I was just taking it all in. People on six-foot stilts all painted silver or gold walking through the crowd throwing souvenirs, lots of chatter and laughing. The parade started with “Dikes on Bikes,” maybe a hundred, dressed in chains, some with blow-up dolls strapped to their backs, riding big Harleys. Noisy and off the wall! There were all kinds of groups on floats. But the ones I remember most were gay police, gay firefighters, gay EMT's, gay doctors and nurses — people I hadn't associated with being gay or lesbian. And then came the parents and friends of gay children. They were not ashamed or afraid to be seen as such. They loved their children. Period. Who am I to judge?


The parade was long, but I don't know how long. It all was so fast to me. I went home to our dorm and finished the school year. I learned many things, but maybe the most important was to appreciate how much pressure these brothers and sisters of ours have to live under for fear of not being accepted or being free to just be who they are. To see so many just let loose together gave me one of the biggest smiles I have ever had. And I thank God for that opportunity to experience “a life not like my own,” as St. Columban would say. I hope I am a bigger person for it.

At the beginning of November 2023, I joined some members of the LGBTQ+ community of Catholics in the San Bernardino Diocese where



I am a pastor. They are called “Gifted and Called.” This refers to the fact that so many of them have many talents, they are “gifted,” and want to use them in the Church for the good of all, “called.” And they want to be accepted as brothers and sisters, just like everyone else, without hiding or feeling cursed or dirty or strange. They want to be respected like everyone else as they are blessings to the community.

Palm Springs was hosting the annual Pride Parade, over 200 different floats. My first experience 30 years ago was so joyful, I wanted to go again. The members of Gifted and Called in Palm Springs are mostly retired people who have gone through the wars. Our members from my parish are younger people who are getting into the wars. We were about 25. The parade was much tamer than San Francisco’s parade but just as joyful. As we walked the route, I saw many big smiles and even a few tears as the spectators realized we were Catholics and part of the family of God, God’s children.

I am now 74 years old, and my missions have brought me to this place. I thank God for bringing so many different people into my life and calling me to walk with them. We priests are shepherds, pastors. We smell like them as we walk with the sheep. May God bless this big, mixed family we call the “Church.” 

Columban Fr. Al Utzig is originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was ordained in 1983 after working as an engineer in a glass factory for almost five years. He spent 20 years in Korea as a pastor, with young workers, and as an organic farmer; 20 years in the U.S. as formator, hospital chaplain, and in parishes.



A Burst of Light

First Year Anniversary

By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala

Before a huge crowd of young people in Portugal Pope Francis said, “Dear young friends, today we too need something of this burst of light, so that it can fill us with hope as we face the many failures of each day and the darkness that assails us in life, and respond to them with the light of the resurrection of Jesus. For he is the light that never sets, the light that shines even in the dead of night.” Pope Francis spoke about the moment Jesus took three of His disciples to the mountain where He “transfigured.” Through this brilliant burst of light Jesus draped the disciples for the dark night of the Passion.

Two years ago, we never thought of opening up a student center. What started out as a desire to provide an alternative learning program for the youth in the diocese, last year we celebrated our first-year anniversary. On August 15, 2022, the feast of the Assumption of Mary and nine days after the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, we opened the Student Learning Resources Center at the St. Patrick’s Church compound in Shatapru, Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar (formerly Burma). The parish priest allowed us to use an abandoned house which we modified into classrooms, computer room, an office, a library and a counseling room.

Through your generous contribution, we provided basic English and Computer classes. The main program of the center is the nine-month long Positive Youth Development Program (PYDP) which is grounded on the Positive Youth Development framework that actively acknowledges and promotes the assets and strengths that young people

possess. We do not focus on factors that may create negative outcomes but focus on building protective factors that help young persons to succeed in life. These positive assets for young people exist within themselves, in their culture and community. Once they complete the nine-month program, the student will then continue with the internship program where they are given the opportunity to work with our partner organizations for two months.

The vision of the center is to produce “Resilient and work-ready

“Let us be strong and flexible together. Be smart, be stable, and try to learn something new each day. The more you learn the more you will improve in both the present and in the future.”

~ ZSOFI KHAUNG NYWEL

young adults to actively participate in the life of their local communities and nation by being transformational leaders, contributing to social and economic development, promoting peace and harmony, and serving those in need.” From 25 students in the first semester, only seven students of the Positive Youth Development Program (Batch1) are now in our internship program. Last year we had a maximum of 40-45 students attending our different programs. This year for the foundational English and Computer classes we have a total of eighteen students and the more advanced PYDP class has 15 students.

Prior to the anniversary, we spoke to our intern students. Zsofi Khaung Nywel (23 years old) believes that SLRC is special for the youth in Kachin State because it gives them chance to learn necessary information and skills to help them find good jobs. She joined the center to build herself a good network. She believes that education is the key to success and only education can fulfill all of her ambitions. She reminds the youth, “Let us be strong and flexible together. Be smart, be stable, and try to learn something new each day. The more you learn the more you will improve in both the present and in the future.” She wants to tell the world that the young people in Myanmar are starving for quality education.

Another student Maria Lamawn Ja Seng Lung (a 25-year-old university graduate) is a volunteer at a local youth organization. She believes that SLRC is “good and a center full of opportunities” to help her upgrade her skills and life. She is a university graduate student but does not have enough certificates and qualifications to land stable employment which is why she joined center. She hopes that after completing the program she will get a stable job. She wants to tell the young people, “don’t give up and one day we will get a great future and our dreams will come true.”

While Kareng Sut Chying Htoi Hkawng, a 22-year-old who wants to be an English language trainer and help children complete their studies, joined this center to get more opportunities and chances to continue his studies. Education is extremely important for him because it is not easy to survive unless we are educated.



Scenes from the Student Learning Resources Center at the St. Patrick's Church compound in Shatapru, Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar (formerly Burma).

In other words, in order to earn decent money we have to be well-educated in Myanmar. He wants to say that even if young people in Myanmar are facing many difficulties and very few people are enthusiastic to help us, we just have to try ourselves to build our future and survive. But he also calls on the world to give young people of Myanmar more opportunities to get quality education.

Lastly, an internally-displaced youth Sut Mai Naw (18 years old who resides at the Palana Internally Displaced Persons Camp) mentioned that “SLRC for me is my future. And I expect to learn more to increase my qualifications to be able to work. That is why I joined the center. Education is life for me because it is quite important. I want to tell the young people of Myanmar to put education first in our priorities.”

The center is also very youthful. Most of our staff have not completed their university degree programs. The center provides not only employment opportunities but also skills training for professional development. The mission of the center is “SLRC aims to be an inclusive, youth-centered and youth-led institution that provides integrated and holistic formation programs and activities for and with young adults.”

For many young people in Myanmar, the world around them is dark literally and figuratively. We experience more than 12 hours of power blackouts each day. But figuratively the whole country is under a sense of hopelessness, helplessness and restlessness — in many places it is darkness. Many young people are experiencing mental health issues, and there has been an increase in suicide

among young people. Many young people are lost.

Pope Francis invites us all to be “burst of light” to others. He explained that we do not radiate our own light but “we radiate light — we shine — by welcoming Jesus into our hearts and learning to love as he does. To love like Jesus: that is what makes us shine, makes us do works of love. Friends, I am telling you the truth: whenever you do works of love, you become light. But the moment you stop loving others and become self-centered, you extinguish your light.”

Thank you for helping us to help young people in Myanmar. You are the “burst of light” for our young people here in Myanmar. **CM**

Columban Fr. Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar.



When Our Lady Changed Her Mantle

“...and Mary arose in those days and went in haste...” Lk 1:39

By Fr. Donal McIlraith

It was Easter 2012 and I was acting Parish Priest of the Columban Parish of Ba in Fiji. The Ba river had burst its banks once more on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, and the town and vicinity were badly flooded. As usual the Village of Votua was also badly affected. Once more they had to rescue the Blessed Sacrament from the Church by boat. Votua is the only village on Fiji whose chapel is named after St. Columban. There are two statues in the Church, one of Our Lady and one of St. Columban. The flood did no harm to St. Columban, but the statue of Our Lady was destroyed.

When I got to the village on Easter Sunday to celebrate the Easter Liturgy with them, the old ladies were very upset, “Our Lady has left us,” they told me. As was right and fitting, I preached on Jesus and His resurrection during Mass. Before the blessing, I said, “please do not be worried about Our Lady leaving

I was in a parish in Hamilton Diocese and met an old friend, Edward Gangalo who always brought his large statue of our Lady of Fatima to the cenacles.

you. She most certainly has not. She and Jesus will always be with you. But perhaps she has gone to change her clothes.” I have no idea what prompted me to say that.

A few weeks later, the pastor, Columban Fr. Paul Tierney, returned and took back his parish. I had a commitment to do cenacles for the Marian Movement in New Zealand. I was in a parish in Hamilton Diocese and met an old friend, Edward Gangalo, who always brought his large statue of our Lady of Fatima to the cenacles. He said to me, “I am worried that if anything happens to

me, they will just throw out the statue. Do you know anyone who needs a statue of Our Lady?” “Do I ever?” I thought to myself and to Edward I said, “Yes, Edward, I actually know a church in Fiji that needs a nice statue like this but I am now going to Wellington and will leave for Fiji next weekend from Auckland.” “No problem,” chipped in a lady at the meeting, “I’m going to Auckland and can deliver it to you.”

When I left for Fiji, I had two items of baggage and as the machine was only registered for one, I got a message to go to the counter. At the counter the lady serving me asked, “What is this?” pointing to the nicely wrapped statue. “That is Our Lady” said I, with my money ready to pay. “We can’t charge for Our Lady” announced the lady, and I did not argue. Some time later I was sitting in my seat, and I suddenly remembered that I had Our Lady’s crown in a small bag and had left it in the waiting area



After Mass



Parishioners at St. Columban's



Parishioners with St. Columban statue



Fr. Donal and Our Lady



Fr. Donal with Columban Deacon Ioane Naio

just outside the plane. I rushed to the attendant by the still open door and said, "I have left Our Lady's crown in a bag outside." She slipped out of her shoes and raced out. I remember the pilot looking out to see why things were not moving. Then she returned triumphantly waving the bag. "They had already cleaned up," she said "but I found it in the bin."

Now, Ba and Votua are about an hour's drive from Nadi where the

international planes land. In Nadi I looked for someone to drive me to Votua, and my friend Ken Pickering came to the rescue.

Our first stop in the village was at senior catechist Ramoce's house, but he was out farming. I proceeded to the Church. It was May 1 and several people were in the church preparing a very small statue of Our Lady for the May procession through the village that night. We unpacked Our Lady, I

blessed it, and we got a child to crown our Lady. As I left the church, catechist Ramoce and some of the menfolk of his family were sitting just outside with a bowl of Kava to thank me and presented me with an extraordinary gift in Fiji—a whale's tooth. So, Our Lady changed her mantle and sent me a whale's tooth! **CM**

Columban Fr. Donal McIlraith lives and works in Fiji.

Dance with Me

By A Columban Friend



*I stand at the perimeter,
never seen, never heard.*

When I am noticed, they call me names:

*Words of hate, words that condemn, they push me further
into the margins.*

*They don't see me...they perceive my presence and dismiss
my being...*

I shrink from the rejection and I lose my voice.

*The darkness of isolation deplete what little air is left in my
soul,*

*And I cry in desperation: I am here, see me, invite me, hear
me, listen to my story and come to know me.*

*In the dark silence, I hear a small voice: an invitation to
come and be.*

*The voice strong and calm echoes in my soul
Listening, I hear: Dance with me*

*A hand of Love reaches out and the voice says: "Remove
your shoes."*

*My shoes, no they are my comfort, my identity, they are
molded to me, not my shoes!!*

*"Trust me, my child, remove your shoes and come to me."
Haltingly, reluctantly, I slowly remove them: my comfort,
my shield, my self-identity.*

I move forward and take his hand

*As I move closer, I recognize Him: the One who loves me
before time, the One who died for my sins.*

"Dance with me,"

The steps are unfamiliar and I hesitate.

*"Dance with me, place your feet upon mine and learn the
Dance of Life."*

I gingerly place my feet upon His and we began to dance.

*We twirl, we spin, we dip. At times, I am afraid that I am
out of step with Him.*

But he is there, guiding me, holding me, supporting me.

As I grow more comfortable with His dance, He whispers

*"There are those who still despise me, they call me names,
they scourge me and they kill me in the ill treatment of
my sisters and brothers."*

"Don't be afraid, my child, you are stronger than you know.

*You are clothed with the colors of the rainbow because
you are hope, you are joy and you have the promise
of My love. You are all the colors I have created, all
beautiful and unique."*

*You have danced with me, you know me and now you are
seen, heard, and invited.*

Dance with me,

*Then dance with others so that they will have the opportunity
to see you, to hear you, to know you and to love you.*

Dance with me.

A Challenging Encounter

Go and Do Likewise

By Nathalie Marytsch

It was a sweltering afternoon when I was travelling back home, and it reminded me that God's love is for anyone, not just a few chosen pious or law-conforming individuals. I, too, can't be complacent and decide whom to love, for God's love includes everyone—yes everyone.

For those of you who have experienced traveling on buses in the West Midlands, Britain, you appreciate the small windows — which open only six inches at most — that keep you warm during the winter. However, when the weather gets hot, you think twice about the journey. On this particular afternoon the mercury had climbed to 81 degrees, and commuters were evidently uncomfortable due to the heat. To make matters more challenging, there was a homeless passenger whose evident lack of personal hygiene repelled everyone around him.

I was sitting a row behind the man and, continuously, I considered moving seats or even getting off the bus, as some of my fellow passengers had done. However, I chose not to. It wasn't because I wanted to be some sort of hero, but because I felt challenged. Instead, I tried to imagine what this man's early days had been like: his childhood, his youth. What events led him to have that scruffy appearance, with all sorts of stains on his clothing? When I asked him to excuse me so I could get off the bus, the man tapped my shoulder and muttered, "sorry I smell ma'am.... but I don't have no one."

Thinking about this encounter with the homeless man reminded me of Jesus' encounter with the Syrophenician woman. We know that she was a foreigner from a region



known as Canaan. According to Matthew's Gospel, she was seeking a cure for her daughter, who was thought to be possessed by a demon. The disciples' reaction, "send her away, for she keeps crying after us," followed by Jesus' remark that He was only sent for the people of Israel, makes me wonder how we treat homeless people today. How often do we detach ourselves from these realities?

Similarly, in Jesus' initial words, we can observe a clear distinction regarding whom Jesus came to save and those whom He did not.

The woman's daughter being possessed presents Jesus and the disciples with yet another challenge. She is seen as an impure soul who is not deserving of healing and grace. She is viewed as an outsider tainted by disease and shame. It is interesting that it is only because the woman persists and challenges Jesus that He changes His attitude, finally recognizing and praising this foreign mother for her great faith. The gist of this story, in my opinion, is that by journeying

with others, we discover the gifts and blessings that God brings us.

As I journey with diverse communities, trying to live out my missionary call, I am reminded of the blessings and challenges I have experienced. Encounters like the one with the homeless man on the bus serve as a constant reminder that I need to be challenged to change my perceptions, to consider when I am not being welcoming and compassionate, and ultimately, to confront my prejudices that may hinder me from seeing God and sharing God's love with even the seemingly least of my brothers and sisters.

Additionally, I feel challenged to explore the issue of homelessness in the broad sense, looking at the structures that cause people to fall out the safety nets. While compassion is at the core of the Christian message, justice and equal opportunities for all are just as central. **EM**

Columban lay missionary Nathalie Marytsch lives and works in Britain.

Love for Young People

A Passion and a Gift

By Angie Escarsa

For almost three decades, working with young people has been part of my ministry as a parish catechist in my home country of the Philippines and now as a Columban Lay Missionary in Ireland. For this I owe, and I give credit to, a dear Columban priest who was also my first ever “boss,” Fr. Donal Bennett.

I write this as a tribute to his great passion and love for young people.

Fr. Donal Bennett had an amazing gift of empowering the young people in the parishes where he was assigned. I for one was a witness to this wonderful ministry.

After graduating from college as a religious and values education teacher, I was employed by Fr. Donal as a full-time parish catechist. My role was to take up the position of an assistant youth coordinator. The first thing Fr. Donal asked me to do was to attend a Youth Encounter Seminar for a week in Virac Catanduanes in Bi-col.

As a 21-year-old new graduate, it was my first time to travel by plane to

attend a national seminar with young people from all over the Philippines. The Youth Encounter Seminar was my baptism of fire in my journey as a youth minister. Through this I was led to understand the role of young people in the Church and my own role as a youth minister.

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After attending the Youth Encounter, we worked towards gathering our young people in the parish. This gave birth to the SAYA Group — St. Anthony’s Youth Association.

As a group we began taking part

in “Youth 2000,” which was a group of young people focusing on the new millennium. It has since become a big organization, even in Ireland, which creates space and a platform for young people to express their faith and to feel they belong and are important in the life of Jesus’s Church. We traveled to different parishes in our Diocese and the neighboring diocese for Youth 2000.

When I joined the Columban Lay Missionaries my involvement in Youth 2000 was one of the things I had to give up when I resigned and left the parish for cross-cultural mission. Little did I know that working with young people would become a big part of my life as a Columban lay missionary. The love for young people did not end but rather was intensified when I came to Ireland.

Pope John Paul II, now St. John Paul II, was known for his love and confidence in young people. Just like Fr. Donal, he worked for the youth in his parish during his younger years



as a priest in Poland. And with his great love for the youth, he initiated the World Youth Day (WYD). This concept has been influenced by the Light-Life Movement that has existed in Poland since the 1960s, where, during two week summer camps, young Catholic adults celebrate a “day of community.”

As the biggest gathering of young people, World Youth Day is a celebration of faith and prayer that no other gathering in the world has ever surpassed.

I was privileged to have attended this youth festival of faith. The first was in 1995, before I joined the Columban Lay Missionaries. It was held in Manila, Philippines. This particular World Youth Day holds the record for having the highest number of participants ever with over four million attending. Of course, this was by far the biggest youth gathering I ever attended.

During my first year on mission in Ireland I was given the gift of

representing my parish of Ballymun on the Dublin Diocesan trip to the World Youth Day in Rome in 2000. For the second time, following Manila, I was able to see Pope John Paul II.

Then in 2005, while working with the Redemptorist’s youth ministry team I was asked to be one of the leaders in bringing over twenty young

As the biggest gathering of young people, World Youth Day is a celebration of faith and prayer that no other gathering in the world has ever surpassed.


people to Cologne, Germany. There we met Pope Benedict XVI.

Eighteen years after World Youth Day in Cologne, I had the opportunity to attend this special event once again when I was asked to be one of the leaders in bringing fifteen young

people to WYD 2023 in Lisbon with the Spiritans. There we met Pope Francis.

In my lifetime, I never knew what God had in store for me. Working for young people continues to be, and will always be, my passion—just as it was for Fr. Donal Bennett. Last year he left this world and went home to God.

Hopefully, all those young people Fr. Donal cared for and supported will continue his legacy and pass on this ministry to the next generation. This is what I continue to do.

Certainly, to journey with young people in prayer and in the celebration of faith at these World Youth Day events has been a great gift in my life. It is also my hope that at the next World Youth Day in 2027, I will see some Columbans accompanying young people to Seoul. It would be a gift in which they will experience. 

Columban lay missionary Angie Escarsa lives and works in Ireland.



90 years of Columban Mission in Korea

Diversifying from Parish Work

By Fr. Denis Monaghan

Columban missionaries arrived in Korea in 1933 at the invitation of the Paris Foreign Missions (MEP) Bishop Demange of Daegu Diocese. As many of the MEP priests had died while working as chaplains in the first World War and many decided after the war not to return to the mission in Korea, the diocese was very short of priests and so the bishop petitioned Rome for help. Rome in turn invited the Columbans to take a mission in Korea. In 1934 we were assigned the provinces of Jeollanamdo and Jeju Island and from then on our priests worked mainly in parishes.

However, Columban Fr. P. J. McGlinchey, while working at a parish in Jeju, started a 4H development program to help alleviate the poverty he encountered after the Korean War. Later he formed the Isidore Development Association which introduced new farming methods as well as cooperatives, credit unions, a hospital clinic, an animal feed factory, etc. Fr. P.J. was the first person to successfully grow grass on the hills of Jeju island, until then considered worthless, suddenly became land on which animals could be raised. Through this efforts farming became a viable way of life for people to prosper and rise out of poverty. Today Columban Fr. Michael Riordan continues the work at Isidore. Fr. Michael worked there as a veterinarian in the 1970s before later joining the Columbans and returning to Korea.

The first Columbans to work completely outside the parish framework were Owen Doyle and Kevin O'Rourke who, with the blessing of the then regional director Fr. Neil Boyle, decided to go into third level education as university teachers.

This decision was not welcomed by everyone, as traditionally we worked only in the parish apostolate and working in another apostolate was viewed by some as a betrayal



of our charter. Gradually however their work became acceptable to the majority especially when they were recognized for their work by the State. Fr. Kevin O'Rourke was recognized as a foremost translator of Korean poetry and received many awards. He published some 25 books.

Another apostolate was the student chaplaincy which Columbans took up as a way of keeping in touch with young people. Columban Frs. Paul Kenny, Owen Doyle, Con Murphy, Liam McCarron and Sean Conneely were involved in this work. As a principle we have always looked for diocesan approval before beginning any apostolate, but it was not always granted immediately. For example, when Fr. Art McMahon first looked for permission to promote Alcohol Awareness Education in the Seoul archdiocese, he was told that Korean drinking patterns were "part of traditional culture" and such education programs were not really needed! However, the Bishop did take a copy of the "The Big Book" – (the AA Handbook) – and having read it some months later, he called Fr. Art and encouraged him to promote alcohol education!

The Columbans worked in Kwangju City from 1934. Fr. Gerry Marinan was the first appointed there

as a curate to a Korean priest Fr. Min in Puk Dong parish. Catholics in Kwangju would have been very familiar with the Columbans. However, when Fr. Brendan Hoban was appointed to work in the labor apostolate in Kwangju, suddenly a whole new group of non-Catholic traders got to know the Columbans. How many times I went into a shop to be asked "do you know Fr. Hoban?" For almost 60 years we were anonymous to these people and suddenly a whole new section of society got to know the Columbans. I must confess as a parish priest I felt a bit envious that a newcomer was better known than I.

Each of the non-parish apostolates in which we were involved in deserves an article on its own but as they are so many I will just mention the particular apostolate and the number of Columbans involved over the years. Catechetics in Kwangju and Seoul – 2; Retreat Directors – 5; Student Chaplaincy – 5; Mass Communications in Wonju and Mokpo – 2; Working with J.O.C – 5; Labor Apostolate in Inchon and Kwangju – 2; 3rd Level Education – 5; Alcohol Education Programs – 5; Gambler's Anonymous – 1; Marriage Encounter – 3; Retrouvaille – 2; Counseling & Clinical Pastoral Education (C.P.E.) – 5;

Hospice Education Program – 1; Prison Chaplaincy – 6; Hospital Chaplaincy – 6; Migrant Workers – 4; Inculturation – 2; Dialogue with other Religions – 1; Working with persons with special needs – 1; Organic Farming – 1; Rural Farming community – 1; City Poor Apostolate – 10; Vatican Embassy Attaché – 8; Fish Market Ministry – 1; Missionary Parish – 1; Magazine Editor – 5; Columban Center – 4; Ecology – 1; J.P.I.C. Work – 1; Art Ministry – 1; Refugees – 1.

Many of the above works still continue today in the Region. We also have what I call "Columban work" such as Formation, Mission Education, Lay Mission, Mission Promotion, Vocations, House Managers, Bursar, etc. In fact, everyone in the region is involved in some way or other with Columban work, and those "retired" do not like to be referred to as retired! The Seoul Archdiocese, in line with most of the other dioceses, no longer uses the category retired. Instead upon reaching the age of 70, priests are assigned to sacramental ministry. Likewise, today all Columbans are involved in other apostolates — even the apostolate of "growing old!" EM

Columban Fr. Denis Monaghan lives and works in South Korea.



Help Spread the Light of Christ with a Gift that Costs Nothing During Your Lifetime

You can show your personal compassion and set an example for others by remembering the Missionary Society of St. Columban in your will, trust or other planned gift. No gift has a more lasting impact.



Recently, a huge influx of thousands of Venezuelan immigrants have entered Chile. Columban parishes have always welcomed the immigrants and tried to provide some material help (school supplies, warm clothing, blankets, and more) for them. We hope to continue providing relief for those who come to this "land of dreams." However, we know that the most important gift we have to share with them is our faith in the Risen Lord.

A planned gift helps the Missionary Society of St. Columban continue God's mission in the poorest areas of the world. And, financially and prayerfully supporting the Missionary Society of St. Columban is an excellent way to participate in the missionary activity of the Church.

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For more information, please contact us at donorrelations@columban.org, call us toll-free at (877) 299-1920, or visit www.columban.org. The Missionary Society of St. Columban treasures your support and is committed to the stewardship of your gifts.

Combating Exploitation and Poverty

I participated in a Holy Land tour in October 2022 with two parishes from Nebraska. It was a gift from my parents who also went on the tour. I had never been to the Holy Land and eagerly looked forward to visiting places that I read and studied about for many years. The only factor that hindered my experience was the advanced arthritis in both knees. My legs were not as strong as I was when I was young. Having no cartilage, I could not run or jump. For preventative measures, I bought a cane and used leg braces to reduce stress on the knees. Also, I took a big bottle of Extra Strength Tylenol arthritis pain tablets. I constantly prayed that my knees wouldn't give out during my tour.

Over the course of several days, I was amazed how much I was able to do with all the preventative aids I had. We often walked four to six miles a day. At the end of the day, as I took off the braces, my legs were tired, but I was not in great pain. I was making the journey and enjoyed such places as the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth, Ceasarea Philippi, Masada, the Dead Sea, and other Biblical sights. However, I was concerned about walking the Ways of the Cross (Via Dolorosa) in Jerusalem. It was an uphill walk to the sight of the Crucifixion. The night before, I prayed to the Lord to give me strength so my knees would not give out. Going uphill was a major task, and I truly wished to arrive to the sight of the greatest moment of our tour.

The next day, in order to avoid crowds, we arrived at the base of the Via Dolorosa at five in the morning. We began our trek up, stopping at various stations. As time went on, my

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Chris Saenz



legs begin to feel the climb. I felt the knees trembling and getting weaker. I recalled Jesus' words: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11: 28-30) Even as a child, I didn't find much comfort in these words when I thought of Jesus' yoke, the Cross! How is that easy! How is that light! And, now as I struggled to walk, I felt justified in my

earlier thoughts about this passage. I wondered if I was going to make it.

Suddenly, a person entered into my mind. Juana, a migrant whom I knew in Chile, who had contacted me before I left to the Holy Land. She had a daughter who struggled with drug addiction and bad relationships with men. The daughter had a little boy whom Juana loved with all her heart. Unfortunately, the grandchild was in danger of being placed in foster care due to the mother's inability to adequately care for him. Juana decided to return to her native land and wanted to take the child with her. However, she could not unless the daughter signed a release form. Juana argued with her daughter who threatened to never let her child go. In fact, the daughter threatened Juana with not ever seeing the child again. Juana was at her wits end and called me asking for prayers.

As I climbed, I thought about Juana and her family. I could hear her crying in desperation over the phone. I began to pray for them and the situation. I became so focused on Juana and her family, that without knowing it, I had reached the top of Golgotha, the place of the Crucifixion. Yes, I was tired but with no real pain. I made it because I refocused my efforts from myself to others. We all suffer from various ailments either it be physical, mental, or spiritual. Yet, it doesn't impede us to continue to reach out and help others. Jesus gives us the highest example. His Crucifixion was not for himself but for us, so we don't have to suffer. In his weakest moment, he reached out to save others. Today, we are invited to accompany those who suffer in the world with whatever means we have available to us. We may not have much, or may be weak ourselves, but someone out there needs us. And, by the Lord's grace, we can pick up that yoke and carry it through. We are to reduce suffering, not add to it.

Final note: Juana's situation improved. The daughter signed the release forms and Juana brought her grandchild back to their native country. Now the entire family is reunited and is doing much better. I would like to think that my contribution was listening to Juana when no else did, providing some much-needed encouragement, and praying for her situation. In the end, it was all God's grace.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Chris Saenz".

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World...Give Hope**

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*"Do not prevent them, for the
kingdom of heaven belongs
to such as these."*

- St. Matthew 19:14

To whom does the kingdom belong? It belongs to the children, indeed, but also the weak, the poor, and those on the edge of society are those who possess it. He sends us to bring the good news to them and to be good news for them.

We invite you to join this new generation by becoming
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Columban Fathers
St. Columbans, NE 68056
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Sr. Carmen Maldonado
National Vocation Director
Columban Sisters
2546 Lake Rd.
Silver Creek, NY 14136
716/934-4515

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