

Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

February 2024

Bread of Life



C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Bread of Life

Volume 108 - Number 1 - February 2024

Columban Mission

PUBLISHED BY THE COLUMBAN FATHERS

COLUMBAN MISSION (Issn 0095-4438) is published eight times a year. A minimum donation of \$15 a year is required to receive a subscription. Send address and other contact information changes by calling our toll-free number, by sending the information to our mailing address or by emailing us at MISSIONOFFICE@COLUMBAN.ORG.

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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 Fr. Trevor Trotter

Listening and Mission

Over a hundred years ago, a small group of Irish priests working in China decided they needed to listen to what God wanted them to do. These men had the desire to live according to what God wanted and must have known from past experience that, if they prayed and listened to God, they would be able to discover God's wish for them. We call this the process of discernment.

They came together and decided they would make a novena. They set aside nine days of prayer during which they asked God to help them decide whether they would go back to Ireland and set up the Columban Mission Society. By the end of the nine days, they must have been fairly convinced that God was calling them to do precisely this. To confirm their thinking, one man suggested they "cut the Bible." They opened the Bible and Joshua 1:6 read, "Be strong and stand firm."

We can learn a lot from this experience. There was no clear directive from God, but these words touched something within their hearts, within their spirits, at that time.

It was the Spirit of God within them that spoke through the experience of reading that verse. We've all had that experience. We can be reading the Gospel or hear it being read at Mass, and a few words touch us strongly. We may have heard that verse many times before, but passed over it. God is speaking to us through our experience of the text.

If we are not paying attention to the response within ourselves, we will miss what God is trying to communicate to us. We need to listen to our own responses in order to listen to what God wants to say to us. God's desire is to reach out in love to every person and everything. The Spirit of God has been poured into our hearts, so we have the same desire. We have the same mission.

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God speaks to us in many, many ways. We believe that the Spirit of God is leading the Church. We believe that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who guides His flock. When we look to the New Testament and especially in the Acts of the Apostles, we see how the Spirit leads Christian communities in mission. Here, God is not just speaking to an individual or a small group; the whole community is listening to what the Spirit has to say.

If we read how the early Christians gathered in Jerusalem for the first synod, we can see how they listened to God. In the letter they sent to the Christians in Antioch, they say, "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves..." In other words, the people in the synod had to use their normal, God-given talents of thinking, remembering, and debating, along with inspiration from the Holy Spirit to come to their conclusions.

It is the same for us as individuals and as members of the Church. We want to be able to say, "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by us..." We can only do this by listening deeply to what other people are saying. We also have to listen deeply to what is happening within ourselves and to what we believe the Spirit is saying. Listening is critical to mission.

Columban Fr. Trevor Trotter lives and works in Australia.

Life Is a Mission

A Reflection

By Irma Cantago

I am Irma Lara Cantago, a Columban lay missionary for many years. A high school teacher by profession, I was teaching for fifteen years and at the same time was involved in the parish, helping the catechist and with lay leadership formation. I had the passion to serve and be with the people. The experience that deepened my faith and made me reflect to leave the school someday and be a parish worker. But everything has its own time because I tried many times to leave my job as a teacher but I couldn't. It was very hard because I enjoyed it. God knows when one is ready to answer His call.

One day I met Columban Fr. Neil Collins asking me if I would like to be a lay missionary overseas. My response was an immediate yes to the question with joy and a light heart to leave the school. The time to fulfill my desire and dream to serve and be an instrument of God in spreading his love and peace to all the creatures on earth. I was accepted in the lay mission orientation in 1992 with five other lay people. Before saying goodbye to everybody I did an act of "letting go" by burning all my school notes with a light and a happy heart. I believe that my fifteen years' experience as a teacher and as a voluntary parish worker prepared me to answer the call of God to be a Columban lay missionary overseas.

I was happy, but I was facing another difficult situation to leave my mother alone with my six brothers and sisters. Since the death of my father and being the eldest girl in the family I became the right hand of my mother. The first time that I explained everything to my mother about my passion to be a lay

missionary she didn't say anything. I knew it was hard for her to let me go. But later on she told me to go and not to worry about her and my brothers and sisters. I thank my mother, my brothers and sisters for the support. It was not easy for me either to leave them, but I strongly believe that God won't leave them alone. If it is His will then everything will be fine and He will allow me to reach the place where He wants me to be.

I was appointed to Brazil in 1993, together with Ariel Presbitero, Josie Manuel and John Din. It was the first time to be in another country with a different culture, people, and language. There was a lot of adjustments to the challenging reality that I had to face for three years in a faraway country, uprooted from my comfort zone. It was not easy facing uncertainties of what might happen in the journey, even the fear of traveling by plane for long hours. But the excitement and the feeling of a dream coming true helped me to continue and be firm. My faith was that if it is really God's call then He will take care of me and bring me to Brazil safely. When God calls, He always provides the grace to venture to the unknown. This grace and energy helped me to continue to the second country where I did my mission was Lima, Peru.

Once again, I was like a child learning to walk, to talk and needing somebody to support me and teach me. I had to surrender and accept that I don't know a lot of things and I had to learn it from the people. Sometimes you have to learn to do things that you are not familiar with and you don't like to do. One youth in Brazil asked

us if we came to solve their problems. Our answer was just a no because we didn't have enough language that time. Columban Fr. Colin McLean explained to them our presence in their community. The comment made me reflect. I tried very hard to learn Portuguese because otherwise I might just let the other person speak for me because they assume that I don't know the language.

Living in a foreign country was frustrating and at the same time frightening because of the violence in families and on the street. It seems that everybody has a gun and almost every night you can hear gunshots. One day a neighbor warned us to be careful because somebody in the community was planning to rob our house during the week. I was alert during the week, waiting for the man. But thanks to God, the man was caught by the police for drugs.

While I was in Brazil, I need to learn their dance — the samba — so I can join them or else they will feel bad if I am just sitting down watching. I tried to show them that I was also enjoying their parties, the conversation and their jokes. I learned a lot from the Brazilians and the Columbans in Brazil. I experienced the concern and love of God through the Columbans, other lay missionaries and the economically poor people in the "invasion area" where I worked. It challenged more my passion to continue as a lay missionary even after the closure of the Brazil mission.

In Peru, the advantage was the mission experience I had already from Brazil. Peru is still in Latin America so there are some similarities in the



culture and language though there are differences in lifestyle and ways of celebrating life. I did learn how to listen and be flexible in order to understand and be a part of their culture. The people of Peru taught me a lot to learn their own language and jokes. They taught me to celebrate life in the midst of their poverty, dancing and enjoying the night, even with a hungry stomach.

For the Peruvians drinking and dancing are important, and the food will follow very late in the evening or early morning when you are ready to go home. As a Filipina, we have food first before the dance so my technique was to eat first before going to the party. People are poor, but they always save money to celebrate special occasions.

In Peru, I was often with my neighbor calling the water truck to buy water. In every prayer meeting and liturgical celebration, the blessing of water is very important. They won't mind if it is the priest or a lay person who will bless it. They use it to drive out bad spirits or sickness. Many times I was asked to bless the water; at first I was doubtful whether it will function or not. But I saw the deep and sincere faith of the people. In all Eucharistic celebrations, people bring water for the priest to bless.

The different ministries I had both in Brazil and Peru helped me to be more creative, open to learn in order to persevere in the difficulties that I encountered. The acceptance of my presence by the different groups gave me the strength and the confidence to go tell the Christ story to the people. My six years in Brazil and fifteen years in Peru were in the poor communities. I accompanied the catechists and did a literacy program for out-of-school children and youth in Brazil. In Peru I accompanied adults, adolescents and children. I was involved with catechism, human promotion, parish

Irma (with glasses) on mission with friends in Peru.

environmental promotion, the parish baptism team and the pastry-and-baking project for single and abandoned mothers. I enjoyed working with them, listening to their stories and being a part of the struggle of the poor and marginalized. Many times, I asked myself how to help the people and be a “wounded healer” especially to the victims of family violence. In Peru, gang fighting in the streets is a problem: they used stones and killed each other with them. I was trapped many times in their fights so I had to run from the flying stones.

Machismo is very strong in both countries. Women have to serve the men and are not that free to go out. Women and children suffer a lot of violence. Not all were asking for material things but my presence, being with them in their hard moments was already a big help. What matters most was the friendship, letting them feel that you are one of them, that you are there when they need you.

I was generally comfortable with the groups though there were times of disagreements and fights that brought lessons for me and the people. There were frustrations, confusion, and new realities that were not easy to deal with, including with the Columbans. I tried not to waste my energy and let the good experiences in mission dominate the negative feelings. The hard experiences were in fact a blessing, making my faith stronger that God won't leave me alone.

The mission helped me grow as a person, a missionary, and a caretaker both of myself and all creatures around me. I became closer to God, the Columbans and the Peruvians who walked with me. God was with me in all these years revealing himself in many ways in difficult times, and He will always will be. One of the greatest gifts that God is giving me, is the passion and the grace to go on. God will always be with me and the people I left behind. I believe God's image



is revealed in many different ways in different realities and cultures.

For the many years I shared my life in Peru, I know that I have learned and grown a lot. It was an affirmation that every lay person is a missionary to their own family, neighbors, their own parish and the society. Some people need others to encourage them, to trust them, and allow them to make mistakes and the chance to improve themselves. I could say that the Catholic church is alive until now because of the lay active participation. Even if there are a lot of priests, nuns and religious sisters in a parish, if there is no lay participation then the church will die. Based on my experience, empowering lay people, giving them the space to be a part and be responsible will help it to continue to be alive. I could say that even if laity do not frequent Sunday Masses, they contribute to the life of the church in many other ways. Active lay people never stop inviting and inspiring everybody to participate.

Recognizing the presence and the face of God with the people of different cultures and ways of celebrating life is a gift. I am evangelized by all who journey with me. The treasure that is a part of me and I will bring it wherever God

wants me to tell Christ's story. The uniqueness and beauty of the different cultures and people that I encountered teach me to appreciate and value my own culture.

The presence of Columban lay missionaries challenges other lay people to reflect on their role, vocation, and their mission. It empowers lay people to be missionaries in their own homes, community and society. Lay people can identify themselves with Columban lay missionaries and feel free to share their struggles. Another contribution is the witness of a simple lifestyle, love and respect. As a lay missionary I lived in the community with the poor letting them feel that I was one of them, that we are children of God and a part of the church. Our being partners with the ordained in mission is a revelation to the people that everyone is missionary. To be a lay missionary is a call to value and defend the life of all creatures. Another challenge for lay missionaries is to look for funds because one needs capital to use in order to teach the poor people to not be dependent, and to defend themselves in a healthy environment with dignity. It is also a challenge for lay missionaries to support one another so when one leaves, he/she does so with a light heart, happy and proud to tell her/his story of life in mission.

God has given us the gift of life and of the earth in order to enjoy the beauty of His creation but with the responsibility to take care of it, this too is mission. A million thanks to my family, friends, the Columbans and the people of Brazil and Peru for this enriching experience and the sacred space of being partners in mission. I am what I am now because of all of you. There is always something to learn every day that prepares us for the next day. **EM**

Former Columban lay missionary Irma Cantago provided this reflection on her mission experience.



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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- 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.

Creating Bridges

Joy in Diversity

By Fr. Kevin O'Neill

There are no accidents. Twin brothers Kevin and Peter O'Neill were born on 23 November, the feast of St Columban, in 1962. In 1962, their parents, John and Ruth, had little sense that both of their sons would become Columban missionaries. But then, when Bishop Edward Galvin was born on 23 November 1882, his parents had little sense that he would found the Missionary Society of St Columban. God is a God of surprises.

The O'Neill brothers grew up in the Australian port city of Geelong, which lies about 45 miles south west of the city of Melbourne. Of the six siblings, three joined religious life. Peter joined the Columbans first and served in Taiwan helping undocumented migrant workers. Fr. Kevin studied chemical engineering before he joined the Columbans. Later, he too also served in Taiwan. He is currently based in Australia. Kevin and Peter's sister Kate is a member of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions and works in the Philippines.

During his time as the Society Superior General, Fr. Kevin very much felt the hand of history on his back as he followed in the footsteps of Bishop Edward Galvin and Fr John Blowick, who as young men founded the Maynooth Mission to China now known as the Missionary Society of St. Columban. "They had a great sense of God's call for them to be missionaries."

Fr. Kevin described the Society's centennial in 2018 as "a wonderful gift and opportunity" for Columbans to celebrate their continued and unfolding participation in God's mission, the past 100 years and to all

those who have been a part and who continue to be a part of Columban mission, particularly benefactors. "Many of our benefactors have gone to God and we know that they are continuing to pray for us, so we pray for them and their families." He also knows that "Columbans — priests, lay missionaries, Sisters — who have returned to God are looking over us and celebrating with us."

Among the challenges missionaries face today is the challenge to "be

"It is a gift to have that diversity — there is also the challenge of coming to a deeper understanding of each other's cultures and what those cultures bring to the lives of the Columban missionaries and God's mission."

people of faith and hope" and "to continue bringing the Good News of God's Reign as lived and proclaimed by Jesus." Another challenge he identifies is inviting people to participate in Columban mission as priests, lay missionaries, co-workers, benefactors and supporters.

One of the gifts of 21st century missionary life is that it is far more intercultural than it was in the past. "When we first started, it was predominantly young men from Ireland who joined; then within a few years, young men from Britain, New Zealand, Australia and the United

States, mostly from the Irish diaspora, joined. Since the early 1980s, we have welcomed young men from most of the countries where we work. Now our membership is blessed with a great diversity of cultures with young men from Latin America, Oceania and Asia."

In tandem with this development, the Columbans began inviting lay men and women to join them on mission from the late 1970s. "We would still have some that would come from the western countries but predominantly the younger face of Columban mission is now from Asia, Oceania, and South America. It is a gift to have that diversity — there is also the challenge of coming to a deeper understanding of each other's cultures and what those cultures bring to the lives of the Columban missionaries and God's mission."

Missionaries, Fr. Kevin believes, have "the ability, because of our experience, to bring people together to create bridges and to try to alleviate fear of the other and the unknown. To be able to celebrate the diversity that is in the world among people from different nationalities, cultures, and the different religions which make up our world today."

One of the merging themes of mission today is for missionary congregations and societies to collaborate more closely. "Working together we can bring about communities of love and solidarity throughout the world." This can help counteract the sense of fear of the stranger that sometimes overtakes people and societies. Diversity, he stresses in "a real joy."



“There is a desire among all of us to be more aware of the needs of our world, of our church and the needs of society today, particularly the needs of the poor and marginalized. The call to work with migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers was also echoed at the conference; people are having to flee their homelands for all different kinds of reasons such as unemployment, war, and as climate refugees. So, our call is to be with them in solidarity, to empower them and to encourage them to share their story.”

Another area highlighted was the area of ecology and *Laudato Si*. “Pope Francis has said there is a need for an ecological conversion and to look at the practical ways each one of us can have their own personal ecological conversion. As Missionary societies, we need to ask how we can contribute to education in the area of care for the earth and ecology and to try as best

“As Missionary societies, we need to ask how we can contribute to education in the area of care for the earth and ecology and to try as best we can to live more lightly on this earth.”

we can to live more lightly on this earth.”

Reflecting on his time as the Society leader, Fr. Kevin says of his ministry of leadership, “I’ve grown into an understanding of the role of leadership as also being a part of mission. Over the years I’ve learned that there are many different dimensions of mission and leadership is a very important part of that; it is different to the other experiences I

have had. When I was in Taiwan, I was a prison chaplain for eight years. When I was in China, I was our vocations coordinator and at various times I had the opportunity to lead recollection days or days of retreat for parish communities and groups of sisters.”

“I’ve enjoyed it. There have been challenges. As we become smaller, there is the challenge of having to hand over some of the ministries that we have been engaged in for many years. Sometimes letting go is not easy but it is also part of the missionary journey. When we do let go, we don’t let go lightly, because we really value the contribution that we have made to those particular ministries. But neither do we really hold on tightly because it is God’s mission — it is not our mission.” ☩

Columban Fr. Kevin O’Neill lives and works in Australia.

Camilla Hall

Daily Inspiration

By Fr. John Burger

Recently I found myself really enjoying catching up on developments in the Columban world. I realized I had not been contributing anything about what I have been doing since finishing my last term as regional director here in the United States in November of 2021. I admit it. I am feeling some guilt but that motivated me to sit down at the computer and pound out a few paragraphs for our Columban publication.

As avid readers may know, I was the U.S. regional director from 2001, then was a Councilor in the late Fr. Tommy Murphy's administration in Hong Kong. I was vice-director in the U.S. when Fr. Tim Mulroy was our regional director here. When Fr. Tim became the Society leader, I again became regional director for three more years. In November, 2021, my term ended the same week I turned 75, and I took that as a sign that the time was right to say "enough" to administration work.

I mentioned this to a Sister who taught me in elementary school with whom I have been in contact, off and on, over the years. She mentioned to me that her community, Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM), were looking for a chaplain for Camilla Hall. Camilla is an assisted living facility, a nursing home and a memory care facility all



Camilla Hall

in one. Across the back drive, is Pacis Hall, a residence for Sisters who are on staff. Camilla has 200 beds and there are 36 Sisters living in Pacis Hall. In other words, it is about the size of a couple of the parishes I was in Japan. Of course, all 236 are practicing Catholics!

On the same campus is the Sisters' flagship, Immaculata University, and across the road is the Motherhouse, and a grade school named Villa Maria. This is in the western suburbs of Philadelphia, about an hour's drive from Independence Hall. It is the site of a Revolutionary war battle, the Battle of the Clouds. We sometimes have thick fogs here.

The Columbans first came to this area in the 1950's to minister to farm workers who spoke Spanish. We then

received permission to open a house near West Chester. These days, I pass that big old stone house often. I have not found documentation for it, but I believe the first superior of the house, Fr. Peadar Garahy who died in 1960, was cared for in the Sisters' infirmary in West Chester. Camilla Hall opened that year and one of the early chaplains was Columban Fr. John Kerr, an old China hand who died here and is buried in the Sisters' cemetery.

Some Sisters remember Columbans saying Masses and giving talks during their formation. Columban Fr. Bill Carney it seems is particularly well remembered, although Those who journeyed doesn't mention him having been in West Chester. Columban Fr. Barney Toal gave a retreat here. The Sisters remember even more vividly



Mass

being dispatched to the Columban house for housecleaning; I am not sure what that says about our cleaning habits!

The IHM community was founded in 1845 to teach the children of immigrants. And their charism has been focused on education ever since. They have had a presence in Peru for the last 100 years and also had a school in Chile. Most of the residents here spent 40 plus years in grade school classrooms from Allentown, Pennsylvania, to Miami, Florida, and many went on to have second careers teaching English as a second language to adults, or working as parish directors of religious education or various pastoral care roles. You are liable to be passed by in one of the hallways by a former college president

in an electric wheelchair. Some Sisters who are from Latin America are also being cared for here. Columban Fr. Leo Donnelly is the Columban whose name comes up most frequently at table conversations about Peru.

And the ministry of a chaplain here? There are daily Masses, of course. And I have the distinct impression the Sisters like short but insightful homilies. Besides the expected anointing and confession times, there are occasional presentations on whatever I feel I have to share. I feel appreciated and shamelessly receive positive feedback multiple times a day. Along with one of the Sisters, I am leading a program called “Seasons of Hope” for those who are experiencing loss. We have had many deaths since I have

arrived here. I am on a first-name basis with the undertaker. And he has memorized all the words of “Salve Regina” which is sung at the cemetery. Sometimes the Sisters have their own priest relatives or friends, but I still compose a lot of funeral homilies. And the congregation always includes a majority of the same people, and they listen well and with a critical ear. Therefore, I cannot just repeat one I have given before.

The Sisters have been hard workers all their lives and even in retirement here are looking to contribute by doing something useful. Having a “charge” is really important to them. They are a constant source of inspiration to me. **CM**

Columban Fr. John Burger is living and working in Pennsylvania.

The Village School Teacher

Mr. Zawng

By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala

“Wa Jau ngai hpe hkan ya rit.”
“Father come and follow me. This is a short way to the top!” It was a rainy day. The road was muddy and steep. A crowd of people were rushing to reach the peak of the Cross Mountain. All that time Zawng Daw stayed with me pushing and pulling me up each time I slipped or get stuck in the mud. It was the Solemnity of the Most Holy Cross. Zawng Dau is one of participants of the first Student Leadership Camp that the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM) facilitated. The camp features inputs on leadership, effective communication, self-awareness, Catholic Social Teaching, and pastoral circle method commonly known as “Review of Life” methodology.

Right after the coup, many young people filled the streets of the major cities and spread to the towns to protest. It was a strange sight for a country that has been silenced for a long time under a military regime. The

coup went on days, weeks, months. Eventually many young people became revolutionary soldiers and joined the “Peoples’ Defense Force,” or PDF in short. But not all young people joined the PDF; some also became revolutionary teachers.

Zawng Dau shared that “I got the key from CSAM to open to the world. Last year I learned from

Leadership is also important because now I can lead many students and my own people.

leadership courses skills like public speaking and leadership skills. Public speaking is very useful for me. Now I can speak in front of people even in the Church and before many people. Leadership is also important because now I can lead many students and my own people. When I was young I was really afraid to speak with my teachers

or any authority. I always think that my education and experience is not enough and that I come from a poor village. Now I am a teacher and a lifetime student. That is how I see myself now. Father gave me many experience like not to be afraid to speak English even if I make mistakes. And I will never forget the different activities we did together in CSAM.”

Zawng Dau’s full name is John Vianney Zawng Daung. He was born in Kachin State at Sumpra Bum Myanmar, formerly Burma, and then his family moved to another village, Ga RaYang Village in Waimaw Township. He attended primary school at Ga Ya Yang from Grade 1 to 5. But he moved again to Shan State with his mother who is from the Shan ethnic tribe. He grew up mostly with his mother since his mother separated from his Kachin father later in life. It became very difficult for his mother to support them, but his mother tried to provide for all their needs. His mother was



Mr. Zawng



Mr. Zawng and his students



Children in the village school

able to send him to the University of Myitkyina where he studied and majored in Psychology. He wants to become a politician and a writer in the future. He hopes that there will be peace in the country so he can pursue his study of Psychology and Developmental Child Psychology. He also wants to be a doctor for his poor village.

These days he is a volunteer teacher at the Injangyang Township Jubilee Village. They are going to open a Roman Catholic boarding school which has now thirteen students. He is also the boarding school master and teaches business and primary English. The village is quite remote, far from the parish church of Njanyang. During the rainy season it can take to about four hours to reach the village across the Mali Hka river. The roads are very bad and to reach the village you also need to cross the river by boat. Last year three individuals died crossing the river.

When he is able to visit the town proper, he is able to get a good internet connection and able to post on Facebook and check in with family and friends. In one of the posts he shared

that like many young people he also wants to complete his studies, pursue and learn computer skills and English. Like many, he would like to obtain a good-paying job to earn money. But then he remembers the children in the village who run in the rain without

Like many, he would like to obtain a good-paying job to earn money. But then he remembers the children in the village who run in the rain without umbrellas while wearing shoes filled with holes.

umbrellas while wearing shoes filled with holes. On winter days many of the children will have black lips from the cold because they have no warm clothes or sweaters to wear. He gave his sweater to a young village girl without one. She wore it and said with a smile, "It is getting warmer."

In the village there is no internet or mobile connection, no good food and no money. But the future



School children

of children is more important than anything else.

When he looks at the children, he remembers the time when he was a kid like them, running freely in the village. He met many different kinds of people. Before he left his own home, his mother gave him some money. He used this money to buy snacks and school materials for his students. He also told his mother not to worry about him. He is enjoying fishing every day.

He remembered to thank all the parents, teachers and friends who supported him. He added that he will forever remember the pure hearts and sweet smiles of the children. He said that we can join the revolution by sharing our knowledge without shooting a single gun.

Last year he had a chance to come to Myitkyina. I met up with him to check on him and gave him some money to buy books and other school supplies for his students. Mr. Zawng Dau is now back in the village, probably playing around with the kids and teaching them the ABCs. **EM**

Columban Fr. Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar, formerly Burma.



Seeds of Hope

Education

By Fr. Leo Schumacher

“Education for our children, we have to teach our children.” This was the message we heard at our discussion about supporting the Church in Myanmar, formerly Burma. All schools had been closed since 2020 due to the Covid pandemic, and due to the unstable social situation, they still had not reopened in many country areas. In areas with little or no electricity or any access to the internet, if the school is closed there is no opportunity for any kind of education for the children. The parents do their best to provide food and security for their children. They passed on this message to us: we need to teach our children as well.

There may be as many as one million internal refugees in Myanmar, that is people who have had to leave their villages and towns due to the unsafe security situation. In five dioceses, the Church is caring for over 100,000 people in temporary camps, providing shelter, food and medical help. Already stretched to

In five dioceses, the Church is caring for over 100,000 people in temporary camps, providing shelter, food and medical help. Already stretched to the limit, they have few resources left over for setting up learning centers as well.

the limit, they have few resources left over for setting up learning centers as well. However, with whatever little they have parishes, convents and local communities have started over 400 education projects, relying on volunteer teachers and donations.

Classes started in the shade of a tree or under plastic sheeting stretched between bamboo poles. But soon, the villagers would start the process of putting up temporary classrooms: level the land, cut down trees for timber,

flatten the bamboo for flooring, weave bamboo into wall panels and add plastic sheeting for roofing. And then classes can begin. Still setting up these learning centers involves a great many challenges, but the resilience and dedication of the people involved means that the obstacles will be overcome to provide education for their children.

In consultation with Myanmar church leaders, the Seeds of Hope project was created. Due to the sweat and labor of the villagers, new classrooms have been built, and now we can support their efforts providing educational supplies and living expenses for the volunteer teachers. Planting the seeds of education will give the whole community hope for a better tomorrow. These children have lost their homes; we are trying to make sure that they do not lose their futures as well. 

Columban Fr. Leo Schumacher provided this update.

A Life Unlike Our Own

Assisting the Deaf

By Lani Tamatawale

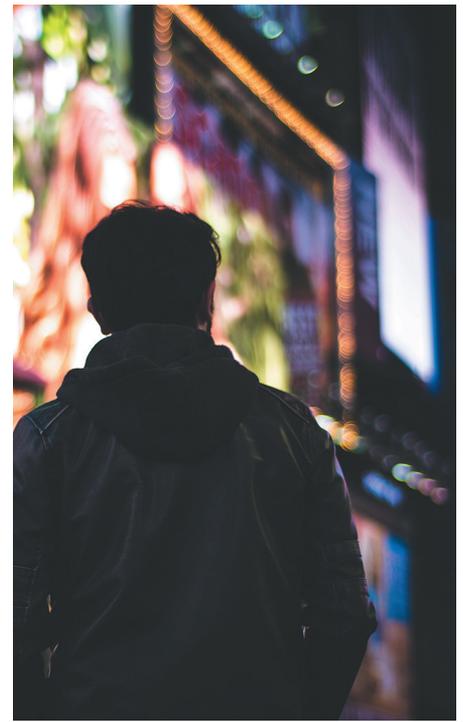
The world faced devastation during the time of the coronavirus pandemic. Millions of people have died, and many others have suffered and continue to suffer. Their lives were ruined or destroyed when they lost their work and could not support their families. Many young people were also trying to cope with the pandemic, family problems, online classes, etc. Some did not see any good coming out of the pandemic in their lives while others were grateful for good things that happened in their lives in the pandemic.

In November 2022 I met a young man named Pau who joined in our “Come and See” session. He shared with me that the pandemic brought something good in his life. Before the pandemic he was not always active in church activities, nor did he attend Mass often. He usually only stayed home and focused on school; he did not socialize with his friends. Since the pandemic, he has had more time to reflect and search about himself. This brought him closer to the Church community as well as changing him a lot. He began to join the youth group and get involved in youth activities, He also became a lector at Mass. He made new friends in the youth group and associated himself with Columban missionaries whom he met in his local chapel. He is very grateful, because, if not for the pandemic, he would not become active in his Church community. I shared with him that God really loves him and wants him to come closer to God.

On St. Columban’s Day we celebrated Mass at Our Mother of

Perpetual Help Parish for the Feast of our patron St. Columban. Most parishioners attended the Mass, and I was interpreting for the two deaf people who attended the Mass. Pau was also at the Mass and became interested in learning sign language in order to serve the deaf. I asked him why he was interested in learning sign language. He said that one day when he was in a jeepney two deaf persons came in and paid their fare. They wanted to tell the driver where they were going but they could not understand each other because of the language barrier. Pau wanted to help them. However, he himself, like the jeepney driver, does not know sign language and so he felt sorry for the deaf persons. It was because of this experience that he wanted to learn sign language.

Since Our Mother of the Perpetual Help was elevated to become a parish, The Deaf Ministry was introduced as one of the parish ministries. I began to visit chapels and attend Parish Pastoral Council meetings to introduce the Deaf Ministry in the hope that for some parishioners might be interested in learning sign language. Some women in one of the chapels, together with some of the youth, including Pau, were interested in learning. Every Sunday afternoon I would have sign language classes for the youth who were interested in learning. Pau was very committed and eager to learn. He never missed a class. I have always hoped and prayed that the youth who were learning sign language would have the heart to serve the deaf. We always have fun in the class, especially when we have a quiz to see what the



youth remember from the lessons we studied. The youth are naturally competitive and are very interested in learning.

In February 2023, the Deaf Ministry was introduced to the parishioners of the parish. The deaf parishioners were invited to attend the 8 am Mass every Sunday during which there would be interpreters. As an inclusive church we are welcoming the deaf and interpreters to Mass every Sunday. I am proud that even one of the youth is a member of the Deaf ministry and interprets during Mass on Sundays. Pau has come a long way. I am so happy for him and with his enthusiasm and commitment. I hope and pray that he continues to serve the deaf. The more he communicates and engages with the deaf community the more sign language he will learn. The deaf parishioners are so happy and willing to help him learn more signs. It’s a humbling experience to teach sign language and to share our gifts with others who are eager to learn and serve the people of God. ☩

Columban lay missionary Lani Tamatawale lives and works in the Philippines.

A Faithful Follower of God

A Heart Fulfilled

By Reins O. Mosqueda

When I was young, my family was not religious or active in the parish. My father had a different belief and hated the Catholic faith, especially the priests. My Mom just agreed with my father's beliefs to avoid conflicts with him. My eight siblings and I were all baptized in the Catholic Church but, as a family, we did not go to church like other Catholic families in our neighborhood. Growing up, I did not have an idea of who Jesus was because we did not talk about it at home. But there is one member in the family who was so brave and courageous in expressing his faith and love in God—my brother Levy.

My brother Levy is the third brother among my six older brothers. Growing up, he was very much aware of the poor financial condition of our family. At a young age, oftentimes after school, he used to go to the farm which is almost a two hour walk from our house to get some wood or vegetables to sell and give money to my parents. He remains a very kind, helpful, hardworking, and responsible man.

He was a teenager when he started to get interested in knowing God by attending church every Sunday. He liked listening to the homilies of the parish priest and the songs of the choir group. He found fulfillment in what he did. The physical hard work he did on the farm became light and full of satisfaction because he knew that God was with him. Even if he was sick, he would go to the farm and work. He did not feel discouraged because he

found joy in everything he did. His desire to know God became stronger and stronger every day like his will to follow Him. When he decided to follow God, he did many things to know Him well. He tuned in to the Catholic radio station as a member of the Bible study group, bought spiritual books, joined a charismatic community, and became a catechist in the parish. Through these activities and the formation he received in the church, he developed a deep relationship with God. He saw God as his strength and great provider. He believed that following Him and His teachings would make him inherit His kingdom which is his ultimate goal as a Christian.

However, my father was not happy that my brother Levy was an active member of the church. Whenever our father arrived home drunk, even if it was in the middle of the night, he would get a Bible and fight with Levy. Even so, my brother did not fight back and did not hold grudges against our father. Instead, he forgave and prayed for him. His relationship with God shaped his Christian values and character.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17)

From an early age this Biblical passage became my brother's great reminder of God's love for him. His faith led him toward the right path.

He desired to become a monk or a religious someday. When he started to search for the true plan of God for him, he was amazed at how God accompanied him throughout his search. He believed that the graces of courage and determination he had during those times of searching for the call of God for him were the manifestations of God's faithfulness to him. Nevertheless, God had a different plan for my brother Levy. He got an opportunity to study in a Catechetical Center for two years for free on the condition that he would teach in the parish school. And after some years of working in the school as a Religion teacher, he found his future wife in the parish who was also a catechist at that time. When he got married, he studied a four-year course in college majoring in Mathematics. At present, my brother is a public school elementary teacher. He did not become a monk or a religious but he continues serving God in his parish together with his own family.

The fulfillment and deep joy I witnessed in my brother were the reasons why I also desired to follow God. He inspired me how to put my faith and trust in God's divine providence and how to learn more about the life and teachings of Jesus so I can also share His great love for His people. I also became a student catechist in high school and took up a course majoring in Religious Education. My brother Levy is one of the significant people in my journey of faith for whom I will always be grateful. God is truly faithful and generous to His people. He gave me my brother Levy who leads me to know and love Him. I hope that like my brother, I may lead other people to know God's great love for them with deep joy and a heart that is fulfilled. 

Columban lay missionary Reins Mosqueda provided this reflection.



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.

With thoughtful planning, you can choose which ways to support work best for you and your loved ones and make sure your gifts are made in a way that will maximize their total value while minimizing their after tax-cost. There are many planned giving options, including some you may not have considered before. Planned gifts provide a major impact in our missions, and we offer the following suggestions to aid selection of the best giving option for your stage of life.

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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.

Dialogue

A Way of Being On Mission

By Sr. Rebecca Conlon



Pope Francis' pastoral visit to Iraq in the midst of the pandemic as a Pilgrim Penitent and as a Pilgrim of Peace put me thinking. Age and diminishing health did not stop him from taking on this pilgrimage which started in the ruins of Ur, the 5000-year-old Mesopotamian city that was the birthplace of Abraham; the place he once called home. That to me was ingenious as it is the root and "home" of our monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which on many occasions do not see eye to eye.

Just as Abram left Ur and pitched his tent along the way, we Columban Sisters pitched our tent in the midst of Muslims in Pakistan 32 years ago, making dialogue our way of life. In Pakistan we breathe Islam day and night as we hear the Call to Prayer five times each day, wake up to the sirens calling the nation to get up at 3:30 a.m. as it is Ramadan and time to get ready for the fast, and where the presence of



God is tangible in the midst of many differences.

Our plan to live among Muslims was frowned on because of fear for our security, but keeping the vision of dialogue alive and focused gave us strength to face the many challenges over the years. Twenty-nine years ago, we branched out to the tribal Christians of the Hindu background in the interior of Sindh.

This brought another rich dimension to our dialogues which now included Hinduism as well as Islam. This enriched our mission immensely.

Our first Christmas in Pakistan was memorable as our Muslim neighbors gave us our first Christmas tree with a "Happy Christmas" decoration, which they stuck up on the wall. It is important to note that this was a time of great political tension and turmoil in the area where we lived. They protected us in our vulnerable moments and were always with us in good times and difficult times. On Christmas Day, family and friends arrived to celebrate with us. It was a eureka moment of welcome and the dialogue of life was opened up for us effortlessly. We attended their marriages and deaths as family, and when tragedy hit them, we were the first called, and we supported them. This relationship continues to this day. Their friends became our friends and

this experience showed us how life can be, as a tiny minority in a sea of Isla.

One dream was to have a shelter for women as the plight of women was one of our top priorities when we were missioned to Pakistan. We visited a renowned Muslim lawyer in Karachi seeking advice and there we met a young Muslim lady doing her law internship in his NGO; she was a native of Hyderabad, where we lived. This encounter worked out as a partnership for life to the extent that when the Irish Bishops came to Pakistan with Trocaire, she was introduced as a “Columban Sister” as she is of one mind and one heart with us in our mission to reach out to the people on the margins.

As foreigners, we could not open a shelter, so she became our hands and feet. She successfully opened her shelter and worked at grassroots with women, visiting them in their villages as well as accompanying them to the courts and giving them shelter. It was thanks to our relationship with her and her contacts that we were able to visit the women’s jail for about fifteen years as an ongoing twice-weekly presence, running income-generating projects with the women prisoners. Their children stayed with them in prison and we saw to their education. Our Christian children from outside always visited for Children’s Day and played and danced with the mothers and their children.

One American Dominican priest who was a missionary here for many years was once asked how many people he converted in Pakistan? His answer was, “One. Myself.” That’s it! Our neighbor comes in with a tray of food, just cooked for our Eid (Festival). This has been a pattern all our years here, and we in turn do likewise. We meet the women and children on the roof and chat across to each other, but this does not mean that as a minority there are no problems among us in



this society. Muslims have stood at our gate in dangerous times of war and controversial cartoons, to make sure we were not attacked.

As foreigners we cannot take a prominent role fighting for justice, but we remember Shakeel Patan, a neighbor and an outspoken human rights activist opposed to bonded labor who was killed in a car accident. When his body arrived at his home, we were there for his bewildered children who did not understand anything of what had happened.

Our mission mandate to “go to the margins” would not have happened without a vision of dialogue with other religions as being a way of life. God’s kingdom is alive and well in and through all this and hopefully through our daily intermingling of life together we will continue to care for each other as children of the one God for, “It is in Him that we all live and move and have our being.” 

Sr. Rebecca Conlon lives and works in Pakistan.



Go Home

I Am at Home.

By Fr. Bobby Gilmore

“Home is a place where, when you go there, they have to let you in.”

“Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.”

– ROBERT FROST, “THE DEATH OF THE HIRED MAN”

Racism is a specific form of discrimination and exclusion faced by minority groups.

It is based on the false belief that some races are inherently superior to others of different skin color, nationality, ethnic or cultural heritage. Racism robs people of their basic human rights, confidence, dignity and respect. Racism generates fear of those who are a different minority effectively excluding them from full participation in the human mainstream. Racism underpinned most if not all of the atrocities of history from genocide to ethnic cleansing to segregation, slavery, apartheid, discrimination and everyday prejudice. It became institutionalized.

The recurrence of revolting atrocities culminating in the Holocaust forced the world to reflect on its implications to such an extent that the United Nations was coerced to debate the issue and define what racism is as defined above. While this was welcomed it did not eradicate racism. However, it set in motion an awareness of the ugliness of what racism is and the need to deposit it in the dustbin of history.

Over the years tremendous efforts have been made to confine it to garbage, but it is obvious that it has not been fully incinerated from the human mindset to be resurrected and used when needed. It seems that the human heritage sponges of each generation are predisposed to unwittingly accept it in its dormant state awakening when needed especially in times of perceived or actual problems, they like to blame a vulnerable, powerless minority.

After the horrors of the Holocaust the ideology on which it was based, white nationalistic supremacy became dormant in intellectual circles but not extent. A network of people silently worked to keep it alive in academic and political circles in the hope of an eventuality presenting to bring it mainstream. Apartheid in South Africa, segregation in America and discrimination in Northern Ireland did not melt away. It took a struggle to eradicate each, evidence of the strength of both and the theory on which they were based. Justice, diversity and multiculturalism were stronger forces of the time all promoting equality of rights.

Anti-immigrant groups began to emerge in Europe giving an opportunity for the ideology of white nationalist supremacy to emerge. These groups found segments of traditionally manufacturing areas where people in traditional employment were abandoned as industry migrated to other climes offering cheap labor and lax environmental regulations.

“Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of human life.”

– THE UNITED NATIONS’ DEFINITION OF RACISM



As these anti-immigrant groups engaged in political representation, at first ignored, then gradually becoming splinter parties needed by mainstream parties to form governments, they imposed policies underpinning their ideologies. They presented themselves as the voice of the perceived and actual dispossessed. Gradually, they exploited racial difference by blaming immigrants as the cause of indigenous dispossession, implying that mainstream parties were promoting immigration as agents of cheaper immigrant labor.

Anti-immigration became an umbrella for covert racist nativism. Mainstream political parties panicked taking on some of the anti-immigrant biases in order to compete. This was exemplified in recent political elections depicting images of hordes of foreigners arriving at borders. Mainstream governments took the

bait by creating hostile environments for immigrants and publishing slogans such as “Go home, go back to where you came from.”

These policies have emerged from sections of the political directorate claiming to represent and protect patriotic nationalism founded on Judeo/Christian values and culture. Proponents of such policies promote themselves as the guardians of a “way of life,” their reality being undermined by foreigners, those who look foreign and by those who do not comply with their notion of who belongs and who should be excluded—those who should “go back.”

Where can we go back to? We are all the product of recent or distant migrations. The salad bowl of humanity has always existed. None of us are pure, none of our parents come from the same yard. We are descendants of impurity, the energy of

diversity, the uniqueness and mystery and the desire to belong, decide and participate in compassion with those who are different.

Human beings in the Judeo/Christian civilization are, we are taught, in the image of a communitarian God. So, it is our nature as social beings to welcome, to belong, intermingle and be responsible for others if we are to be happy.

Human beings, Christians, welcome strangers. Dogs bark at strangers. Those who try to alienate us are our enemies not our co-religious friends.

I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to see me. (Mt. 25-35) 

Columban Fr. Bobby Gilmore lives and works in Ireland.



Meaning in Life

Senior Citizens of the Kingdom

By Fr. Barry Cairns

Some words in Japanese are hard to translate. The reason is that there are many, many years of cultural feeling and experience behind the words.

One such word in Japanese is “Ikigai.” The dictionary gives the English meaning as: “Something that gives meaning and worth to one’s daily life.” One commentator says “Ikigai” has three elements: what one loves, what one can do, and what the world wants.

Here are some examples of “Ikigai” from my own experience.

The Yokohama Diocesan Liturgy group advised us to create a bright, welcoming atmosphere at the entrance of our churches as preparation of the heart to pray the Mass.

I thought of Tanaka-san. Mrs Tanaka was an elderly widow who had a skill in writing Japanese characters with brush and charcoal ink. I asked her to write a very short sentence giving the theme of the Sunday’s scripture readings. Her delight at this request was encouragement to me. We posted this theme sentence at the entrance to the church. But as we entered the third cycle of the Scripture readings Mrs. Tanaka’s legs and heart were giving her trouble. Some parishioners said it was too much for her and advised me to get a replacement.

So I went to Tanaka-san to gently relieve her. When she got the gist of what I was aiming at, she cried out in a voice from the heart. “Oh Father! Don’t take this away from me. It is my Ikigai. It not only gives me interest and purpose in my week, but also keeps me in contact with the words of Jesus. Please let me keep writing.” That is “Ikigai.”

In another instance, a man I received into the community is a professional sculptor. I have often been to his atelier. It specializes in people playing musical instruments and also animals. So his works are displayed in halls and parks throughout Japan. These carvings are for his family as living expenses. But he is also carving a statue of Mary and Child. “This, he says, is my Ikigai. This keeps me going for my other works.”

And just last month I heard this meaning-loaded word again. Recently a young couple came with their four-month-old baby. The mother said that she would like to belong to the same religion as her husband. She had eight months maternity leave, could she receive instruction. The mother seemed to me to be a bit lonely. Her husband, like all company men, works long hours. So I asked 80-year-old Hikari-san to lead her to the font. Mrs. Hikari has a delightful grandmotherly touch that I thought suited the young mother and child. After a few weeks I asked Mrs. Hikari’s daughter if the weekly instruction was too much for her mother. The answer: “Not at all! It is her Ikiga. She loves it. It gives her purpose and meaning.”

From here on I speak as a 90+ year-old to my fellow senior citizens of the Kingdom. Try to develop a special interest, an “Ikigai” in your life. I have personally found, and observed in other Christians, that the effect of this special interest goes deeper when it is connected in some way with the Kingdom of God and its works of kindness to others.

And to our younger generation I ask this. Do not classify us seniors as “passed selling date.” Give us some minor but useful task within our ability. We might surprise you! Such a task can give us new life, enthusiasm, peace, and yes, even health. When the task is some help to others and for the Kingdom, it brings us closer to Christ. 

Columban Fr. Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.

The Bread of Life

The struggle of any missionary is to give effective aid to those who are in need. Yet, it is difficult to determine in what form do we aid others. In the 1990's when I was as seminarian, a man came knocking on our center house's door. I was the only person present at the time. The man wanted to speak to a priest. I informed him that none was around. He asked who I was. "A seminarian," I replied. "Great! Can I talk to you?" he asked. I let him in, and we conversed. The man said he was dying of an incurable cancer and didn't have the money to pay his medicines. He produced several medical documents confirming his condition. After, he talked about meeting Columbans in other areas of Chile. He was knowledgeable about several of our men, therefore, he sounded legit. Feeling pity for him, I gave him about \$50, a good sum that day. Months later, the man returned asking for me. Another Columban saw him and told me, "that guy has been dying for years." Meaning, he was a conman. Truly, I felt angered that I fell for his story. I refused to see him, but he insisted. Finally, I decided to confront him. The man poured out his heart to me saying that his family, wife, etc., all thanked me for being so generous and compassionate. Then he came to the point, can I give him more money. I said I had none. He asked if I could get it from the other priests. I said yes, but I won't disturb them. With this, he knew the game was over, got up, shook my hand and left. I never saw him again.

Years later as a priest, I was working in an urban parish of Santiago, Chile. We had opened a communal kitchen where we offered cooking

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Chris Saenz

classes for women so they could sell their baked goods. Furthermore, we organized a children's summer camp for two weeks. Organized activities made the day fun for the children. The communal kitchen was filled with youth volunteers who prepared meals for the children. The summer camp was a way of getting the children off the streets, not be exposed to gangs and other harmful elements, and receive a good meal. However, one evening, rioters looted our compound and stole the refrigerator, oven, and many utensils of our communal



kitchen. It was disheartening to see those from the very community destroy that which helped their community. I didn't think we would recover. However, the following day, many from the parish came forward and donated items such as a used refrigerator and oven. It was great to see the solidarity amongst the people.

The inevitable question is, are there deserving poor and undeserving poor? The Gospel response is difficult for many of us as there is no distinction. The Gospel mandate is simple and forward: "For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was in prison, and you visited Me." Matthew 25: 35-36 Obviously, the conman angered me at the time. Did he deserve what I gave him? Wouldn't it have been better to send him to the communal kitchen? Years later, I think of that moment and the man. Truly, I didn't know

The inevitable question is, are there deserving poor and undeserving poor?

his situation, what lead him to live his life that way, nor could I determine if what I gave truly helped him. As missionaries we try to be effective and organized in our aid to those in need like the parish communal kitchen. However, there are moments when we have to make a spontaneous call and take a leap of faith. After all, the man needed the money more than I did regardless of his condition. Who am I to judge? I will never know, but I trust the Spirit knows. The following quote from Dorothy Day helped me let go of my resentment against that man and look upon him as those in the communal kitchen: The Gospel takes away our right forever, to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor.

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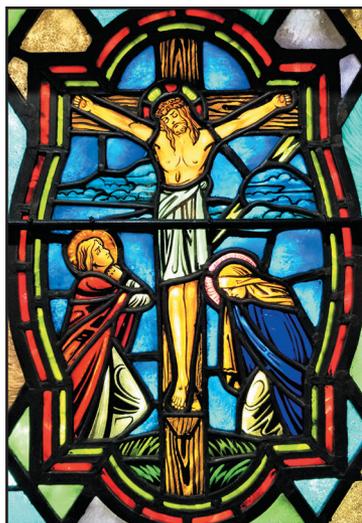
Columban Mission magazine is published eight times each year and tells the stories of our missionaries and the people they are called to serve. Columban missionaries live in solidarity with their people and, together, they move forward to improve their social, economic and spiritual lives, always with Our Savior as their guide and their eyes on God's Kingdom.

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