

# Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

October 2023



## Race, Ethnicity and Culture



# C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Race, Ethnicity and Culture



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# Columban Mission

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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](http://WWW.COLUMBAN.ORG)

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### PUBLISHER

FR. CHRIS SAENZ  
[DIRECTORUSA@COLUMBAN.ORG](mailto:DIRECTORUSA@COLUMBAN.ORG)

### EDITOR

KATE KENNY  
[KKENNY@COLUMBAN.ORG](mailto:KKENNY@COLUMBAN.ORG)

### EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

MARCI ANDERSON  
[MANDERSON@COLUMBAN.ORG](mailto:MANDERSON@COLUMBAN.ORG)

RENEA STEELE  
[RSTEELE@COLUMBAN.ORG](mailto:RSTEELE@COLUMBAN.ORG)

DYANNE WENDLING  
[DWENDLING@COLUMBAN.ORG](mailto: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 Latai Muller

## Guided by Faith

**A**s I reflect on the past three years of my life as a Columban Lay missionary assigned in the Philippines, I am overwhelmed with a flood of emotions. The journey has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences in my life.

When I first decided to embark on this mission, I had no idea what to expect. I had heard stories of the struggles and triumphs of other missionaries, but I never imagined that I would experience them myself. I was filled with a sense of excitement, nervousness, and uncertainty as I stepped onto the plane and headed to my new home.

The first few months were a blur of new faces, new cultures, and new languages. I struggled to understand the customs and beliefs of the people I was living amongst. I struggled to communicate with them and make sense of the poverty and injustice I saw around me. But as I slowly began to understand and connect with the people, I began to see the beauty in their lives and the resilience of their spirits.

The mission was not always easy, there were moments of doubt, fear, exhaustion, and homesickness. But in those moments, I was

reminded of why I am here and what I have to offer. I saw the impact that my presence and my work had on the people I was serving, and it gave me the strength to push through difficult times.

Working with the people was a humbling experience. I saw the impact of poverty and injustice on these people's lives, and it broke my heart. But I also saw the power of hope and the resilience of the human spirit. I saw young people who had lost everything still smiling and moving on, and I saw women who had been oppressed standing up for their rights and fighting for a better future. There were three wings that I always carried with me through journey and those are FAITH, HOPE, and TRANSFORMATION.

FAITH has been the foundation of my mission. It has given me the courage to step out of my comfort zone and trust in God's plan for my life. It has reminded me that I am not alone in this journey and that God is always with me, guiding me and strengthening me. My faith has also been strengthened by the faith of the people I have met along the way. Seeing their unwavering trust in God, despite difficult circumstances has been an inspiration to me.

HOPE has been the fuel that has kept me going. It has given me the belief that there is a brighter future ahead and that, through God's grace, we can achieve it. It has reminded me that no matter how difficult things may seem, there is always a glimmer of hope. My hope has also been strengthened by the hope of the people I have encountered. Seeing their resilience and determination to make a better life for themselves and their families has also been a source of inspiration for me.

TRANSFORMATION has been the fruit of my mission. It has reminded me that change is possible and that, through God's love, we can be transformed and become the best version of ourselves. It has reminded me that my mission is not just about helping others, but also about being transformed myself. The transformation I have witnessed in the people that I have journeyed with has been a testament to the power of God's love.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve, the people I have met, and the rich experiences that have helped me grow in my faith, hope, and transformation.

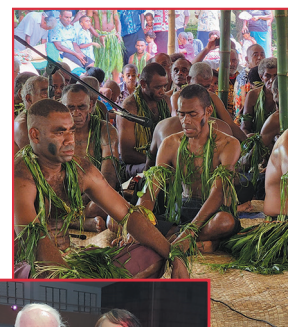
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*"I had heard stories of the struggles and triumphs of other missionaries, but I never imagined that I would experience them myself."*

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*Columban lay missionary Latai Muller lives and works in the Philippines.*





# A Hard Goodbye

70 years in Ba

By Fr. John McEvoy

At the end of 1952 and the beginning of 1953, (70 years ago) the Columban missionaries took over the spiritual administration of Ba Parish in Ba, Fiji. Our relationship with the people of this huge parish was forged through hard times and good times, through trials and cooperation, through struggles and togetherness over the years. However, on Saturday, February 25, 2023, we ended our service to the parish. The bonds and ties with Christ the King Parish and with the people so many of us Columban walked and worked with over the past seventy years are sure to remain.

Columban priests working in Fiji, together with our students and lay missionaries, made their way to Ba for this farewell. Fr. Peter O'Neill, Columban Regional Director of Oceania traveled from Australia. Most of the diocesan priests from the Western Division of the Archdiocese

and many parishioners from the surrounding parishes and even from Suva graced the occasion with their presence.

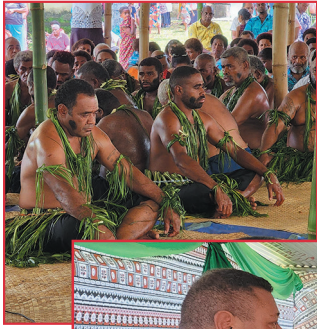
Parishioners gathered at the parish center from every village and community of the parish — the ten large villages in the highlands, the six villages on the coastlands and the six communities that make up the town area of the parish. First and foremost, all packed into the church of Christ the King for a thanksgiving concelebrated Mass at which the main celebrant was Fr. Peter O'Neill, while the homily was given by Columban Fr. Felisiano Fatu.

The people of the parish felt the need to say their goodbye to the Columbans in a way that they knew best — by offering us a most solemn and elaborate Fijian Traditional Ceremony. This ceremony entailed the offering of many whales' teeth (*Tabua*), the yagona plant, the offering of mats and the offering of a pig and root

crops for the feast (*magiti*). Into this mix the parishioners offered another whale's tooth seeking forgiveness from the Columbans for any neglect or wrongdoing by them over the years. This is called in Fijian *matanigasau*. Columban Fr. Pat Colgan accepted their Tabua of forgiveness speaking in their own Ba dialect. The Columbans then reciprocated offering our *matanigasau* to the people seeking their forgiveness for our mistakes and the hurts we may have caused the people of the parish.

Every aspect of the occasion was done with perfection costing time and sacrifice and expense on the part of the people and on the part of the parish itself. A special Columban Gate was erected to the entrance of St. Teresa's School, so we would be remembered in Ba Parish, and a commemorative plaque was unveiled on the church wall. The liturgy, singing, readings were flawless. Perfection was the





hallmark of the day under the direction of Fr. Pat Colgan, the last Columban parish priest of Ba, who on the previous Tuesday saw Fr. Pio Matotolu, a priest of the Archdiocese installed as the new parish priest of Christ the King Parish Ba.

After the formal ceremonies were complete, representatives from other ethnic communities including the Indo Fijian and the Rotuman communities, and others from the town and villages personally expressed their thanks and memories of the Columbans who worked among them. All of this indicates the multiethnic and racial mix of the parish.

Then the entertainment started with dance and song provided by the youth of the parish. A life band from a nearby town was a real hit and had the people dancing almost nonstop until way after dark. Before lunch the Columbans present were obliged to cut the "Thank You and Farewell" cakes. Nearly 600


people were fed effortlessly by the women's groups of the parish.

On the previous night the Board of Governors of Xavier College invited the Columban priests to a relaxing and sumptuous meal, in the auditorium of the college. Again, this was in recognition that the Columbans founded Xavier College back in 1953 and staffed the college until 1987 when they handed over the management to the Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel. The college is now governed by a Board of Governors/Trustees from the Parish for the Archdiocese of Suva.

As dark descended parishioners from the villages reluctantly boarded their buses for home, bringing with them their empty pots and food baskets but well satisfied with the celebrations of a long day.

Now that the dust has settled, and that we are all back home at our respective ministries I can reflect again what this farewell has meant to

everyone present. The fact that the people put on such a farewell for us showed how much they appreciated the contributions and sacrifices the Columbans have made in the parish and in other parishes in the West of Fiji over the years. They really put their hearts and souls into these ceremonies, I have rarely seen these ceremonies done with such solemnity and dignity. Such full Fijian ceremonies are rarely seen nowadays except for the most special of occasions. We will miss Ba Parish, but we can be proud of our legacy left there in the fields of education, evangelisation, interfaith dialogue, championing justice and peace issues, promoting inter-religious and inter-racial harmony, and always concerned for the plight of the poor.

Yes, indeed it was hard to say goodbye after 70 years. 

Columban Fr. John McEvoy lives and works in Fiji.



# My Weekly Tonic

## The Power of Friendship

By Fr. Patrick Colgan



Prayer group participants

I, and the Columban missionaries, are in our last month of ministry in Ba, before we hand over the parish to the Archdiocese of Suva. As the “last standing” Columban here for the past two and a half years, it has been a rich experience indeed of ministry to predominantly itaukei (indigenous Fijian) Catholics in their homes and villages. The parish stretches a couple of hours in each direction on pot-holed roads, and in the wet season, transport and ministry often come to a stop as parishioners deal with flooding. Strangely though, some of my most relaxing, and stimulating, moments in those years have occurred, not during my ministry or Sacraments to Catholics, but in friendships and informal interfaith encounters I have with the Hindu community which surround us.

If I am free on Tuesday evenings, I have a standing invite to the local Ramayan Mandali (Hindu prayer group) which meets in a small shed or members’ houses, all of which are in walking distance from the Church. I sit through the pundit’s recitation of the Ramayan and/or Bhagavad Gita, interspersed with lively singing, and also gestures such as *aarti* (waving of a flame) or anointing of statues with *sindur*.

When the formal prayers have finished and we have all shared *prasad* (Indian delicacies), then the men get down in earnest to singing devotional songs while drinking *kava*. This is the part I enjoy most! The music is lively, and I am given a small cymbal or drum to clang. There is banter in between the songs, and I am invariably invited to sing one or two Christian *bhajans*, which are appreciated greatly by the Hindu members.



Interfaith encounter



*Strangely though, some of my most relaxing, and stimulating, moments in those years have occurred, not during my ministry or Sacraments to Catholics, but in friendships and informal interfaith encounters I have with the Hindu community which surround us.*

They tell me that Catholic bhajans are unlike most other Christian Indian music — ours have an authentic Indian “sound” and rhythm (*raag*).

Friendships made in this mandali were very useful to me in my time in Ba, particularly in the time of COVID lockdowns. Having a direct line to the Ba Police Station Chief (a member) came in useful when we had a number of break-ins; the Principal of Ba

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*Friendships made in this mandali were very useful to me in my time in Ba, particularly in the time of COVID lockdowns.*

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Sangam College (another member) often asked my help to try to get students’ worksheets onto buses which were going to far flung villages (I admired his beyond-pay dedication to our rural young people).

We also shared flood evacuees on our premises a number of times. The


Principal of Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) College, on three separate occasions, asked me to “exorcise” what he feared to be evil spirits in a number of Catholic students. He figured, I being their priest, would be the best equipped for that. In one case, the girl, having calmed down on seeing me in a stole, had eaten no breakfast and was simply nervous about her exams; another young lady, quieting on being blessed with holy water, shared privately that she was being badly bullied by an uncle; a third was very distressed, and I do remember feeling something “sinister” around. We all waited until relatives came to collect her, and I recommended a lot of prayer and counseling.

I was honored that Master Singh in each case reached out to me to help. I found it important to remove the writhing and crying young ladies from public sight, to a more private sick bay or classroom situation, where we could figure out the situations.

I brought my parish Mandali group to visit their Hindu

counterparts and take part in prayers during the Ram Naumi feast, and also invited them to our 2022 Dharm Samellan (National Hindi-speaking Catholic Gathering), where they sang some Hindu songs — the first time such an interfaith invitation had been offered in the 25 years or so of Samellans in Fiji.

I will miss these men. Unlike my parishioners, they never asked me endless questions about why-this-and-why-that in parish or the Archdiocese, and accepted me for who I was — “Pat,” not “Father Pat” (though they invariably used my title).

I have witnessed that God uses friendships and gestures of help and cooperation to help grow the mustard seed of the Kingdom. With this aspect of life in Ba, my ministry and conversations could have become confined to Catholics only, and I — and the parishioners too — would have been the poorer for it. 

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Columban Fr. Patrick Colgan lives and works in Fiji.



Prayer group musicians



Fr. Pat making music



# The Joy of Intercultural Living

## Appreciating Other Cultures

By Fr. Cireneo Matulac

I have been a Columban missionary priest for many years now. I first worked on cross-cultural mission in Chile, China and Taiwan. Now I am working in my home region in the Philippines in our formation program to prepare young men to become Columban missionary priests. I like my work in formation. It's a privilege for me to accompany our students and see their growth in their vocation to become missionaries. One of the things that I particularly like is the aspect of intercultural living of the program.

Our students are coming from different countries such as Korea, Fiji, Banaba, Kiribati, Myanmar, and Philippines. Interesting stories abound coming from the different places where students are from around the world. We get to share the unique characteristics of our individual cultures and also share our food and spices. Watching movies as a community on Saturday nights is particularly a unique experience since the movies we watch range

from Bollywood, to Korean drama, Philippine cinema and of course Hollywood. But not only that, we seem to develop a taste of international cinema because the students become interested in countries and culture other than their own. Without knowing it, we have become more appreciative of other cultures and the uniqueness of each person.

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*It's a privilege for me to accompany our students and see their growth in their vocation to become missionaries.*

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We always have interesting table conversations, most often fun but it could also be serious when we get to talking about the international political and economic situations especially of our own countries. This leads to a much greater sensitivity to others' experience and life situations. Although there is not much we can do as a community

about the situation at home, the students always express their support and willingness to listen and understand what others are going through. Thus, a deep friendship is established among the students where they feel supported, appreciated and valued.

Such a diverse cultural group can also be challenging at times particularly when it comes to ways of communicating. But the learning we gained from living together is always more profound and rewarding. By bringing into awareness one's own prejudices and biases against others who are different, it leads a way towards self-transformation and openness towards others. Once a month we have a cultural night. Students from a particular country make presentations about their place of origin. It is an opportunity for each student to showcase their own country, their culture and history to the bigger group. Even if this is only introductory, I get more interested in the places where the students are coming from which leads me to do more my own exploration.

I realized that I need to constantly listen to the wisdom our students bring into the community and appreciate the richness of their culture, history and society. The Holy Spirit is alive and actively working in every person and every human community. This is what missionary means for me, to discover the different ways of being human outside the boundaries of one's culture and even religion, and as Saint Paul says, to become human together. **CM**



Our students from left to right: Lydio (Philippines), Nadim (Philippines), Marvin (Philippines), Fr. Cireneo (Philippines), Ietawa (Keribati), Iowane (Fiji), Pio (Fiji), Matang (Keribati)

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Columban Fr. Cireneo Matulac lives and works in the Philippines.





# Help Future Generations with a Donation Today

Your gift helps make possible livelihood programs like the Embroidery Project started by Columban Fr. Bill Morton and Columban lay missionaries in Mexico to help female migrants provide for their families.



***The Embroidery Project goes beyond a business, it is a humanitarian project. It serves as a network of support and solidarity. It is a space to weave the pain, the memories of their country of origin and to be able to express their emotions, feelings and stories through art, and to be able to weave a hopeful future.***

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# Explosions of Grace

## A Beautiful Liturgical Crescendo

By Sr. Rebecca Conlon

**T**he explosions of grace that took place in St. John the Apostle Church in Latifabad, Hyderabad, Pakistan, throughout Holy Week and the Easter season of 2022 should not go unnoticed. It was not just a beautiful liturgical crescendo to Easter; there were many Sacramental crescendos dotted throughout the week causing an outpouring of God's grace, love and joy on the children and community.

The first was First Confession. What a blessing it was to prepare the children for this beautiful Sacrament. Then there was the Confirmation crowd. Those preparing for this Sacrament were also invited to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation to prepare them for their big day. It was challenging, needless to say, to go out into the gullies and invite wayward teens to receive the Sacrament of

Confirmation. But when they plucked up courage to come, it was a real joy to welcome them to Sunday School and prepare them for the Sacrament.

Bishop Samson Shukardin came to the church to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation and was greeted by a sea of excited youth, thirsting for the Spirit! We know that the Spirit was thirsting for them too. They came from the parish of St. Elizabeth, 347 youth in all. Between the praying, singing, excitement, heat, social order and not a little disorder,

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*Bishop Samson Shukardin came to the church to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation and was greeted by a sea of excited youth, thirsting for the Spirit!*

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the Spirit came hovering over each one, renewing and strengthening their spirit to face life head on in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, where it is a great challenge to live out their commitment.

On Holy Thursday we had the First Holy Communion group of twenty one students as it was the ideal day to receive the Sacrament remembering that Jesus broke the bread of His life for us all on that day. Afterwards there was the Agape meal, where people shared their food with each other, and as with the miraculous multiplication, there was more than enough for all.

As the Agape meal was about to start, the Blessed Sacrament was placed in the Altar of Repose, as is customary every Holy Thursday night, and people keep watch and pray with the Lord as He faces the ordeal of Good Friday







and all that that entails. When the food arrived in our gathering, the people rushed in that direction and so I decided to go to the Altar of Repose to wait for a while with the Lord and eat later.

There were two children in the church. I tried to gather my thoughts but one of the children came up to me and asked me what I was doing there. I told him I was praying, as Jesus was all alone and He needed friends that night. Satisfied with this information, the little boy took off doing cartwheels and spinning about on the carpet floor of the church.

The other child was a young girl dressed in an immaculate long white dress. When she saw the little boy doing cartwheels, she decided that she would do what she was best at and so she started standing on her head. We

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*We three were the companions  
of Jesus on Holy Thursday —  
doing what we were best at  
— and I know that He was so  
happy to have our company.*

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three were the companions of Jesus on Holy Thursday — doing what we were best at — and I know that He was so happy to have our company. It is like the story of the young student preparing for priesthood who was always criticized by his formators for not doing things the proper way. He knew what he was best at and decided to go to the chapel quietly and do that thing and offer it to God. Juggling was his gift.

We moved on to the Holy Triduum when those who received

the explosions of grace and blessings from the Lord entered fully into the Holy Week ceremonies with great pride. May they be faithful to the promises they made and fulfil all their wishes to be committed Christians in this society and do what they are best at for God. Thanks to Bishop Samson, Fr. Yusuf Bagh, Fr. Ajmal, Master Mubarak and the staff of the Good Shepherd Tuition Center who shepherded the children through Sunday School and led them to these beautiful pastures.

The Lord is my Shepherd, we shall not want. CM

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Sr. Rebecca Conlon is a member of the leadership team of the Columban Sisters. She was one of the first group of Columbans Sisters to go to Pakistan in 1990. She has also served on mission in Korea and the Philippines.



# To Hide a Priest and a King

## Ministering in Secret

By Fr. John Boles

On the night of September 7, 1651, things were looking bad for Charles Stuart, the future King Charles II. Four days earlier, his Royalist army had been destroyed by Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentarians at the Battle of Worcester, the final engagement of the English Civil Wars (1642-51). Together with a small group of supporters, he was now on the run. There was a price on his head. The previous day, he'd only escaped capture by hiding in the branches of an oak tree (later to be celebrated as "The Royal Oak") in the grounds of Boscobel House in Shropshire. The stakes were high — two years before, his father Charles I had been publicly beheaded in London.

For the desperate fugitives, there appeared to be one last chance of safety. The persecuted English Catholic minority had sided with the Crown in the Civil Wars, and close by in Staffordshire (dubbed "Little Rome" for the number of its Catholic houses) lay Moseley Hall. This was owned by the Catholic Whitgreaves. Moreover, this family was clandestinely served by a priest, a Benedictine monk called Fr. John Huddleston, who lived there disguised as a servant. As Charles later recalled to the diarist Samuel Pepys, they were "Roman Catholique, and I chose to trust them, because I knew they had hiding-holes for Priests, that I thought I might make use of in case of need."

Under cover of darkness, five brothers from the Penderel family — Charles's "five faithful" — brought the prince to Moseley mounted on an old mill horse. (When Charles complained about the discomfort of his mount, Humphrey Penderel allegedly replied, "My liege, can you blame the horse to go heavily when he has the weight of three kingdoms on its back?")

The bedraggled future monarch of England, Scotland, and Ireland stumbled into Moseley in the early hours of September 8, to be received by Thomas Whitgreave, Thomas's mother Alice and Father Huddleston. These were to be the only three members of the household privy to the mystery visitor's true identity. Even loyal servants were informed that the man was just another hunted Royalist. Huddleston immediately conducted Charles to his own first-floor room. This had a clear view of the approach road and was accessible by a back staircase. Crucially, it had another advantage. Next to the fireplace was a wardrobe and, under its floor, a trapdoor leading to one of the famous "priest holes." It had served Huddleston well for many years. Now it was to save the life of a king.

Charles's taking refuge at Moseley had come not a moment too soon, for Cromwell's Roundheads were hot on his heels. On only his second day at the house he heard the dreaded cry, "Soldiers are coming!" He was immediately bundled into the priest hole, where he lay low until the troopers had left. Looking at it now, you can only imagine how

### PRIEST HOLES

Today, when we hear of Christians being persecuted for their beliefs, it is sobering to remember that there was a time when Catholicism in Britain was outlawed. Under Elizabeth I and James I it was treason for a priest to celebrate Mass, and for lay people to shelter him. For this reason, wealthy Catholic families often built concealed "priest holes" into their houses. Many were designed by Jesuit lay brother St. Nicholas Owen, who died in the Tower in 1606. The future Charles II sheltered in one such refuge at Moseley Hall.

Nearby Harvington Hall in Worcestershire contains the best examples of these priest holes. So well concealed were they that some were only discovered in later centuries. In one room stands an innocent-looking fireplace complete with ash stains. Look more closely, and the "ash stains" turn out to be black paint. Crawl up the chimney breast and you find it blocked off — but with boards that can be removed, leading to a bolthole in the roof.

Harvington Hall, like any self-respecting Elizabethan manor, boasts a library with a large book cupboard. "But," explains a guide, "if you know where to press, one of the wall timbers suddenly swings out on a pivot," acting as a door to another secret chamber.





claustrophobic it must have been, yet as Charles later remarked tongue-in-cheek to Pepys, it was “the best place hee was ever in.”

Charles had evaded capture by the skin of his teeth, but he and his hosts knew their luck couldn't last. The soldiers would be back. So, the day after, they arranged for a courageous Protestant Royalist, Jane Lane, to take Charles with her to Bristol disguised as her servant, under the pretext of visiting her sister who lived in that city. It was from Bristol that Charles made it to the South Coast and, eventually, from there to France.

Nine nervous years lay ahead for those who'd assisted in his escape. However, the story had a happy ending. Or rather, several happy endings. Cromwell died in 1659, and in 1660 Charles was finally restored to the throne as Charles II.

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*Next to the fireplace was a wardrobe and, under its floor, a trapdoor leading to one of the famous “priest holes.” It had served Huddleston well for many years. Now it was to save the life of a king.*

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The Whitgreave, Penderel and Lane families were all richly rewarded. As for John Huddleston, he was summoned to London, housed in Somerset House, granted immunity from prosecution and installed as Royal Chaplain, first to Charles's Catholic mother Queen Henrietta Maria, and then to his Portuguese Catholic wife Queen Catherine of Braganza — the only Englishman ever

to be accorded that honor. But the tale doesn't even end there.

Inspired in no small part by the courageous examples of those Catholics who'd sheltered him after Worcester, Charles long considered becoming a Catholic himself, but political considerations made it impossible. Then, on the morning of February 2, 1685, he fell gravely ill. Knowing he was dying, he quietly conferred with his Catholic brother James (later King James II). Once the Protestant clergy had been ushered out, up the back stairs came a Catholic priest, who gave Charles the Last Sacraments and received him at last into the Catholic Church.

That priest was Father John Huddleston. 

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Columban Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.





# Formed by Faith

## The Value of Hope and Love

By Fr. Edward O'Connell

**A**na Cristina Pallin Figueroa, a young person from the community of San Benito has been actively participating since her childhood in the Columban program “Warmi Huasi” which translates to Women’s House (Space) and is a volunteer who attends and supports the activities given by Warmi Huasi. In this article, young Ana talks about the importance of faith and how faith has been a great help in her life.

### Helping Your Fellow Beings

Since I was a little girl, I felt that I had to help my fellow beings without receiving anything in return. Fortunately, Warmi Huasi was that medium to be able to help others since my childhood. I could teach my classmates at school about the interesting topics I learned about at Warmu Huasi and also engage them in activities that I learned there. Also, Warmi Huasi helped me to promulgate the faith through my values I formed there.

### My Teen Years and My Struggles

There is always a solution when difficulties arise. I can relate this to the struggles I went through during my teenage years: sexism, gender prejudice, bullying, classism, among others, which does not let one improve easily. However, with the support of Warmi Huasi, I was able to guide myself and learn that these social issues do not last forever and that you can make the change if you want it. For that reason, I decided to continue with this important goal: to support and guide the new generation of children and teenagers in this important organization that marked my life since my early age.



# Love | Faith | Hope

## Reading Club

It is important to mention that my volunteering with Warmi Huasi began in 2014 when a new project called “Reading Club” was created which is a space located within the installations of Warmi Huasi Center to reach every child and adolescent of San Benito and promote in them reading and to develop their values thanks to the faith that we have. When I was invited to be part of this wonderful space as one of the monitors, being 12 years old, I never thought it would be so enriching for me, personally, until today.

## Dreams

One of the things that I wish to happen in my community is to make visible the participation of children and adolescents in the mission of promulgating the faith to others for the common good, just as I did before. It is time now for them to continue with this objective so others notice that in our community of San Benito there are young people who want to move their country forward by helping the most defenseless people through our social commitment.

Currently, Ana, being 20 years old, continues to support and bet on the future generation that they can make a great positive change in their community and that they can believe that they are important for their country. She tells us: “We need the population to become aware that their children, teenagers and young people are the only social groups that can truly make the change, and that we need to trust them and support them in bringing about the common good, and do so full of faith and hope.” Note: Ana is half way through her University studies to be a translator. Her main

languages, apart from Spanish, are English and Mandarin.

## When Faith Helps You Find Your Purpose in Life

Flor Daniela Pallin Figueroa is 22 years old, and represents a certain part of the young people who today are called “followers of Jesus.” Through her experiences during her participation in different organizations in her

community, as a catechist, head prefect of her public school, member of the CCONNA (Advisory Council of Children and Adolescents to Mayor) of her district Carabayllo, in Warmi Huasi, Plan International and CAFOD in Connect2, she has realized that the greatest enemy is the absence of faith and hope in people. Currently she is about to finish her studies in journalism and although there are few



Luz, Ana and Flora





Reading club



Reading club

Catholics at her university, she does not feel the need to hide it, rather she is proud of herself because thanks to this she managed to improve as a person and not even her professors or classmates can take that away from her.

### Development

“To be honest I do not have a specific date when this whole adventure began, but I do remember the day I had to leave my old home, friends,

some members of my family to start building new experiences with new people when only eight years old in 2009, and found Warmi Huasi,” she says, after remembering how difficult was the situation of moving with her family to a house far from the city, without electricity or water and studying in a humble school with poor infrastructure.

“Maybe that’s how I started to prepare myself as a disciple,” she

adds. Since she was a child her family taught her about what faith was, only some of her relatives had experienced paranormal events. Flor was waiting for the moment to experience the same to demonstrate her faith, but it did not happen. As they say, things come at the right time. For Flor it was like that—from the beginning, she was taught the value of hope, love for God, for His Son Jesus and for her neighbor. Despite witnessing abuse and mistreatment at school or in her family, she always held her faith firmly because thanks to this she learned what it is to know how to forgive and demonstrate your faith with real acts without expecting anything in return. This changed her as a person.

### Leadership

Although she was considered a rebel without a cause at home, she knew how to differentiate when to leave worries and problems behind if you want to help your fellow man and if you want to demonstrate to be a leader in your community by acting with humility, honesty and perseverance. “If you are going to do something, do it really well,” she says that was what her mother used to tell her and her younger sister.

“I feel grateful to have found this caring space at Warmi Huasi, because it was the first place that guided my family and helped me to form much of my leadership and my purpose that wanting to improve my country and the world to a better one.” In the beginning she participated by attending nutrition workshops in the company of her mother and sister. After two years they started journalism workshops for young leaders who seek change in their community. Finally, she was invited along with her sister to



# Love | Faith | Hope



Fr. Ed O'Connell in Peru

be part of the founders of the Reading Club space, where reading and the rights of children and adolescents are promoted. Prior to the Reading Club space, there had never been a library in her town.

Therefore, as a team they set the goal of educating everyone through this space to change the world to a better one, helping the most vulnerable in their town, doing social work in groups, teaching them that it is not necessary to receive anything in return, motivating them that faith and hope is the last thing to be lost and that it is not good to take advantage of others because every act has a consequence.

## Goals

Although Flor lacked many material things, she would never have imagined that she would manage to meet and help so many people from big to small along with her family.

Since the time that she was a small child she was taught not to give up in looking for hope in herself and in those who need it without excluding anyone and without receiving anything in return.

“So never be afraid to have dreams, goals, give your own opinions and act to help your fellow man and your planet, because it is no use complaining about problems or standing idle, in every part of the world there are

problems but what are you doing or giving for your community? The most important thing is to look for solutions and stop stressing about insignificant things that will not strengthen our spirit of hope.” CM

*Note: Anna and Flor are the daughters of Luz, our Columban community worker in San Benito, who is active in the local Catholic community, the township and with Warimi Huasi. Flor is the oldest daughter of Luz and has almost completed her studies to be a journalist.*

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After many years in Peru, Fr. Ed O'Connell is now living and working in Britain.





# Interreligious Dialogue in Fiji

## Understanding and Respect

By Fr. Frank Hoare

**O**n May 14, 1987, people in Fiji were shocked when the army overthrew the elected government in a coup d'état. The army claimed that it was saving the indigenous Fijian people and their land from the ethnic Indian people. Confusion reigned for months. People were divided by ethnicity and by religion — indigenous Fijians are Christian and ethnic Indians are mostly Hindu or Muslim. Mistrust, suspicion and hostility were widespread. Christians themselves were divided — some for the coup and some against it. Fundamentalist Christians influenced the military to ban any kind of work, games or even travel on Sundays for about one year. Temples and mosques were desecrated and burned. Social unrest, poverty and fear stalked the land.

There were some protests, but people also turned to prayer. A

Presbyterian minister started a multi-faith organization called Interfaith Search Fiji. Its main purpose is to seek understanding and respect between all the religions in Fiji. It holds monthly meetings for the representatives of different faith communities to present on various themes from their scriptures. Interfaith Search Fiji is invited to lead prayers for national events and celebrations. Columban priests and seminarians have been involved in Interfaith Search.

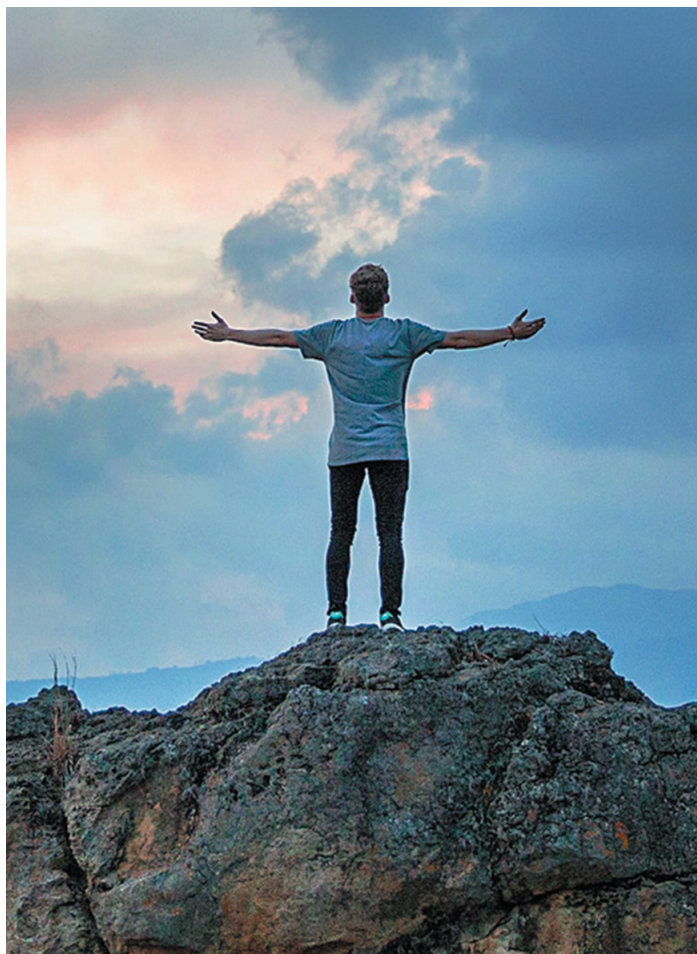
Columban missionaries ensure that its younger priests learn both Hindi and indigenous Fijian languages. They can then minister to indigenous Fijians and build bonds of friendship with Indo-Fijians of different religions. They are able to engage in a dialogue of life with others. Columban missionaries are often invited to give talks at Indian weddings and funerals. Some attend Hindu weekly prayer meetings and are

invited by Hindu families to pray for the sick and to visit them on their feasts.

A few years ago, Columban missionaries in Fiji employed an Indo-Fijian, Ms. Priscilla Magdalin, as coordinator of its Interreligious Dialogue efforts. Priscilla and I decided to focus on youth so as not to appear to compete with Interfaith Search Fiji. We initiated regular youth events. We invited representatives of other religions to join an organizing committee. The committee meetings and youth events are held bi-monthly.

We have had programs on many and varied topics — the meaning of festivals, prayer for the sick, fasting traditions, religious messaging through social media, respect for God's creation, and more. The youth participants make presentations using banners, drama, film, songs and dance to illustrate their themes. We often include an exercise called merry-go-round which young





people enjoy as it enables them to meet ten others, previously unknown, within a short time.

One of the most popular events has been visiting places of worship. Beliefs and rituals are explained, and generous hospitality is offered. Hospitality is at the heart of interreligious understanding and dialogue. A physical sharing of food and a spiritual sharing of faith go hand in hand. After one pilgrimage walk, a Catholic youth told his village elders that seeing the deep faith of the Hindus and Muslims had made him ashamed of his own weak commitment to Christianity. He resolved to be more dedicated in his faith.

Priscilla and I are, at this time, visiting leaders of different religions and denominations to elicit their support for their youth groups to be involved in a regular and formal way. We are also inviting our Columban Companions


in Mission in the Columban parish of Raiwaqa to begin regular meetings with women's groups from other religions. We hope that they will find projects of mutual interest to work on together and inspire each other in their faith commitments.

We would also like to find ways for students in the upper stages of secondary education to mix and mingle on occasion and to learn from each other. Holding intercultural workshops for them and sessions where they could share their personal experience of faith and prayer could be very enriching. We would like to encourage the Archdiocesan Commission for Evangelization to give more importance to Interreligious dialogue also.

Religious congregations in Suva gather together for a Mass, some input, entertainment and food on Fiji Day, October 10 of each year. This year

was different. We invited a Methodist minister, a lady evangelical, a young Muslim lady and a female Hindu priest. They each spoke for ten minutes about their experience of faith and afterwards fielded questions from the priests, Sisters and seminarians. All participants found it a very interesting and valuable event.

Just before the Hindu feast of Diwali this year Fr. Pat Colgan, a Columban parish priest, invited a Hindu teacher to explain the meaning of Diwali to his parishioners at the end of Sunday Mass.

Hans Kung says: "There will be no peace among the peoples of this world without peace among the world religions." Our Columban efforts in Fiji are small contributions in working for peace in the world. 

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Columban Fr. Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.



# Never-Ending Education

## An Opportunity to Grow Closer

By Sihyeon Bae

When I began my long-term commitment as a Columban Lay Missionary, I took on the role as a diocesan catechist. Bishop John Lee of the Diocese of Hsinchu asked me to study and get a certification for the indigenous language, Atayal. Prior to the bishop's request, I had thought about learning the language because in my ministry site some people still use their mother tongue more frequently than Mandarin, which is the standard language in Taiwan. But I felt the bishop's request was too sudden, and I was not ready to learn another language while still learning Mandarin. But I changed my mind as I realized that this was an opportunity for me to learn indigenous culture in depth.

Fortunately, I was able to find an Atayal language teacher immediately and started to learn. As I began to learn the language, I found the alphabet (Romanization) challenging. Although they use the English alphabet, the pronunciation is slightly different, which made it difficult to adjust. For example, alphabet "b" is pronounced as "v," "p" pronounced as "b," and "t" pronounced as "d." It was confusing, because I was already so used to the English alphabet. I had no choice but to memorize everything.

I studied harder than when I had to prepare for my college entrance exam. Although, the bishop did not give me a deadline for passing the exam, and I knew that I didn't need to put too much pressure on myself, I just wanted to be responsible for what I was doing. Because while I was studying the Atayal language, I felt close to them. It had been a long time since I was in a school setting, so studying became something new again. So, I decided to entrust this

experience to God. When I arrived in Taiwan, I studied Mandarin for a year. At that time, I always asked the Holy Spirit to guide my lips and open my mind for mission as a missionary. I believe it is God's plan, so I follow it; if not, I could not find any reason.


After months of studying Atayal language, I finally went for an exam. I met some indigenous parishioners from our parish in the examination hall where I took the exam. They were surprised to see me not only learning their language but also taking the exam.

The test was conducted in two ways, listening and speaking comprehension. During the exam, I was nervous because a non-indigenous teacher did the exam — I had to take the Atayal language test in Mandarin. It was hard, but I tried my best to focus on my answer. During the speaking comprehension, I made sure I answered loudly because I thought it would be better to answer loudly with a clear voice. But the test supervisor found my voice too loud, approached me, and warned me to speak quietly because everyone in the room could hear my answer. I was given a second warning because my voice was still too loud.

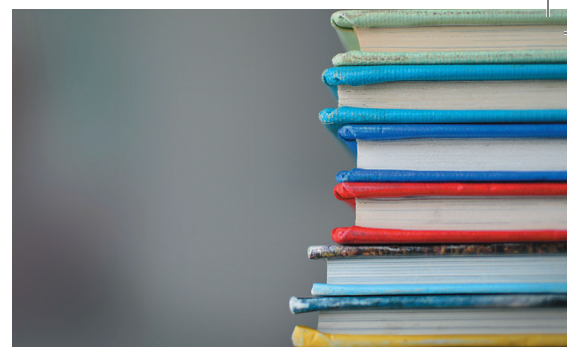
I felt my answer was too short during the second part of the exam. I knew that was all I could answer, but I still had time. So, I decided to sing an Atayal song that I usually sing during the Mass. The song was about thanking God and entrusting our difficulties to him. I knew this song was irrelevant to the question and I didn't know how much this would affect my test scores, but I wanted to do my best. Perhaps God saw my efforts and gave me blessings. Finally, I passed the test, and I was able to get a certification.

I was happy about the result, but what touched my heart more deeply than the certificate was the parishioners' reactions. When the parishioners learned that I was studying their language, they showed a great interest in me and my study. They were amazed and touched to see a foreign missionary struggling to learn their language. I felt that their attitude toward me somehow became different, and I also felt closer to them than before. It seemed that we had become a real family. Previously they called me simply "Mahong," which is my indigenous name, but now they call me "Mahong Chuan-Dao." It means "the missionary Mahong." I felt glad and privileged to be accepted by the group and to have earned their respect.

This opportunity to learn the local language deepened my missionary journey in Taiwan. I could already communicate with the indigenous parishioners in Mandarin but since I began to speak their mother tongue it brought a huge difference in our relationship. I was also grateful that God invited me to do God's mission in various ways. God journeyed with me, encouraged me, and strengthened me.

Learning a new language probably will be the most challenging part of missionary life. But it is also the most effective way to learn the culture, draw ourselves nearer to people and be one of them. While learning a new language, I acknowledged the constant presence of God among us. I thank God for this opportunity, and I look forward to the unique invitation God will give me next. 

Columban lay missionary Sihyeon Bae lives and works in Taiwan.







# 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.



***Columban Fr. John Boles was very distressed and worried when the coronavirus pandemic struck Peru. For the already poor, the pandemic was a dual catastrophe. With Peru's vaccination program being painfully slow, they were the ones most at risk from infection and the ones with the greatest responsibility to self-isolate when necessary. However, this meant they couldn't go out onto the streets and earn their meagre living resulting in hunger for them and their families. For many, the reality became "Die from Covid or die from hunger. Not much of a choice." However, with the support of Columban benefactors, miracles like the "kitchens in the sky," communal kitchens serving the poor and hungry, happened to help those most in need.***

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](mailto:donorrelations@columban.org), call us toll-free at (877) 299-1920, or visit [www.columban.org](http://www.columban.org). The Missionary Society of St. Columban treasures your support and is committed to the stewardship of your gifts.



# New Ways

## Spreading Hope

By Jao Resari

Since the Covid pandemic began, we've experienced Sunday Mass cancellations whenever new cases spiked. This has impacted activities in my ministry because most of them have been integrated with Masses to be able to reach out to as many parish communities as we can. These restrictions posed a challenge to adapt to the changes brought about by the pandemic to continue our education campaign for migrant communities. This has led me to try out new activities using social media.

During the initial stages of conceptualizing and planning, I had moments when I was filled with uncertainties of how these will be received and questioning whether such efforts will bear fruit. But I try to keep myself grounded by reminding myself that I can only do the best I can with the resources I have and offer a prayer to God to prepare and open the minds and hearts of the communities I hope to reach.


While we were preparing materials for one of the activities, I remembered one conversation I had with a volunteer which helped to silence some of my doubts. She shared about her friend whom she recently found out is HIV positive through social media. When I asked if she has talked to her friend since finding out, she admitted she was hesitant to do so. Our conversation led to talking more about the illness and, to alleviate her fears and concerns, ways of how the virus is transmitted. I shared how it is one of my hopes that our activities may be able to reach out to people living with HIV through social media to let them know that they are not alone.



I was fortunate to have the continued support of fellow missionaries and lay leaders, people whom I have collaborated with for many years. Together, we were able to launch community prayers online for the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial for two consecutive years.

This annual event is much more than just a memorial. It aims to raise social awareness about HIV and AIDS. With almost 38 million people living with HIV today, the AIDS Candlelight Memorial “serves as an important intervention for global solidarity, breaking down barriers of stigma and discrimination, and giving hope to new generations.” More so now as we are facing a prevention crisis because according to the UNAIDS2, “the progress in the reduction of new HIV infections is slowing. If current

trends continue, 1.2 million people will be newly infected with HIV in 2025 — three times more than the 2025 global target of 370,000 new infections.”

With the new activities we launched in the past years, I was deeply moved seeing hundreds of people from different communities engaging in our online campaign. With God's grace, we were able to reach people beyond the scope of our usual on-site activities. I pray that the Holy Spirit continues to inspire others to spread messages of hope to those we encounter, be it in our personal or online communities, as we continue to fight HIV-related stigma, until we find a cure to end this illness once and for all. 

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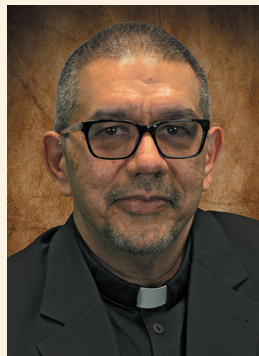
Columban lay missionary Jao Resari lives and works in Taiwan.



# Race, Ethnicity and Culture

In today's world, tensions between race, ethnicity, and culture have increased. There are polarizing movements that seem to fuel more hate than understanding. As missionaries serving in a country not of our origin, we tend to be placed in the middle of such tensions. What stance do we take? How do we react? What can we do? Much depends on the situation and nature of conflict.

For several years, I worked in southern Chile which had a large native population of Mapuches. There is a historical mistrust between the Mapuches and Chileans. The Mapuches' territory never fully came under the Chilean government control until the late 1800s. In the history of South America, it was one of the last areas to be colonized and Christianized. For some, the wounds of colonization were somewhat fresh. One Mapuche elder told me how, as a child, they were told by the Church to renounce their traditional ways and how they had to burn native ceremonial artifacts in front of state and church officials. Amongst the Mapuches, there was a plurality of ideologies. One thought was that one can only be Mapuche and not Christian. Another was, one can be Mapuche and Christian but you don't mix the faiths. Thus, if one participated in a Mapuche ceremony, they did so as 100% Mapuche. When one participated in a Christian ceremony (i.e. Eucharist) one did so as 100% Christian. A third ideology was that one can be Mapuche and Christian, and can mix the faiths. For example, in the celebration of the Eucharist,



## FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Chris Saenz

Mapuche elements can be added. The last ideology was that one can only be Christian and never Mapuche. Some groups can radicalize these ideologies, some can be more dialogical. As one can see, it had a myriad of nuances that need different approaches. One simple approach was not enough.

Whatever situation a missionary encounters, the center of any approach has to be the human dignity of the individual and people. During my mission work in southern Chile, I became friends with Chileans and

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***Whatever situation a missionary encounters, the center of any approach has to be the human dignity of the individual and people.***

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Mapuches of all different ideologies. I heard stories of injustice and misunderstandings. Yet, the basic need was to listen with compassion and provide a peaceful stance. Yet, there will be moments when a direct action is required with a clear stance for one and against another. Thus, the centrality of human dignity.

Once, I drove to a small town to buy supplies for my house. I came to a stop sign and watched as a Mapuche couple crossed the street in front of my truck. As they approached the other side, a police van pulled up and four officers got out of the vehicle. They immediately grabbed the man and began beating him in the street. The woman screamed. Others stood around and watched. I did not know the man and maybe he was a criminal. However, the fact that the officers did not handcuff him and take him to vehicle was suspicious to me. Having the faith that the officers would recognize me, I got out of my truck and yelled, "Hey! What's going on over there!" The officers stopped, turned around and looked at me with a frenzied look. Suddenly, the look disappeared, and they recognized me. They quickly left the man, got in the vehicle and left. Clearly, they were acting out of bounds and wanted to assert dominance for some reason. I went to the man and asked if he was alright. He was muttering obscenities at the officers but appeared to be fine. The couple thanked me and left. Although it was not a great action, this small act is one example of how a missionary can encounter issues regarding race, ethnicity, and culture on a daily basis. The primacy of human dignity over any ideology is a central Christian principal that must be always maintained when dealing with race, ethnicity, and culture.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fr. Chris Saenz".



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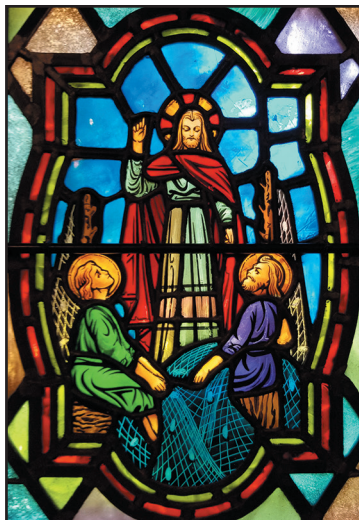
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– Matthew 4:19

*At once they left their nets and  
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