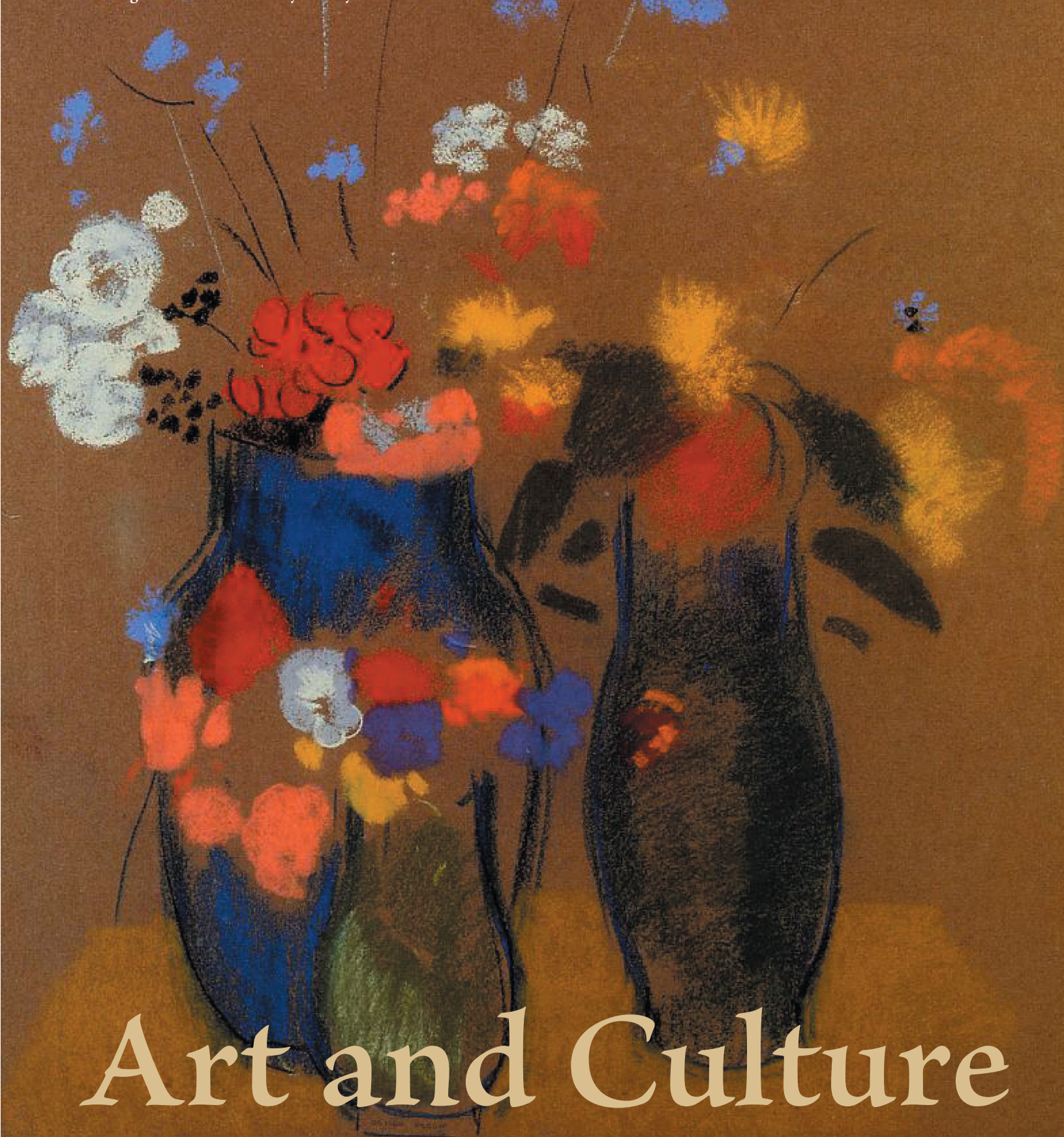




Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

October 2025



Art and Culture

C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Art and Culture



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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 Columban Missionaries

Art and Religion

Art and religion have been intertwined throughout human history, each influencing and shaping the other in profound ways. At their core, both art and religion strive to express the inexpressible — to reach toward something greater than the ordinary, something sacred or transcendent. Reflecting on their relationship reveals a rich, complex dialogue between human creativity and spiritual belief.

Religious themes have inspired some of the most powerful and enduring works of art. From the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel to the intricacies of Islamic calligraphy and the sacred sculptures of Hindu temples, art has been used as a vehicle to honor the divine, tell sacred stories, and invite contemplation. In this way, art becomes more than mere decoration — it becomes an act of devotion, a form of worship, and a means of spiritual communication.

At the same time, religion has provided artists with a framework of meaning and purpose. Beliefs, rituals, and sacred texts offer artists symbolic language to explore life's biggest questions: What is our purpose? What lies beyond this life?

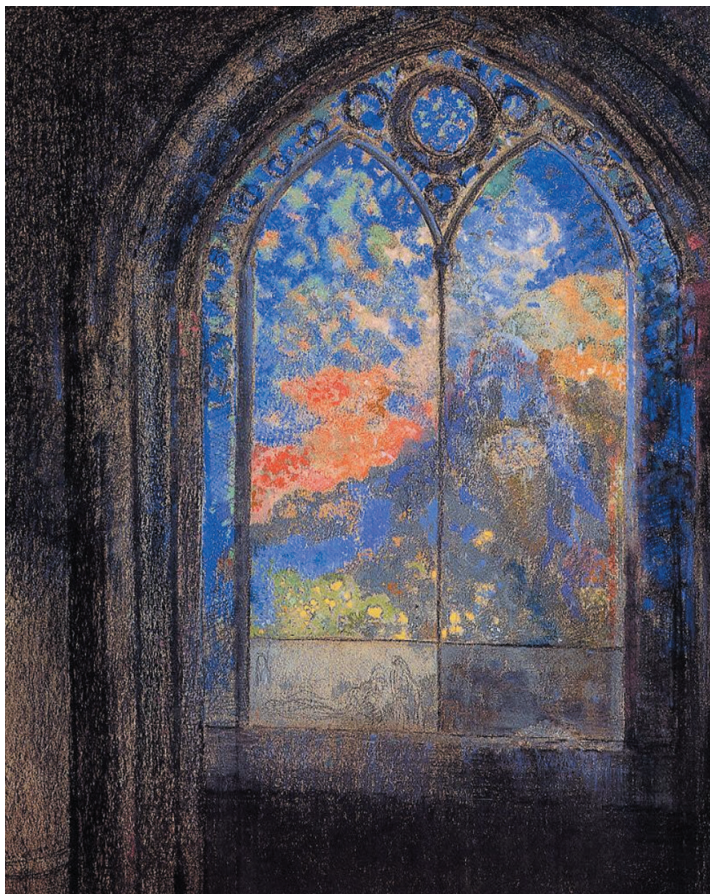
At their core, both art and religion strive to express the inexpressible — to reach toward something greater than the ordinary, something sacred or transcendent.

What does it mean to be good, just, or holy? Art allows these questions to be visualized, sung, or dramatized, inviting viewers into an emotional and reflective engagement with faith.

However, art and religion can also challenge one another. Artists may use religious imagery in provocative ways to critique institutions, explore personal doubt, or question dogma. Likewise, religious authorities have both supported and censored art, depending on whether it aligns with doctrinal values. This tension shows that both art and religion are dynamic forces, not fixed or unchanging.

Ultimately, the relationship between art and religion is a testament to humanity's need to reach beyond the material world. Whether harmonious or conflicted, their interaction reflects our deepest longings for meaning, connection, and transcendence. In contemplating this relationship, we are reminded that both art and religion, at their best, invite us to see the world — and ourselves — with greater depth, awe, and humility.

Columban Missionaries



Pilgrim's Progress

The Driving Forces of Justice and Rights

Fr. John Boles



Fr. Cathal Gallagher

Fr. Cathal Gallagher recalled the incident vividly. "It was in 1998. I was working in a poor parish in Lima. I got a call from a local clinic, run by the Mercy Sisters, saying someone was having a serious panic attack. I went over. The man was in a real state. He kept saying, 'My brother died last night.'" Fr. Cathal, recognizing him and thinking he was confused with grief, assured him, "No, he died last Friday. I did the funeral." "NO," the man insisted, "my other brother. He died last night!" The man had lost his two brothers in a week. Both had died of AIDS.

This was the pivotal moment which Fr. Cathal reckoned changed his life. It was in fact one of a series of life-changes that saw him move from being a policeman in his native Ireland

Being from Northern Ireland, justice issues were always important to him.

to a Columban missionary priest in Peru, where he dedicated much of his time caring for people infected with—or affected by HIV/AIDS. Yet, by Fr. Cathal's own admission, this remarkable journey began in a very conventional fashion.

Born in 1951 in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, Cathal grew up in what he remembered as a "typical Irish Catholic family" of the time. "Rosary every night, Confession every Saturday, a boarder at the local Catholic grammar." Being from Northern Ireland, justice issues were always important to him. Maybe it was because of this that he felt attracted to public service, and at the age of 20 he hopped over the border to join the Garda Síochána, the police force in the Republic.

"I enjoyed my time in the Gardai immensely," he remembered, in spite of a few "hairy experiences". It was the 1970s, the height of the Troubles. Yet, after just six years, he took the radical decision of leaving the Gardai and entering the seminary to train for missionary priesthood with the Columbans.

"I'd had an inkling of 'something else' calling me, ever since I'd been an altar boy back home," Cathal recalled. Also, I'd always been interested in mission. The magazine produced by Columbans in Ireland, *The Far East*, gripped me." Another factor was that Dalgan Park, home of the Columbans in Ireland, was only a stone's throw from Navan, where Cathal was based as a policeman. He used to pass the entrance to Dalgan nearly every day. "Finally, I decided to drive in. Just turned up at the door. Asked to speak to a priest. Took it from there."

One step led to another, and he joined the Columbans in 1979, did his priestly formation in Ireland and overseas mission training in Chile, was ordained in 1985 and appointed to Peru. For most people, Fr. Cathal had already run up enough vocation changes to last a lifetime, but more was to come.

"Accompanying suffering was the key," he explained. He had seen suffering caused by the Troubles in Northern Ireland. He had seen it in Chile, the product of a brutal military dictatorship. He met it on arrival in Peru, where the Maoist insurgency of the notorious Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) group caused havoc from 1980 to 1995.

Finally, he saw the suffering inflicted by the Aids epidemic which was ravaging parts of his parish in the 1990s—epitomized by that heart-rending tragedy of the death of the two brothers.



It seemed as though he has been ticking off all the "p's," from police to priesthood to psychotherapy to Peru.

He decided to act. Again. "Two main driving forces in my life have been justice and rights," he affirmed. "As a priest. As a cop." So, he went twice to London, first becoming a psychotherapist and then gaining experience as coordinator of the multi-disciplinary team working to protect the health and promote the rights of those with HIV.

Returning to Lima, Fr. Cathal set up an organization to put into practice all he had learned. He called it, *'Si, da Vida'* (roughly translated as: 'Yes to Life'). "Human dignity was the focus, fighting the discrimination that people living with HIV/AIDS experience in Peru." His guiding light was 'responsibility', or rather, 'responsibility'—helping people respond to


new situations in their lives, and giving them the tools to do so.

He implemented the Positive Self Management Program, developed at Stanford University in the U.S. This promotes a "social model of health care." People are taught how to manage their own chronic health conditions. They are also educated in prevention, with former participants going on to become instructors.

When I spoke to Fr. Cathal, the results of almost 20 years' work were impressive. Supported by funding from the Irish government, the Columbans and private benefactors, 'Si, da Vida' boasted a center and a dozen staff, including doctors, psychologists and social workers. Some 400 instructors had been trained, and around 4,500 people had benefitted from the programs and a much wider population had received prevention-education through talks, literature and the center's own radio station.

The staff liaise with government agencies and the police. Volunteers go into places as varied as universities, hospitals, prisons and discos. They always concentrate on the poorer areas. "We go to the people, we don't wait for them to come to us," Fr. Cathal explained.

When I met with Fr. Cathal, he was dividing his time between 'Si, da Vida', his role as Director of the Columbans in South America, and being the driving force behind an inter-agency network responding to the effects of the Covid emergency in North Lima. It seemed as though he has been ticking off all the "p's," from police to priesthood to psychotherapy to Peru. It was an extraordinary "pilgrim's progress" for Fr. Cathal Gallagher.

Fr. Cathal died on November 28, 2023, in Lima, Peru. 

Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.

Encounter with Life

Removing Obstacles

By Fr. Alvaro Martinez

Mirrihue Alto is a rural town located a little more than three miles from the village of Antuco in the Bio-Bio region of southern Chile. Some of its inhabitants work in honey and honey-derived products.

One of the major challenges facing the area is the lack of native trees and wild flora, primarily due to the proliferation of large monoculture plantations, such as pine and eucalyptus. Trees like eucalyptus can consume between five gallons of water per day for a three-year-old tree and up to 53 gallons of water for a 20-year-old tree, which damages the ecosystem and renders these hectares highly vulnerable to forest fires. Furthermore, pine trees cause significant harm to the soil and subsequently to the ecosystem of other wildlife.

Water scarcity is one reason it's difficult to maintain and support native trees and wild flora, leading to the need for assistance, such as deep wells for irrigation, which helps create floral diversity. Additionally, monoculture directly impacts the lives of bees, pollination, honey production, and its byproducts, influencing the area's wildlife.

That's why, years ago, when I discovered the area, I began dreaming of digging a deep well to plant native trees that would directly benefit the local ecosystem. It has been a long and complex journey, because the soil there is very rocky. And, the water is very deep underground which makes well construction quite expensive. Over these years of waiting and searching, a satellite survey revealed that the land where I wanted to dig was unsuitable. This result,

although discouraging, didn't deter me from dreaming and continuing my search. A few months ago, a small company informed me they could drill the well, so we resumed the hunt for a suitable location. The search for water was carried out using an ancient technique of the local Mapuche people: they used wooden rods and now employ pieces of copper wire. This method of searching for the "eye of water," or the location of deep water, is called "zahorí." With this technique, we identified the perfect spot to dig and create the well that would provide the water.

I must admit I was scared of the investment, but with the help of a few friends, I was able to proceed with the expenses. However, the confident man assured me that the water was 36 feet deep. His calm voice encouraged me to take the risk, even though I hadn't first said a prayer or sprinkled holy water, nor brought a medal of Saint Pius or the Virgin Mary to the chosen spot. The initial feet of digging were challenging and filled with rocks. While we were digging and only encountering rock, a local man—since digging a well is a community effort where all the neighbors help—asked me if I had sought Mother Earth's permission to dig and draw water.

This question, "Did you ask Mother Earth's permission to dig and draw water?" lingered in my mind, and early the next day, I returned to the site to pray once more. I sprinkled holy water and sought Mother Earth's permission to continue digging for water. The ground began to give way, and soon, water gushed from the depths of the earth at 30 feet. By 43 feet, a steady flow was ensured for the trees that will be planted this winter in southern Chile. These native trees will be donated by those who have learned about this wish to contribute to biodiversity.

This experience teaches me to continue searching even when the "studies" are unfavorable; it encourages me to trust the dream that drives my search. It reveals the wisdom in "asking permission," which implies recognizing our interconnectedness rather than seeing ourselves as owners of Mother Earth, or "Ñuke Mapu" in the language of the Mapuche people. It reminds me to trust what others share (small business, the man with the copper rods, the neighbor who came to accompany me) and urges me to delve deeper, motivating me to remove the obstacles. It is arduous work, but one that enables an encounter with life: water! **CM**



A native of Chile, Columban Fr. Alvaro Martinez now lives and works in the U.S.



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.

An IRA charitable rollover is a way you can help continue our work and benefit this year.

- Avoid taxes on transfers of up to \$100,000 from your IRA to our organization
- May satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year
- Reduce your taxable income, even if you do not itemize deductions
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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.

Columban Book Launch in Fiji

Celebrating 50 Years in Fiji

By Frank Hoare

Columban Fr. Frank Hoare has been on mission in Fiji for over 50 years. On April 4, 2025, his two books, *A Missionary Diary* and *A World of Difference*, were launched at the Suva Cathedral. *A Missionary Diary* was launched by the Hon. Sashi Kiran, Fiji's Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection.

The World of Difference was launched by the Archbishop of Suva, the Most Rev. Dr. Peter L. Chong. This was a Pacifican launch.

The launch began and ended with a hymn led by the Columban Companions in Mission from Raiwaqa, the Columban parish together with the main Suva *mandali* (an Indo-Fijian prayer group). They opened with the Fijian composition of "We belong to Christ and not to ourselves" (*Christi simus non nostri*, in Latin). A friend of Fr. Frank's, Vintika Kumar, did a beautiful Indian dance halfway through. The final hymn was

"Make Me a Channel of Your Love." The books were on sale at a bargain price for the event.

Fr. Frank came to Fiji in 1973, and he began the study of the Hindi language immediately. Fiji's two main ethnic groups are the indigenous Fijians and the Indo-Fijians who were first brought to Fiji by the British Colonial administration in the nineteenth century, mainly as indentured workers on sugar plantations. This means that Hindi and Fijian are the two main languages used in Fiji. English is the common language. The Society of St. Columban has been insistent from the beginning that the first task of a missionary is to learn the local language. Our co-founder, Bishop Galvin of Hanyang, had a fine grasp of Mandarin Chinese.

After his study of Hindi, Fr. Frank took on Fijian and became proficient in this also. Later he was invited to study psychology in the Institute of Psychology of the Gregorian

University in Rome. He followed this with an MSc in Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics. In the years since, he has written several anthropological-pastoral articles for various magazines. He has now put these articles together in the book, *A World of Difference*.

Archbishop Peter had a Chinese father and a Fijian mother and grew up in a Fijian village speaking Fijian and immersed in Fijian culture. The Archbishop introduced this book and mentioned some of his own experiences with spirit possession.

The World of Difference has two articles on spirit-possession and its pastoral care. Another article deals with the conflict that arose in an Indo-Fijian Catholic community when a ritual approved by the Indian Bishops but also used in Hinduism was introduced in Fiji. The final article reflects on the symbols used in different religious communities and how inter-religious dialogue is needed

so that we can understand one another.

The Hon. Minister, Sashi Kiran, has been a friend of Fr. Frank's for some 20 years and launched *A Missionary Diary*. In the 1990s, after the first Fiji coup, Fr. Frank set up an organization called People for Intercultural Awareness that brought people of different cultures together in Fiji and helped them to overcome their stereotypes and work together. At the launch, she witnessed that she was greatly helped by this.

In 2001, she set up and became Executive Director of an organization called FRIEND (Foundation for Integrated Rural Development and Development). This helped rural people to generate income and is quite successful with chutneys, flour, greeting cards, herbal teas and other items now being marketed. At the last election, she resigned from FRIEND and ran for election. She was elected and became Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection and in 2024, she became the minister. She spoke glowingly of the book, saying it reflects the heart of Fiji and calls Fiji to be the way the world should be.

Fr. Frank kept a diary of his experiences over the years. The stories

in *A Missionary Diary* are incidents that caught his fancy and tell of people, events, aspects of culture and various incidents from his missionary life. The book has 170 pages and most stories have a photo illustration. It is sensibly priced at 10 Fiji dollars (about 5 US dollars or 5 euro), which is within the price range of working people in Fiji where the daily wage would only be about 60 Fiji dollars.

An early story in the book tells of Fr. Frank's first day in Naleba. He spent two years here to get to know the community, Catholic and others, very well. He still visits them to this day. Now it is their children and grandchildren, many of whom live in Suva, that he meets. Naleba was a community of about 20 Catholic families in a settlement about fifteen miles out of Labasa town on Fiji's second biggest island.


Fr. Pat McCaffrey dropped him off at the chapel there, introduced him to a nearby Catholic family and returned to Labasa. It was simple living, no electricity, no fridge, no gas, and no oven – but he did have a kerosene stove. And there was a toilet and shower outside.

Loud knocks at daybreak the next morning woke him. It was Gabriel,

a mentally-challenged young man, anxious to see that he was up and about early, like everyone else in the community. Breakfast, after morning prayer, consisted of tea made on the kerosene stove with crackers and peanut butter.

He then explored his surroundings. One of his neighbors was a Muslim family who called out to him in a friendly fashion. Chatting with them he discovered that their daughter had a cut on her foot. He got his first-aid kit, cleaned the wound and put a plaster on it. Her mother invited him to lunch, and he was glad to accept.

The next day, he went further afield but did change the dressing on his neighbor's foot and, gratefully, he again accepted lunch. The next morning Gabriel arrived with the message that his grandmother wanted to talk to him.

When he spoke to her, this fine old lady looked agitated. She said to him, "Since you came here, you have had lunch each day with a Muslim family. You are supposed to come here to my house like the other priests. You belong to us, not to them." 

Columban Fr. Frank Hoare continues to live and work in Fiji.

Happy Hallow Eve!

A Reflection About Bats and Mission Life

By Gertrudes C. Samson

Bats as Symbols of Halloween

Happy Halloween! The phrase came from the phrase, “Hallow Eve.” “Hallow” is an Old English word that means “holy.” It is just like in the Old English Version of the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father, who art in heaven, ‘hallowed’ be thy name.”

And so, “Happy Hallow Eve” means “Happy Holy Eve,” celebrating November 1, which is the Feast of All Saints.

The word “saints” in the early church meant all believers, both the living and the dead; therefore, it is the “Feast Day of All Believers in Christ.” “Happy All Saints Day” to all, too.

Nowadays, as you look for costumes and decorations in the shops for Halloween, bats are surely there. And in horror films—especially with vampire characters—there will usually be a bat in the film, and there will usually be a scene where the vampire will turn into a bat, or the bat turns into a vampire. Of course, these films gave the wrong impression about bats, and a prejudice against bats developed.

St. Columban said in one of his sermons: “If you want to know the Creator, you must first know His Creation.” Recently, this year, Columban missionaries organized a Bat Walk at the grounds of the

Columban property in Solihull. I decided to join them, although honestly, I was reluctant at the beginning because of my fears about bats due to my lack of knowledge. I am glad there was a lecture part before the walk explaining the myths and real facts about the bats.

I am thankful to God I joined the bat walk because the myths and facts in my head about bats were clarified. The one portrayed in the films about association with vampires is just a myth; they do not attack humans—they even try to avoid us. The positive contribution of bats to the environment was also talked about,

*“If you want to know the
Creator, you must first
know His Creation.”*

– ST. COLUMBAN

and the fascinating details of how God designed bats as a creature. My prejudices about bats were all wiped away. At the end of the lecture, I totally agreed with the lecturer when she said that “Bats are amazing.” My fear was replaced with excitement before we began and so I enjoyed the bat walk!

God’s Creation and the Story of Bats

Prejudice created by myths and false facts that happened to bats, also happened to humans like migrants. Hostility to migrants by some people in the United Kingdom happened to heighten just a few months ago, due to myths and false information about migrants. There are groups of people who became hostile to the presence of migrants in the country, and so there





Community support for immigrants

were riots in several parts of the U.K. There are even some groups of people attacking the accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees, or houses of migrants and the places where they are staying. Indeed, for me, it is heartbreaking to see it in the news.

I personally experienced hostility too from three boys. They were shouting something, initially I did not recognize the words, until one of them came up to me and said, "Excuse me. Excuse me." I turned to him, thinking that he might need help. Then he said, "Go back. Leave UK." I can't believe it, I said to him, "What did you say?" He suddenly seemed frozen and was not able to repeat it. Then I realized that "Go back. Leave UK" were the words they were shouting. To my surprise, I replied to him, "God bless you." Then they rode their bicycles and left me. I realized we were exactly in front of the church. I thank God that "God bless you" is what came out of my lips. Human as I am, I felt hurt, and it made me feel sad for several days.

Several days later, people with a positive attitude towards migrants put posters on the walls of several places

in Birmingham that say, "Thank God for Immigrants." I also heard that there were groups of people who did peaceful demonstrations in several parts of the country to raise awareness about the positive contributions of migrants. These lifted my spirit that there are also people around who are willing to balance what is going on with positive actions.

Prayers for Those Hostile to Migrants


Migrants are like bats; while the bees are resting at night, the bats go out to do the night shift. Migrants also contribute a lot to society. Migrants contribute economically, filling critical skill shortages, establishing businesses that create jobs. According to the Office for National Statistics, migrants contribute approximately £83 billion to the UK's economic output annually, and the list goes on.

Yes, I am a migrant too. After fourteen years of serving here in the UK as a Columban lay missionary, helping the poor and marginalized in society, for me, they are now my brothers and sisters too. And, the UK is now my home as well. And so,

I would like to share my prayers for those who are hostile to Migrants. With peace and sincerity in my heart, this is also my prayer for the three boys who said to me, "Go back. Leave U.K."

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. I believe some of them were just misinformed, but if there are people who will let them know the real facts about migrants, they will be enlightened and have a change of heart.

May God bless them with wisdom to know what is right and wrong, so they will not just imitate or be swayed by what they see others are doing, or what they hear others are saying. May they also listen to the other side of the story about migrants and see the positive contribution of migrants to society.

Please let them realize that migrants are also part of your beautiful, diversified creation, and that they must come to get to know too, to know you more. Amen. 

Columban lay missionary Gertrudes Samson lives and works in the United Kingdom.

Inherent Worth

Planting Seeds of Self-Love

By Sr. Julietta Choi



In Pakistan, I work at three shelters, referred to as “hostels,” which provide food, lodging and education to over 100 girls aged seven to twenty who come from difficult circumstances. Three times a week I accompany these girls who are from economically disadvantaged families, orphans, or victims of domestic violence, both verbal and physical.

Before coming to Pakistan, I spent many years serving in the cemetery of

Manila, Philippines, where families lived among tombstones. I thought the children born there faced the most tragic of destinies. And in some ways, that may be true. Yet, as I now witness the lives of these girls in Pakistan, I find myself saying something different.

The children in the cemetery were indeed poor, but at least they lived with their parents, who overflowed with love for them. Each morning, mothers in the cemetery would iron

their daughters’ school uniforms, prepare a very simple breakfast, and braid their daughters’ long hair.

In contrast, the girls at these shelters do everything on their own. They not only care for themselves but often take on the responsibility of caring for younger siblings—washing their clothes, ironing their uniforms, and braiding their hair. Then, when they leave the shelter, they must navigate life alone in a country like Pakistan, where it is extremely dangerous for women to live independently.

When I first met these girls in May last year, their expressionless faces and lack of laughter tugged at my heart. I thought, “If only I could bring a small smile to these beautiful faces.” I

When I first met these girls in May last year, their expressionless faces and lack of laughter tugged at my heart.

began to question God: “Lord, what is Your purpose in sending me here?” Gradually, I felt a quiet conviction that my mission is to prepare these girls to recognize the angels that God sends into their lives. I am to plant seeds of self-love in their hearts and help them feel God’s love for them.

Through activities like meditation, music, creating mandala art (a meditative tool for self-reflection), Biblical drama, and liturgical dance, I provided the girls with opportunities to explore and express their emotions honestly. These experiences allowed them to discover their uniqueness and understand that it is okay to think differently from others.

One day, after a mandala art session, a seventeen-year-old girl named Sonia shared her creation. Her mandala was



Meditation



Creating art

painted black on the outside but was yellow on the inside. When I asked her about her color scheme, she explained, “The world is full of struggles and hardships, but God shines His light on them, and that gives me hope.” This was a poignant moment that revealed how deeply these girls feel the weight of life.

Another girl, ten-year-old Sirat, meticulously decorated her mandala with elements from nature. Her serious expression and focused gaze were striking. On finishing, she asked me to place a candle in the centre of her mandala. She explained that her

“The world is full of struggles and hardships, but God shines His light on them, and that gives me hope.”

– SONIA, 17 YEARS OLD

mandala was a representation of her prayer, and lighting the candle would help her prayer reach God.

One day, we shared our reflections on the question, “Why did God create me?” During this discussion, a sixteen-year-old girl named Muqaddas asked,



Lighting a candle

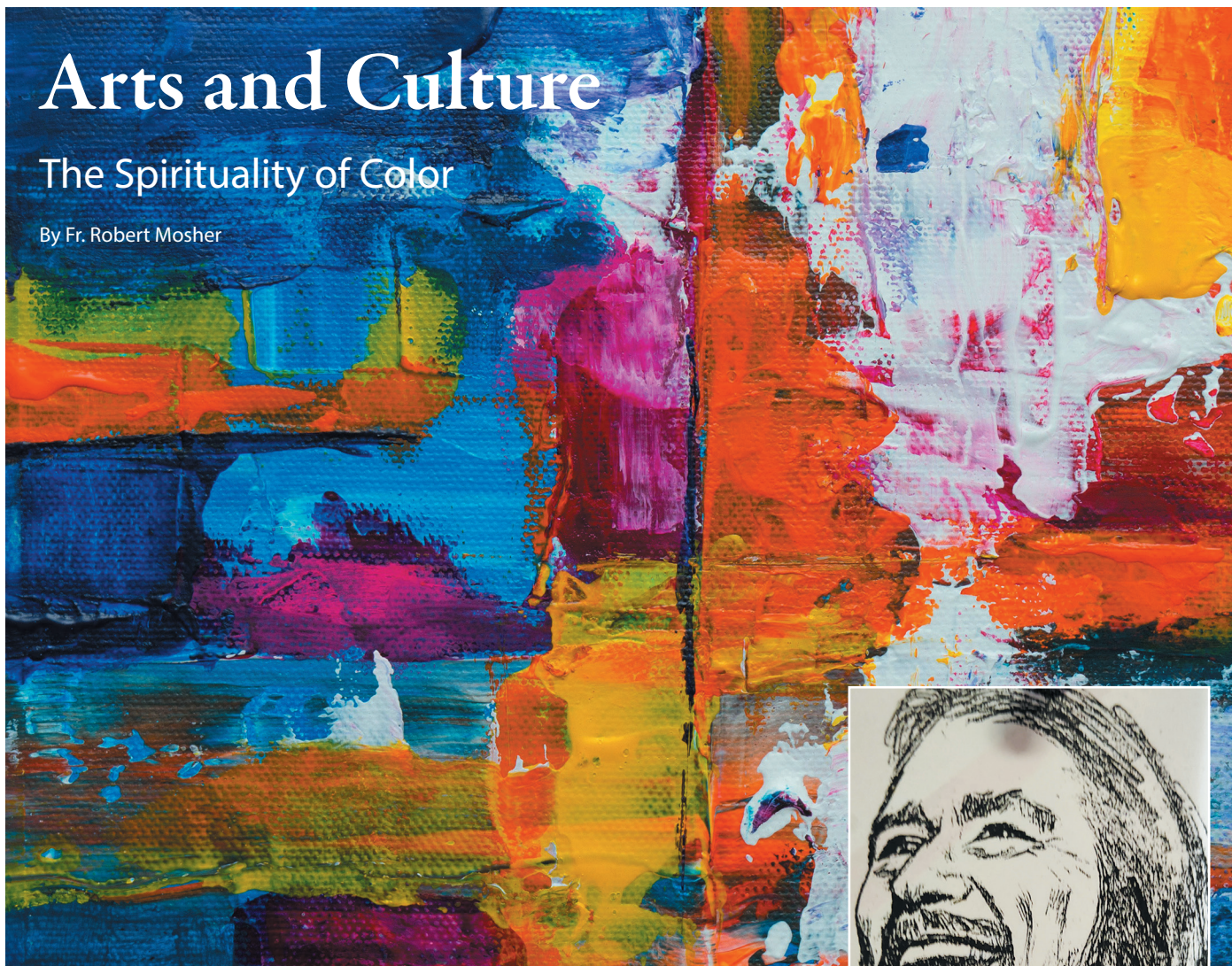
“Does God have something He desires of me, too?” Her question pierced my heart, and I realized anew that my mission is to help these girls gain confidence, recognize their inherent worth, and understand that each of us is uniquely created by God. God loves them deeply and treasures them as His creations. And He loves and values each of us in the same way, including the person sitting beside us. **CM**

Columban Missionary Sr. Julietta Choi is from Seoul in Korea. She was professed in 2010 and has served on mission in the Philippines. She is now working in Pakistan.

Arts and Culture

The Spirituality of Color

By Fr. Robert Mosher



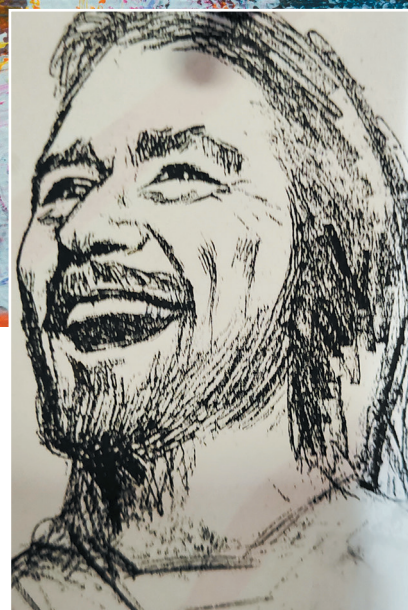
Columban Fr. Bill Brunner keeps his eyes open for seashells, which are plentiful in the Ocean State, Rhode Island, where he lives. The Columban Fathers have their own community of retired priests in Bristol, on the shores of Narragansett Bay, but Fr. Bill finds shells when walking the beach or visiting the local state park on a Saturday afternoon outing with the other missionary priests he lives with. He also finds them right at the dinner table.

We often have fresh shellfish delivered to St. Columban's Residence, as well, either from a local seafood delivery company or straight from our cook, who often serves up what he raked out of the mud at low tide earlier in the day. Then Fr. Bill puts six or seven shells into his pockets at the end

of a meal, and washes them out, after a feed on the little necks, quahogs and clam chowder for lunch. After they dry, he paints designs and scenes on them.

Fr. Bill has been enthusiastic about the "spirituality of color" from an early age. His older brother Dick, when they were growing up together in Iowa, first alerted him to how faith and art come together in unexpected ways. His brother sometimes pointed out to him that the figure of Christ in Catholic schools was a sad figure, suffering on the cross and close to death.

"Why can't they make a joyful Christ?," he wondered to his brother. The question stuck with him, and over Fr. Bill's years serving abroad in the Philippines, and Alaska, and later on in New Mexico, he looked for and



The laughing Christ

promoted the search for new images of Christ.

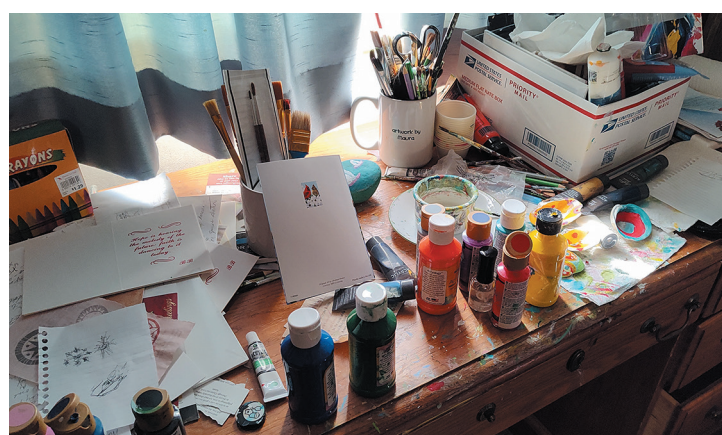
While in New Mexico, he met Fr. Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk based in Colorado, who was known for his work in developing and promoting Centering Prayer, a Christian form of meditation, and his exploration of interreligious dialogue and the mystical path, emphasizing interconnectedness and the importance of transcending limitations.



Fr. Bill Brunner



Still life by Fr. Bill



Fr. Bill's painting desk

This contact led Fr. Bill to explore whether a new image of Christ could be created that would catch Christ in another mood, apart from the despair of the Cross—after playing with children, for instance, or when enjoying the company of His disciples, or while sharing His teachings on how God reveals to the merest children what highly educated people and revered sages miss out on.

His conversations with Franciscan sisters who were traveling through his pastoral area in New Mexico, where he worked with Apache Native Americans, led them to return the following year with a gift, brought back from California: a drawing of *The Laughing Christ*. Fr. Bill was delighted with it, and

had many prayer-card copies made of the image, and still hands them out to visitors today—some 40 years later.

While in New Mexico, he also met Robert Lintz, who painted *The Apache Christ* for his parish and set it up behind the main altar of the church where Fr. Bill worked. It also showed a novel image of Our Lord, with the features and dress of an Apache young man. The local Apache community responded warmly to this culturally more accessible image.

Some of Fr. Bill's own paintings adorn the walls of St. Columban's Residence, and his love for color shines forth beautifully in these works, as well as from the seashells he paints from time to time, and gives

away to visitors. The creative flow keeps pouring out of Fr. Bill in the visual arts, as he continues to nourish his own life with the practice of painting shells with oils and acrylics.

Fr. Bill impresses all of us here with what God continues to create through him, reminding the rest of us of our own opportunities for presenting to the world a smiling, colorful faith that comforts, inspires and creates bonds in an otherwise divided and dark world. Thus, he continues his mission, to announce the Good News of God's love and life to others. **CM**

Columban Father Robert Mosher is the House Leader of St. Columban's Residence in Bristol, Rhode Island.

Painting Preaching

Encountering the Gospel Through Art

By Fr. Jason Antiquera

What happens when the pulpit disappears, and all you're left with is silence, canvas, and the Word? During Holy Week 2022 — still marked by the COVID-19 pandemic — I encountered the passion of Christ not in a church, but in the quiet of my studio.

With public liturgies like the Stations of the Cross suspended due to social distancing, I spent Holy Week in the art studio, praying and contemplating through paintings of Christ's passion. I sought to depict the narrative thoughtfully and in my own way, allowing it to unfold as a deeply personal journey. This led to what I would later call "Painting Preaching" — visual interpretations of Scripture offered as fresh material for homilies and Gospel reflections during Sunday Mass.

It begins with reading the Gospel, then moves into studying scriptural commentaries and engaging in deep personal reflection. But unlike the usual process, it requires an additional step: imagining the scene — visualizing the movements, emotions, and atmosphere of the Gospel story. This imaginative contemplation often stretches beyond formal moments of prayer — such as sitting quietly in a chapel — and instead unfolds in the rhythms of daily life: during walks, subway rides, or while performing ordinary tasks.

For example, when drawing the Parable of the Sower, the tree at the center — though sketched in pencil, quiet and monochrome — was inspired by a cherry blossom in full bloom that I saw while walking. In this way, prayer becomes less of an activity and more of a presence — woven into

the ordinary, inviting grace to enter through the unexpected.

While a typical homily might be prepared in a relatively short time, Painting Preaching demands more — more time, more imagination, and a willingness to sit patiently until the image reveals itself.

Before I pick up a pencil or brush, I take care to ensure that my work goes beyond simply replicating existing images, even those by renowned Gospel artists like Rembrandt. I aim to create something fresh, even if only a small part feels newly seen — a unique insight or reimagined perspective on the Gospel narrative.

This process takes time and often involves days of contemplation, preparation, and research — yes, research — to refine the vision. The final expression isn't conveyed through words but through a visual medium: an image brought to life on paper or canvas. Through this creative journey — Painting Preaching — I forge a deeper connection with the Gospel and offer others an opportunity to encounter its message in a new and dynamic way.

The result is Gospel Art — visual expressions inspired by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rooted in Scripture and tradition, yet open to reinterpretation, it conveys spiritual and theological truths through drawing and painting. While Scripture interpretation involves understanding historical context, literary forms, and present-day relevance, Gospel art brings something distinct: artistic license. This freedom allows the artist to move beyond literal accuracy, embracing




creativity, emotion, and personal vision.

Through this act of co-creation — a gift from the God of all Creation — I seek to make space for renewed encounters with the Gospel that are both faithful and transformative.

The unique character of these artworks is that, though intended as a resource for preaching and falling under the category of Gospel art, they are not icons or liturgical paintings created specifically for worship, as they lack the technical and formal visual elements typically associated with art displayed in churches.

Unlike, for example, icons, which, according to Christian traditions, are "windows into heaven" — these images are more like mirrors, reflecting our emotions, our questions and longings, our deeply human experiences as we engage with the Gospel.

Instead, I meant it to lead viewers into deeper — and sometimes critical — reflection, inviting them to consider faith from new angles and, at times, to move beyond traditional visual interpretations of the Gospel. As such, they may evoke uncomfortable emotions and confront long-held values or prejudices, creating space for honest questioning and spiritual growth. These works aim to stir the imagination, disrupt familiar perspectives, and offer fresh pathways for encountering the stories of Christ. 

Columban Fr. Jason Antiquera lives and works in Korea.



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

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



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

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

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

Fatima to Macroom to Saliadrau

Return to Saliadrau

By Fr. Frank Hoare



It is some four years since I last visited Saliadrau. When I left, some asked me to get them a statue of Our Lady of Fatima. This past summer when in Ireland, the Fatima statue appeared.

When in Ireland, I minister at weekends in my home parish of Macroom, the capital of Muskerry. I was raised and ordained there in 1971 by Bishop John Ahern of Cloyne. Surrounded by relatives, friends and classmates, it is always a very joyful experience of ministry for me. A friend and fellow member of the Marian Movement of Priests in Macroom (a few years behind me in school) asked if I would care for a statue he had brought back from Fatima recently. Would I ever! And so, the Saliadrau statue came into my possession.

Traveling halfway around the world with a statue would not be a problem now that we have planes to do all the hard work.

The Parish Priest of Namosi and my former student, Fr. Rogasiano Raikivi, in whose parish lies Saliadrau was keen for me to take the last Sunday Mass of 2024. I left Suva at 7 a.m. with Bill Rogoiwaqa, my frequent MMP travelling companion. After forty minutes, we left the tar-sealed road and headed into the highest mountains on our island, Viti Levu, on a dirt road. It was well kept and did not present a grave problem even on the very steep gradients.

We arrived at Saliadrau shortly after 9 a.m. The crossing took about half an hour and this part needed some preparation. I had donned my swimming shorts that morning under my trousers and had brought a knapsack with me. So, removing my shoes but keeping on my two pairs of socks to enable me to navigate the stones, wearing a sulu (Fijian cotton skirt) over my shorts, I took to the river. Lots of rain recently meant that it was much more swollen this time.

Shortly after entering the river, a Catholic from a neighboring village, who was also on his way to Mass, identified himself as Farasiko (Francis) Koroimara and took charge of me to make sure I made it across safely. Replacing our wet socks with dry shoes, and trying to regain some semblance of dignity, we then negotiated through the village to the Catechist's house, where we were able to dry off and prepare for Mass.

The Mass started on time at 10 a.m. with their new statue as part of the procession. They had already had their Christmas Confessions so this visit did not involve the sacrament of Reconciliation, the exercise of the key of the Blood.

As always in Fiji, the Mass was sung by the entire congregation. It was Holy Family Sunday. As we are now into the Year of Luke, the Gospel was that of the Fifth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the finding of Jesus in the temple. The total relaxation of Mary and Joseph about Jesus' whereabouts shows a marvelous unity between them, as did the search. They lost Jesus! I asked all in Saliadrau to pray that they would never lose Jesus.

Then, of course, we have the very first words of Jesus in Luke's gospel. His last words in this Gospel were spoken on the cross, "Father, into your hands, I commit my Spirit" (Lk 23:46). This was from Ps 31:6, a psalm for evening and sleep. This is how the popular night prayer, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul" also ends. Jesus' first words are "Why did you seek me? Did you not know I must be about my Father's business." Here Jesus clearly tells us two things: He is God's son and must do God's will.

Later in Luke's Gospel whenever Jesus uses the "must" word, He is referring to His coming death and resurrection. Poor Mary and Joseph obviously did not get that nuance and



so the text tells us that they did not understand the "word" He spoke to them. Then He returned to Nazareth and obeyed them. A lesson for children.

After Mass, I stayed on and did a cenacle (rosary, prayer for Pope Francis and Act of Consecration to Mary) in the chapel. This was followed by a delicious lunch of chicken and taro (the Fijian potato). Usually straight after Mass, the community offers the visiting priest a "Sevusevu," a Fijian offering of Kava by way of thanks. The rosary seems to have knocked this out but straight after lunch (eaten sitting on the ground) several elders arrived with a Tanoa, the official bowl used for Kava, and the Sevusevu took place.

After about an hour, I was offered some pillows and invited to rest. I did so and had a delightful short sleep on the matted floor that set me up for the return journey, having to negotiate, needless to mention, the river once more.

The codicil was two days on a drip in the hospital. I suspect it was the Saliadrau river water in the Kava that did me in, but who knows? All part of the bargain in the *peregrinari pro Christo*, the pilgrimage for Christ. This was my first pilgrimage for the Holy Year. **CM**

Columban Fr. Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.



A New Archbishop for New Caledonia

Great Joy

By Fr. Donal McIlraith

Bishop Susitino Sionepoe SM was installed as the new Archbishop of Nouméa in New Caledonia, in the French Pacific on Saturday, April 12, 2025. Archbishop Sionepoe is a graduate of the Pacific Regional Seminary, and I had the pleasure of teaching him many years ago. I was happy to join the Rector of the seminary Fr. Augustino Ulupano SM in representing the Seminary at the Installation.

Bishop of Wallis and Futuna since 2019, Pope Francis moved him to be Metropolitan Archbishop of Nouméa. The Installation was to take place in the presence of the Nuncio at 3 p.m. Kanak dancers led the procession to the Cathedral, followed by servers, deacons, priests and Bishops. The retiring Archbishop, Monsignor Calveh, presided at the start of Mass but then the bishop's staff was given to Archbishop Sionepoe and the retiring archbishop led him to the episcopal seat, the throne.

Archbishop Tino, as we call him, was born in Hihifo, Wallis, and did his seminary studies in Fiji. After his ordination as a Marist, he worked in Tonga and New Caledonia. Then he

became superior of the Marist Mission in New Caledonia and from there was elected to the Marist provincial council. After that, in 2019, he was made Bishop of Wallis and Futuna. The outgoing Archbishop of Noumea, Monsignor Calvet, SM, is now 81 and delighted that the Vatican has finally appointed a successor.

As I set out from Suva with Fr. Tino, I never imagined the Pacific weekend that awaited us. Polynesia and Melanesia are places of plenty and of great welcomes. This began as we waited for the flight to Nouméa in Nadi, Fiji's International Airport. We were sitting quietly having some lunch when a young Tongan priest, a very recent graduate, arrived, on his way back to Tonga from the United States. Now, Fr. Ulupano is both a Tongan and was this lad's vice Rector, and I was his lecturer in scripture for many years. He arrived and gave us a very warm handshake.

We arrived in Nouméa, and Fr. Ken Bhorat was waiting for us. The visitors were shared among the parishes, and Fr. Ken got us. He is ordained for three years and is currently the Parish Priest of three parishes. He sorted us out and delivered us to a hotel.

He collected us about 6 p.m. and took us to the parish where a great concourse of his parishioners was waiting for us and for Bishop Simon Mani MSC of Kiribati. Bishop Simon had been our Rector and on his appointment as bishop, Fr. Ulupano took over, an appointment shortly ratified by the Vatican. The first hour was a Kava ceremony to welcome the visitors. This was followed by a huge banquet for, it seems, all the parish, a welcoming banquet. At this stage, I met Fr. Bill Hergot SM of Vanuatu, now a Parish Priest and the Marist Superior in New Caledonia. Fr. Bill is also a PRS graduate and we had a great catch-up over some more kava after supper. Over the weekend, I had the great joy of catching up with about 20 former students.

The hospitality continued the next day. After breakfast at Hotel Gondwana, Thierry and Colette Tuaula, Fr. Ken's parishioners, collected us for a tour of the city. We started at the Cathedral of St. Joseph, where the installation would take place. Then to St John the Baptist parish, where Fr. George Sau runs a shelter for the homeless people of



Nouméa. “Donal,” he greets us, “I have not forgotten the Revelation!” After a pleasant catch-up, we headed off to the Archbishop’s residence, where we met Monsignor Calvet and Archbishop Mosese Tui SDB, the Archbishop of Samoa.

The next stop was for a cup of coffee at a nearby beach and then a visit to the beautiful Statue of Mary that overlooks Noumea. Our final stop before lunch was in Paita, where we met Fr. Jean-Patrick Callega who has just collected Monsignor Bosco Baremes of Vanuatu, also here for the installation. Fr. Jean-Patrick was one of my brightest students. I remember him correcting a mistake I made once in a Hebrew test. These moments are cherished by teachers.

We then encountered a little of the present troubles of New Caledonia. Across from the church were some burnt-out buildings, and we found a whole group of ladies who seemed to be camped at the Church. Recently, mobs of up to 10,000 disaffected youth burned three churches and many other buildings, all part of the new Archbishop’s flock. Many churches are now guarded successfully

by the “mothers” during the day and by the “fathers” at night.

Then Thierry and Colette took us home for lunch. Colette had fourteen in her family, and ten are still alive. Nine of these and their children and grandchildren were gathered to welcome us and celebrate lunch with us. It was Friday, so we had a fish feast. Next to me sat Colette’s nephew, Olivier, a policeman, who spoke perfect English and facilitated a great chat over lunch.

We then went home and rested until Mass at 6 p.m. in Fr. Ken’s church. This was followed by more Kava during which Fr. Vincent Vireal arrived. I was Fr. Vincent’s Moderator at PRS back in 1993 when he was a first-year seminarian. That Christmas, coincidentally, I spent helping Fr. Derek Finlay SM in his Parish, Melsisi, on Pentecost Island in Vanuatu (and, on a side note, came home with Malaria). I also attended his ordination in his home parish of Melsisi in 2000. Since then, I had not seen him so we had a great reunion and catch-up. He arrived with gifts. His seminary companion and fellow parishioner, Fr. David Bule Tangsu, had died of cancer just three years ago.

Saturday morning was quiet. I attended Mass at 6 a.m. in the Cathedral, which is ten minutes from our hotel. We rested in the morning and then attended the installation ceremony in the afternoon. As an official guest, I had a seat right behind the bishops on the sanctuary, helping a spirit of worship and giving me a great view of everything. The Mass, in French, was solemn and very moving with the use of the *missa de angelis* for the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo and Agnus Dei, sung boldly by the congregation. More celebrations followed with a low-key Lenten supper for the bishops and guests.

I was up at the crack of dawn to return to Fiji the next day, Sunday. And that is how I got to spend the 54th anniversary of my ordination (April 13, 1971) on planes between three countries, New Caledonia, New Zealand and Fiji. I made it back in time for the Apocalypse on Monday morning at RPS.

Please keep Archbishop Sionepoe - and all of us — in your prayers. **CM**

Columban Fr. Donal McIlraith lives and works in Fiji.

A Glimpse of the Past

Encouraged and Hopeful

By Febie Gonzales

I began my active participation in the *Laudato Si'* Movement last year (2024) when I attended the *Laudato Si'* Animator's Course. Since then, I have continued to join online gatherings whenever I can. The program awakens in me the urgent call of the earth and the cry of the poor.


I have become increasingly aware of the significant number of lives lost, homes, and livelihoods, particularly of the poor, devastated by floods and typhoons, with cases of poverty and migration rising, global warming, serious health issues, and much more. All this is happening because of the climate crisis. Unfortunately, my homeland is among the countries most affected. The call to act for personal and community transformation is urgently needed, as no one is exempt from this environmental crisis.

Joining the movement has also prompted me to reflect on my childhood experiences. I grew up in a rural area of Mindanao, Philippines. I am convinced that our region is one of the richest in terms of natural resources and biodiversity. I witnessed and once lived in a luxurious environment that was free — yes, free — from modernization, where nature provided its calming effects and beauty.

Here, I woke up every morning to the delightful sounds of nature — birds chirping, chickens clucking, and more. Gazing around at the lush surroundings with pleasant weather, beautiful trees, lovely flowers, and breathtaking views of the mountains, with fresh, clean air and crystal-clear spring water — a pollution-free dwelling place truly deserving to be called home.

Furthermore, our family embraced a “garden-to-table” lifestyle. Each of us was trained to plant, water, cultivate, care for, and value our produce. Our backyard was filled with vegetables and fruit trees, while the front yard featured flowers that bloom daily alongside ornamental plants and a small fishpond. We also kept livestock. We enjoyed a simple, healthy, and sustainable lifestyle. All of this was made possible by my parents, who raised me in this way of life, for which I feel blessed and eternally grateful.

My understanding of environmental care expanded during my primary and secondary education, where greening the school was a crucial aspect of the school's curriculum. Each student had an area of responsibility, and every day, we participated in gardening classes along with maintaining the cleanliness and beautification of the school grounds. This experience fostered a deep connection with the earth. Additionally, students planted trees around the campus, which transformed our school environment into something breathtaking.

My heart is full because I have been able to encounter and cherish the magnificence of God's greatness. I dream the same for every child of today, that they may experience God's glory through the grandeur of God's creation — free from the natural calamities brought on by climate change. With this, I feel encouraged and hopeful to take action for the restoration and protection of our common home as a gift to ourselves and future generations. 



Columban lay missionary Febie Gonzales lives and works in Taiwan.

Art and Culture

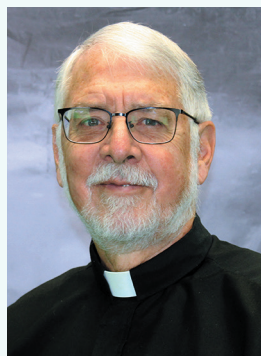
Art and culture and faith – what a broad topic. And it's a beautiful topic! As Columban missionaries all of us get to leave our homes and go somewhere else to work, to in some way, share our sense of who Jesus Christ is for us and maybe for those people too. And I have to tell you without exaggeration that whether they mean to or not, they share so very much of their faith through their culture with us too.

It reminds me of a New Zealand Columban who was assigned to a small parish on the east coast of Korea in the 1970's. Being freshly filled with the values of "inculturation" after the Vatican Council, he decided to have a tabernacle made in the style of a Korean Buddhist temple, very beautiful, colorful and "Korean." The people were not happy! They saw it as equating Jesus with "Buddha." He saw it as "Korean." This is an example of where art can express more about a culture than we realize and can arouse deep feelings.

I'm recently back from a mission trip with six parishioners of St. Mary's Church in Fontana, California, to Guatemala. We went to the town of Livingston on the east coast where most of the people live outside the town in villages of indigenous Quechi-i people. They are very reserved and quiet. But in the church in town, we had Mass where the choir was all Garifuna people. They are descendants of escaped slaves who live along the Caribbean coast. Their language is mostly from their original African homeland. And their music was drums, rhythm, clapping, and dancing. I loved it. The difference is great, but the faith of both is also great.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Al Utzig



A third example of art expressing faith is a simple but beautiful picture one of our LGBTQ parishioners painted and shared with the parish. In it are two large feet in sandals dancing, with a small girl dancing with her feet on top of those feet. She had a dream of dancing with Jesus, a beautiful dream. Anyone could have it. But she had the rainbow colors in her dress. Many people saw it and were very moved. Surely, Jesus could see her rainbow colors and know who she is, and at the same time was very joyful to have her dance with him. For



people who often feel rejected and excluded by many the joy and lightness this picture expresses brings a smile to those who see it. Art expressing faith (and hope). "Jesus is happy to dance with me and I with him!"

Back at St. Mary's parish our new church has an altar made from the 125-year-old trunk of a single walnut tree

Surely, Jesus could see her rainbow colors and know who she is, and at the same time was very joyful to have her dance with him.

that had to be cut down to make room for it. The cross on which Jesus hangs is branches from that tree. The tabernacle is another tree from the land that had to be cleared. All are very beautifully formed by the hand of God and crafted into another use. The parish has no gold or silver or marble, but it has a sense of God offering to our first parents (and to us) the fruits of the "tree of life" in the middle of the garden of Eden. This is our home and we try to appreciate it as we care for it.

Fr. Al

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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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*"Come after me, and I will make
you fishers of men."*

– MATTHEW 4:19

*At once they left their nets
and followed him.*

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