

# Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

February 2023



## A Day in the Life

# C O N T E N T S

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## Columban Mission

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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 Teresa Chuah Hui Ling

## Growth and Glow

As a Columban lay missionary, I have been living and working in Britain for two years. From the limitation of involvement due to covid-19, until becoming fully immersed in different ministries, I have been blessed with new friends, new challenges, new adventures, new opportunities to learn things. Everything is new, as the Lord said “Behold, I make all things new.”

As Pope Francis encourage us to be people-oriented, I truly enjoy being with people and being surrounded by people, it can be with toddlers or with elderly, intellectually gifted or with intellectual disabilities, asylum seekers or refugees, companions or volunteers. They all are a blessing to me! I continue to see God fulfilling His promises to me, as He said: “Everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, children or fields because of My name will receive a hundred times more and will inherit eternal life.”

The new challenges continue to shape me and mold me to be a better person as the Lord created me to be, more attentive to the need of others, more open to being teachable and flexible, more patient, and becoming a more loving and joyful person.

The new adventures: to be accepting and receptive to what life has thrown at me with an open mind and open heart. For the Lord delights in the cheerful giver, and we know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose. He continues to unfold the surprises along with the adventures He plans for me.

New opportunities to learn new things: continuing to learn how to communicate. Good communication needs both listening attentively and responding accordingly. Learning to say no without feeling bad, learning to set boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others, learning to seek assistance and ask for help when I need help, learning to be a good team player as my ministries all interact with people. As the Lord reminds me: You are called to serve not to be served.



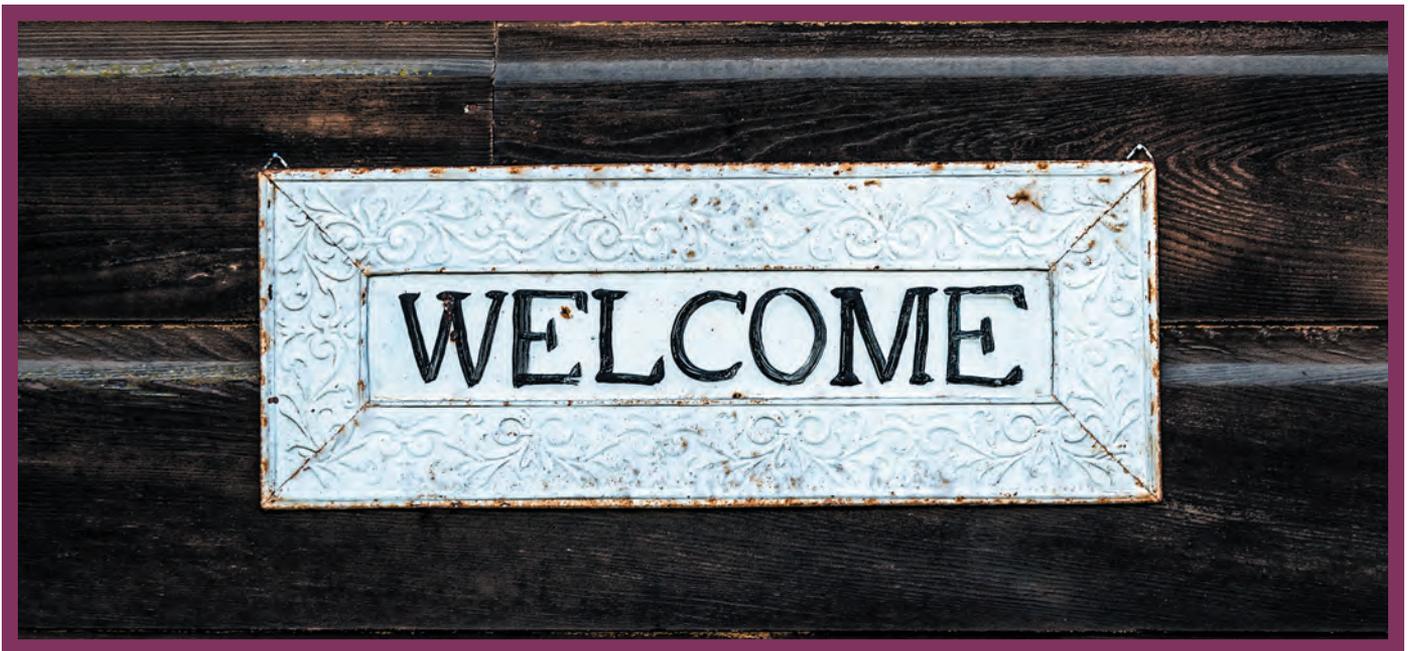
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*For the Lord delights in the cheerful giver, and we know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose.*

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As a Columban lay missionary, I learn more about myself. Saint Teresa of Calcutta said: “Self-knowledge puts us on our knees; this is very necessary for love. For knowledge of God gives love; knowledge of self gives humility.” How well do I know myself, my strengths and weaknesses, my inner drives and the hidden motives of my heart? By examining my conscience and with the help of the Holy Spirit I come to understand a little of the desires and compulsions of my heart. This self-knowledge is the truth that sets me free because it leads not to despair and self-loathing, like Judas, but the joy of turning back to God, like Peter.

*Columban lay missionary Teresa Chuah Hui Ling lives and works in Britain.*



# In the Footsteps of Newman

## The Welcoming History of a Sanctuary for Refugees

By Fr. John Boles

In 2019 I had the honor of being one of the Columban representatives at the canonization of Cardinal Newman in St. Peter's Square in Rome. From that moment on, I thought that no Columban had closer ties to Newman than I did. Then I met up with Nathalie.

Nathalie Marytsch is a Columban Lay Missionary from Santiago, Chile, who serves in a refuge for asylum seekers in Birmingham, England. It just so happens that her workplace is built in the exact place where Newman began his illustrious career in the Catholic Church, a road which led to a cardinal's hat and, eventually, sainthood.

In the 1830's John Henry Newman (1801-1890) was a rising star in the Church – the Anglican Church, that is. He'd been ordained deacon at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, in 1824 and had gone on to be

one of that city's foremost scholars and theologians. Then, in 1845, he scandalized the establishment by becoming a Catholic.

He went to Rome and was ordained a priest for the Oratorian Congregation. Pope Pius IX gave

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*It just so happens that her workplace is built in the exact place where Newman began his illustrious career in the Catholic Church, a road which led to a cardinal's hat and, eventually, sainthood.*

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him permission to return to England and set up an Oratory church in his native land, and he and a group of followers chose Birmingham as the preferred location. After a couple of

false starts, in 1849 they were off red premises (of all places) at a disused gin distillery in the Digbeth area of the city. They transformed the distillery into a chapel, which thus became the first "Oratory of St. Philip Neri" in the English-speaking world.

Digbeth was a hugely deprived neighborhood, crammed with Irish migrants who'd fled the Great Famine. Newman set himself to address the spiritual and temporal needs of this impoverished community.

In 1852 the Birmingham Oratory moved to a permanent base in the nearby district of Edgbaston, where Newman would spend the rest of his life. He left the gin distillery turned chapel to the local archbishop, who built a church and presbytery on the site. Finally, in 2015, responding to a modern-day migration crisis, the diocese converted the presbytery into a home for refugees and asked the Columbans to staff it



Nathalie



Nathalie and the portrait

Enter Nathalie!

“When I arrived the parish priest gave me a framed painting of Cardinal Newman,” she told me. “I’d heard all about Newman of course, but I never knew the picture was here because he’d been here. I took it because I loved the frame!”

“We did know that the parish had a history of welcoming migrants, in those days the Irish,” she continued. When she realized that Newman had done this on the very same spot where SHE was working with migrants, it became an additional source of inspiration for her.

The sanctuary had been set up following Pope Francis’s call to help refugees who’d been driven from their own countries by misery and war. He, like millions around the world, had been shocked by the image of a little boy’s body washed up on a Mediterranean beach. “We decided to welcome single women who’d been

refused asylum at the first attempt and were working towards a new claim,” Nathalie explains. “We felt that these formed the most vulnerable amongst all the immigrant groups. They were destitute and unprotected. Some had been living rough. Others had been victims of abuse or been forced into prostitution.”

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*“We welcome women of all faiths,” Nathalie assures me. They can accommodate nine at a time, for around six months each.*

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For the main part the women come from Africa and South Asia. Many are Muslims. Hence the center is called “Fatima House,” as “Fatima” has a significance both for Catholics (because of the apparition there of Our Lady) and Muslims (as the

name of the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter).

“We welcome women of all faiths,” Nathalie assures me. They can accommodate nine at a time, for around six months each. So far over fifty have benefited from the service. “Other partners provide legal aid. What we offer is a kindly presence to women who feel rejected by everyone else. Standing and working alongside the poor and marginalized, that is how I see my mission here, and these women are so much like that,” insists Nathalie with feeling.

Newman would be proud of her! 

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Columban Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.

Nathalie Marytsch is a Columban Lay Missionary from Santiago, Chile. She and her husband Mauricio came to Britain as part of our Columban lay mission program in 2001 (one week before 9/11). They have two children and live in Birmingham.

# Another Historic First

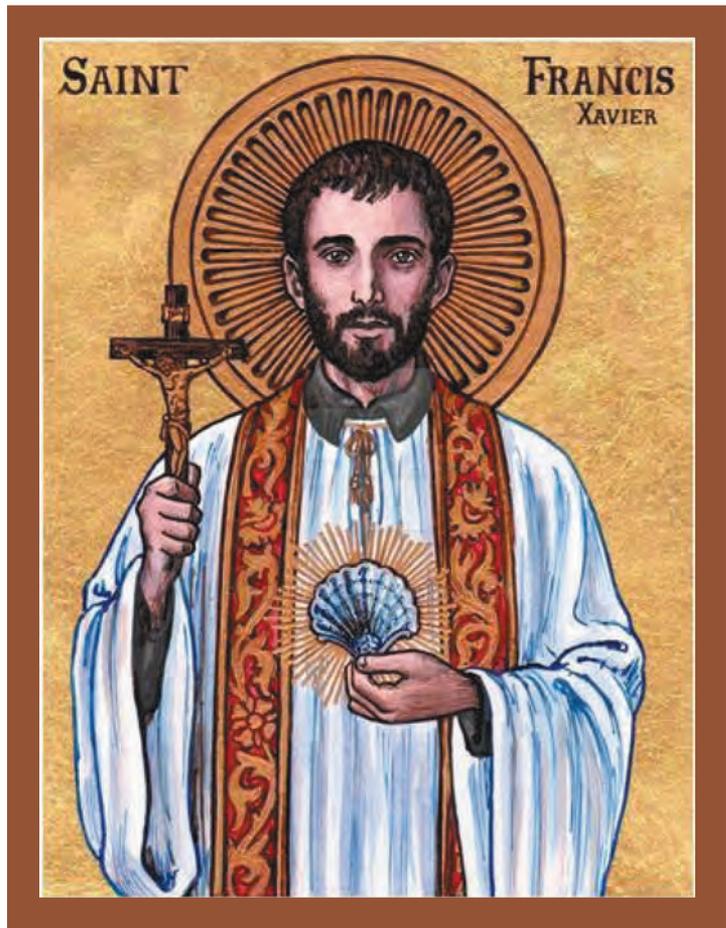
## A Feast Day for St. Francis Xavier

By Fr. Patrick Colgan

Readers of these pages may be getting used to the name of Xavier College, Ba, after being handed over to the Parish of Christ the King on Jan 1, 2021, and from the founding of a unique and multifaith charity arm called “From Mind to Heart” which continues to give groceries and help students during the pandemic-related lockdowns.

December 3, 2021, was another historic “first” for the College. It was in the first time in anyone’s memory that the school celebrated its Feast Day of St. Francis Xavier. This was due to COVID-19’s rearrangement of the academic year, meaning that classes (for years 12 and 13) stretched right into December, which would normally have been in the early weeks of the long summer holidays.

The new management took full advantage of the opportunity, crafting activities for students and staff (the vast majority of whom are not Catholic) to come to know, pray to, and honor the great Apostle of Asia. Some of the activities included laying flowers at his statue during a simultaneous morning prayer and video presentation in all classrooms, followed by being treated to lunch by the Parents and Friends’ Association and ending with an evening Mass and dinner hosted by the surrounding Catholic community of St. Francis Xavier, Namosau.



We all know in broad strokes the story of St. Francis. He was a Spanish Jesuit who lived as missionary in the 1500s. He was one of the first seven members of the Jesuit order and travelled extensively, particularly in India, Southeast Asia, and Japan. Exhausted by his travels, he died at the age of 46 on December 3, 1552, at Shangchuan Island, Jiangmen, China and is a co-patron of all Catholic missions

During his visit to the parish for Confirmations, the Archbishop challenged our schools to be more Catholic, not necessarily in the amount of doctrine taught (because that is now regulated by the government), but by increasing the Catholic atmosphere of the compound and the daily/yearly rituals of the Church. This was a good example of using a Feast Day, whose date everyone knew but had little idea of the person and reason behind it and using it to create an experience that

non-Christian students will remember long after the maths, physics and geography lessons have faded.

I was struck by an email sent by the Vice Principal of the College to her staff yesterday. She is a devout Hindu, but these were her words, which speak volumes of the spirit already in place:

“Wishing everyone a most blessed Feast Day of St. Francis Xavier, patron saint of missionaries. May his life of sacrifice and devotion to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ remind us all of our own baptismal call to share the hope, peace and love of Jesus Christ with others.”

Please keep all missionaries who serve our Lord both home and abroad in your prayers. May the Lord bless you and keep you! St. Francis Xavier, pray for us! 

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Columban Fr. Patrick Colgan lives and works in Fiji.



# 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.

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

- Donor Advised Fund Gifts
- Direct Gifts of Cash and/or Securities
- Charitable Remainder Unitrust Gifts
- Charitable Bequest Gifts
- Gifts of Life Insurance Policies

The U.S. Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Regulations encourage charitable giving by allowing generous tax savings for individuals who make gifts in accordance with approved giving programs. A planned gift also offers you many potential advantages: the opportunity to increase spendable income, the elimination or reduction of capital gain taxes and possibly federal and state estate tax savings.

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.



# Pandemic Response

## Encouragement and Support

By Fr. John Hegerty

In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue in search of treasured spices from the Philippines, but in a lost state managed to bump into the Americas and pick up buckets of gold instead. This marked the beginning of centuries of pillage and slavery with the beneficia y the royal coffers of mother Spain. Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits and others followed the plunder trail, bringing the Good News of a God that loves all creation, as portrayed in our scriptures.

Five hundred years later, to celebrate the anniversary of the first announcement of the Word, the Conference of Religious of Latin America commissioned biblical scholars to develop a Popular Reading of the Bible course using people's own life experience as a starting point. This led to a personal and grounded encounter with the Word, who is life, and gave meaning and hope to all. The

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*We were all in this together, so each night began with a short presentation and sharing from both participants and the team on something inspiring, concerning, impressing, or depressing them.*

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bishops gave a guarded assessment, as they judged the methodology as lacking solid theological foundations. However, the Montfort Missionaries launched the program in their parish in Lima, Peru, and it quickly went national, resulting in the offering of two-week-long courses each year to people from all over Peru.

A retreat center in Lima hosted the courses and, over the years, many Columban missionaries participated

in the mixture of serious study, copious sharing and creative drama. I had the joy of being part of a team taking the course, venturing into the interior of the country to share the experience. We went to Iquitos in the jungle, Cajamarca in the mountains, and Chimbote on the coast. All were different realities with different responses.

In 2005, a group of us decided to introduce the course in the shantytowns on the north side of Lima. Using the facilities of the Columban Mission Center, we gathered our team from among local people who had already participated in the course. Sr. Patricia, who had lived and studied in Brazil, prepared a three-year program with the team. This proved to be heavy going, as it required extensive reading, then prioritizing and developing plans for each gathering.

Invitations were sent to all parishes and Church groups on the north of the city, and we estimated that some 60 would show up. However, when 203 signed on for the first gathering, we were left scrambling with a shortage of materials, desks and group leaders. However, not everyone persisted, as some wanted only talks, while others felt uncomfortable with the demands of group sharing. Nevertheless, we stuck with the tried methodology believing that we remember and value what we discover ourselves more than what is prepared and served up for us. That process began 13 years ago and, over the years, 67 people completed the full three-year course.

Then in February 2020, COVID-19 made its devastating presence felt in Peru. In March, a nation-wide lockdown was imposed, producing the inevitable scramble for facemasks and toilet paper. The young could isolate, as schools closed, and elderly people mostly did not need to go out, but the majority of adults had to choose between going to work or starving at home.

Consequently, after two years, 200,000 Peruvians have died and six million contracted the virus, the worst per capita rating in the world. Medical services floundered and at one stage, more people died on the paths leading to emergency wards than in the hospitals. Because the coronavirus was afflicting everyone, the Bible group joined with some non-government organizations, municipalities, religious and social groups in a coordinated response to the catastrophe. Our contribution was to prepare and offer a weekly reflection on Zoom and Facebook to anyone who wanted some understanding of the situation and find some way of coping with it.

This required a quantum leap for the social media illiterate, so the savvy did most of the groundwork and all material had to be prepared

without the team coming together. The texts, videos, songs, and group work had to be supplied remotely, in between occasional blackouts and signal failures. Multimedia neophytes had a tough time. We were all in this together, so each night began with a short presentation and sharing from both participants and the team on something inspiring, concerning, impressing, or depressing them. A text showing how Jesus responded to similar situations in His time was presented, and the group bonded to draw hope and direction from the sharing and prayer.

At one meeting, the main issue might be hunger: real or threatened. We would watch and listen to Jesus feeding the hungry 5,000 plus. Finally, we might look at the common pots that had surfaced in so many places around the city as people cooperated to avoid widespread starvation. The participants could share their misgivings and their experience of these community responses. The themes offered were the petitions in the Our Father, the Beatitudes in Matthew, the kingdom parables, and the healing hands of Jesus. Most nights

between 60 and 80 people related the Word to their lives and many received encouragement and support.

What to offer during 2023 is the challenge for the team now. The ravages of the pandemic will continue, and there will be a lot of healing needed.

One idea that has gained some traction is a study of the four songs of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. The prophet had seen the suffering of his people in their exile in Babylon and offered a reflection that made some sense of their suffering. He saw that from this people, who were suffering so much, new life would come, and they would be a source of blessing for the world. The suffering would not be in vain.

Another offering may be the work of the Spirit in the life of Jesus and of ourselves. The Spirit gives life, understanding and community. The challenge for now is how to present this theme and, more importantly, make it accessible to those who need it most. 

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Columban Fr. John Hegarty lives and works in Peru.





# From Real Estate Agent to Missionary

## Journey Back to Faith

By Sarah MacDonald

**S**t. Verano is not one of those popular saints whose name trips off your tongue. The 6<sup>th</sup> century French hermit has all but been forgotten by most of the faithful, perhaps with the exception of churchgoers who attend a small church dedicated to his memory outside the Italian town of Pisa. However, when a Korean couple celebrated the arrival of their first-born forty-one years ago on October 19, they were in no doubt their infant son should be named in honor of the saint on whose feast day he was safely delivered into the world.

Verano Lee Jeong-Rak is a Columban seminarian who is studying to be a missionary priest. He grew up in a Korean family where both his parents had converted to Catholicism and so faith was important in his homelife, for his parents, for Verano himself and for his younger sister.

Verano joined the Columban missionaries six years ago in 2017. He was not a pious youth destined for the Church. In fact, for many years, Verano

had no faith. “I worked in a real estate agency for six years. In the evenings I went to university. I was paying for my studies because my father’s company had gone bankrupt.” His faith took a knock with the collapse of his father’s company, a traumatic event which coincided with his mother’s serious illness and his sister losing her eyesight. “With all that, I couldn’t believe in God. I felt, ‘If you exist, how could all of this happen to my family?’”

“I denied the existence of God until I was 26. My parents continued to ask me to go to church but I always refused. My mother urged me to go to adoration. One day I decided to go. There was nobody else there, so I slept in the church. I had an hour before I had to go to college, and it was a chance to have a rest. After that, I continued to go to the church and would take a nap. But on one occasion, I didn’t take a nap, in fact I got curious about the Bible that was there. I opened it and started to read it. Bit by bit, as I continued to go to the church

for Holy Hour, I began to talk to God about my life. One day I cried. For a time after that, I cried or talked about my life and emotions to God. That was the time of my conversion – I started to have faith. After that I changed.”

“I graduated from university with a degree in social policy, and I decided to become a social welfare officer. I worked in this area for two years, but I felt frustrated because even if I wanted to help people, the law and policy would get in the way. Some people who were in need lost their subsidies under government cutbacks. It was very hard for them; they would ask me why I cut their subsidies. But it wasn’t my fault! I felt really sorry for them and wanted to help but was limited by the law.”

“Around this time, the desire to be a priest had half formed in my mind, but I also wanted to get married. One holiday, I was on my way home when I had a serious car accident. I was hospitalized for over a month. As I was recovering, I began to think



Verano Lee Jeong-Rak

about my life and what was the best path for my future. I felt that my life had a point in the eyes of God and that maybe He was calling me, and it was time to follow Him. When I was fully recovered, I decided to join the seminary.”

“My parents were really surprised by my decision, and my friends couldn’t believe it. But I shared about my faith, and they told me it was my decision, and they would support me. Some of my friends were baptized.”

“I joined the diocese seminary but in my first year I began to feel called to missionary priesthood. A Sister who worked in my home parish when I was young recommended the Columbans. I met a Columban priest over a period of a year and then I decided to join the Society. At that point, I had finished three years in the diocesan seminary. I feel God guided my choice.”

“I have now been six years with the Columbans, and this year is my last year of study. I am waiting for the General Council to decide on my First

Mission Assignment. I was assigned to Chile but that was cancelled because of the Covid pandemic.”

“I am 41 now, and I am considered a late vocation in Korea. Joining a diocesan seminary when you are over 30 requires the permission of the bishop. But among the Columbans, the age profile is very mixed. The other students include two others who are over forty as well as two who are 23 and 21. An older student has a lot of life experience to offer and that is a good thing, but it can be difficult to adapt or change. So, there are pros and cons to late vocations.”

“I spent my spiritual year in the Philippines; the poverty was shocking at times. I helped with the ministry to the people living in the slum cemetery in Manila. It is hard to explain how difficult their life is. So very shocking. They live and sleep in the cemetery. They built their homes on the tombs. Life is very tough — having to wash in a public place. But even though they are very poor, these people are very



Verano Lee Jeong-Rak and Columban Fr. Padraig O'Donovan

generous. They want to share what they have.”

Sitting in Dalgan Park, after completing his English language course, Verano shared that many Columban priests “have been a big inspiration.” His visit to Ireland was “a dream” he had long harboured since reading *The Red Lacquered Gate* about the Society’s “noble” co-founders, Bishop Edward Galvin and Fr. John Blowick. “After reading about the history of the Columbans, I really wanted to come to Ireland and look around Dalgan Park. It is really beautiful. The most symbolic place for me is the cemetery where you can see the history of all the Columban members, from the two founders, who are both buried in Dalgan, to the most recently deceased. This life is not easy — living in another country as a missionary. But it is inspiring.” 

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Sarah MacDonald is the editor of the Columban society magazine *The Far East* in Ireland.



Jean and Maurice Soord

# Sunday On Sanday

Faith and Inspiration on Scotland's Orkney Islands

By Fr. John Boles

A “A land lost in the mists of time” might reasonably describe Sanday, an eerily beautiful speck of land set in the Atlantic at the northern edge of Scotland’s Orkney Islands. Its strategic location astride ancient sea-lanes means it displays a wealth of archaeological remains, from Neolithic, Celtic and— most notably—Viking times.

Sanday is sparsely populated and few of its 500 inhabitants are Catholic. Remarkably, for many years the faith has been kept alive here by Columban supporters Maurice and Jean Soord. Even more remarkably, Maurice and Jean are not originally from the Orkneys, nor from England, nor Ireland, not even from Scotland...but from Myanmar (formerly Burma)!

Their story is as fascinating as that of Sanday itself. Both were born in Burma during the days of the British Raj. When Japan invaded in 1941 Maurice’s family opted to stay, but Jean’s decided to escape. They joined

one of the last caravans making up the great trek over the foothills of the Himalayas into India. For most of the refugees this was a harrowing experience, but Jean’s only memory of it is a happy one. “I’d never seen snow before,” she told me. “It was wonderful. I remember making snowballs and throwing them at my brother.” They returned after the Liberation but fled again—this time to England—after the abortive military coup in 1947 which occurred during the chaotic run-up to independence. “We were living right opposite the Administration Building,” Jean recalls. “We heard the shooting, and I ran to the balcony to watch what was happening, until Mum came and dragged me back.” These were the shots which killed Aung San, Burma’s first leader. His daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, also became the country’s leader but in a cruel twist of fate, she currently languishes in prison following the latest military coup. Maurice’s family came to England

at the same time, and he began to make his way as an engineer and a keen amateur photographer. On meeting Jean, he was determined to give her the wedding he felt she deserved. Jean recounts how, “Maurice sold all his photographic equipment so we could have a honeymoon. We went to Torquay.” She proudly showed me the Torquay sugar spoon they’ve kept as a memento ever since.

Jean became an auxiliary nurse and Maurice rose to become a cabling inspector on the London Underground. Once they’d retired and their seven children had left home, they looked around for a rural place by the sea. “One day I was glancing at ‘Exchange and Mart’ and there it was, the perfect home,” Maurice told me. “Saville” was an imposing 18<sup>th</sup> century former seat of a Sanday laird. They decided to fly. “It was the first time I’d flown,” added Jean. “I was scared on the plane. I filed out my will on arrival, got someone to sign



Cathedral of St. Magnus in Kirkwall



Fr. John Boles with Maurice and Jean Soord and other parishioners after Mass on Sunday on Sanday!

it. Everyone on the airfield thought it was hilarious.” Despite the hair-raising journey, Jean fell in love with Saville as much as did Maurice. They bought it and moved in. They felt they were in paradise. However, there was only one thing was lacking: there was no Catholic church!

Undaunted, they gathered the other Catholic islanders about them and began organizing Celebrations of the Word. Soon, the priest on the main island of the Orkneys made them Eucharistic ministers. The bishop in far-off Aberdeen heard about them. Impressed, he visited and granted permission for them to convert a room of their house into a chapel. Nowadays, they host Mass there whenever a priest can visit and, meanwhile, hold daily Eucharistic services, take communion to the sick and generally keep the faith alive.

I’m one of those lucky priests who’s had the privilege of presiding Mass in this marvelous place. Celebrating Sunday

on Sanday at Saville with the Soords makes a fittingly impressive mouthful.

The little congregation was eager to divulge more of the magic of the island to me. Its Neolithic tombs are world-famous, while Christianity came to the later Celtic Pictish inhabitants in the 7<sup>th</sup> century courtesy of Irish and Northumbrian monks. In 2011, in a house now owned by parishioners Wendy and Allan, a rare Pictish Christian stone was unearthed, featuring a cross on one side and Celtic spirals on the other. Pride of place goes to the Vikings, however. They conquered the Orkney Islands in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and Norway only formally ceded them to Scotland in 1472.

In 1991 a spectacular Viking find was made close to Saville when the remains of a boat burial were discovered. A Norse ship had been interred along with the bodies of three individuals and a hoard of ornaments, weapons and other treasures. In 1997, another boat burial

excavation was featured on national television. One morning Maurice was surprised by people knocking on the kitchen door. “They were Tony Robinson’s ‘Time Team’ from the BBC. They’d stumbled on something important and were desperate to borrow my wheelbarrows.”

Funny how God works things out. Not only does He use these wonderful do-it-yourself missionaries Maurice and Jean to link together Burma, the Orkneys, the Columbans and the Vikings, but He also avails of their talents to keep the light of the Church shining on a windswept outpost in the cold North Atlantic. 

Fr. John Boles is Regional Director of the Columbans in Britain.

Maurice and Jean Soord were born in Myanmar (formerly Burma) and came to Britain around 70 years ago. They live on Sanday in the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland. They are Eucharistic Ministers and long-time friends of the Columbans.



# A New Beginning

## Bringing Dreams to Life

By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala

On August 15, 2022, on the Feast of the Assumption, the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina opened its Student Learning Resources Center (SLRC), which is located in the grounds of the St. Patrick's Church grounds, Shatapur Parish in Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar (formerly Burma).

The current political crisis and the COVID pandemic has affected many young people in the country. Young people in the country these days are out of school and seeking employment. Many are not ready to be employed or do not have the important skills to be employable. This alternative learning program for the youth hopes to address the gaps in education, skills formation and youth employment. After the training program, the youth will hopefully be able to find internships and work in different businesses or organizations inside or outside Myitkyina.

The center is a partnership with the Pinyar Thagar Academy, the Advance Accounting Institute, the Confide Psychological Services and the

Columban Missionaries. The center has a computer room, library, office and a counseling room. A total of 27 students enrolled in the center's three-month-long training program which covers the following subjects: basic English skills, basic computer skills, basic accounting skills, work and life skills. The center will also provide counseling services and psychological education classes. The center is also guided by the values of Service, Leadership, Resilience and Community.

In the month of August we celebrated World International Youth Day (August 12). The 2022 theme or focus was on Intergenerational Solidarity: Creating a World for All Ages highlighting ageism. The World Health Organization defines ageism as "the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards others or oneself, based on age." One is either "too young or too old" to be someone or to do something.

The SLRC hopes to provide these young people the space and opportunity to lead, learn and grow

while also providing service to their fellow youth. The center is managed by a young and hopeful team composed of eight members (four men and four women). The teaching staff is also composed of young, competent and passionate teachers and trainers.

Of the 27 participants, fifteen are men and twelve are women. Most participants are 19-22 years old. The political crises resulted to an increased number of students not attending school or universities. Through the center, we hope we will be able to aid and support for all young people not just among the Catholics. We hope to provide a safe space for young people to meet and build community, space and opportunities for learning, support literacy and education, and help shape the new ideas and perspectives and finally build resilient and work-ready young people.

Thank you for helping us to assist young people in bringing their dreams to life. 

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



# 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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# Participation

## Making Space for Grace

By Fr. Paul McMahon

*Fr. McMahon draws some lessons for Synodal Pathway from his experience as a counsellor at the Survivors of Trauma Center in Belfast, a place where traumas can be transformed through making space for Grace.*

**T**he theme of the upcoming 16<sup>th</sup> Synod of Bishops in October 2023 is, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” Reflecting on the theme of participation, I believe it is an invitation to the worldwide Church to create the space for Grace, where we can heal, grow and encounter: to give voice to our thoughts through a period of personal reflection, discussion and

expression. Here we are encouraged by the words of Jesus, “Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.” (Mt 18:20) Just as gardeners don’t just observe the pretty flowers in their garden but get their hands dirty examining the soil and give time to nurture their charges, so, we too are called to play our part, to dig deep and examine what we

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*“What you are in love with,  
what seizes your imagination,  
will affect everything.”*

~ Pedro Arrupe

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love and appreciate in our Catholic faith. As Pedro Arrupe said, “What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.”

Any member of a Church will participate to the extent that they feel they belong to that Church and that their contribution will be appreciated. But what can really stop us from participating is not only our own negative experience of Church but even the stories we hear of how others were excluded and not valued. Therefore, let us not be afraid of the difficult topics. A human body, in order to be healed, must first acknowledge its wounds. It is the same with the Church.



I know from counselling that when affected by shame, we can fall into one or more responses such as to “withdraw and deny,” to “blame others,” to “blame oneself,” or to “avoid the issue.” Therefore, to participate well, I would suggest some spring cleaning of our assumptions and presumptions. To create a level ground on which to participate.

For example:

- Name our present feelings about our Church. Do we have enthusiasm, disappointment or apathy?  
Emotions are like a compass that tell us what direction we are going.

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*A human body, in order to be healed, must first acknowledge its wounds. It is the same with the Church.*

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- Gather to our awareness all our assumptions, prejudices and biases.
- Apply critical judgement: are they true? Where were they born? Are they helpful?
- Transformation: what needs to change in my perception and what may need to change in the Church?

It may also be helpful to acknowledge, “What stage am I at on my personal journey in life?” We know from psychologists like Joan Erikson that as we get older we can lose our positivity, creativity and desire to engage socially. Our age may hold us back from getting involved and participating as we might have done at an earlier age.

But as Joan Erikson advocates, try to nurture “basis trust” in ourselves

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*As we know, thoughts and ideas are the origins of many a good deed but thoughts shared with others have an even greater strength and potential.*

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and others. So, let’s trust in ourselves, trust in our Church and trust in the Holy Spirit. This allows us to move on to a more expanded participation, the “discussion stage” with others.

As we know, thoughts and ideas are the origins of many a good deed but thoughts shared with others have an even greater strength and potential.

Such participation needs to be inclusive of our multicultural society. For our Church community has become enriched by Catholics of varied cultural expressions of faith. But we also need to reach out to those on the fringes of the Church. As we know from Scripture, Jesus’ life on earth was bookended by Him identifying with those on the margins of His community like the shepherds at His birth and the thieves at His crucifixion. He also encouraged the participation of those on the edge, “Go therefore to the ends of the roads and call everyone whom you find to the wedding feast.” (Mt 22:9)

Having reflected personally and discussed with others, we move now to the “expression stage” when we put voice to our thoughts by sharing with our respective parishes and dioceses. To bring the ideas we have discussed in the park, the pub or the post office to

the priest. To ask our parish priest or parish Sister, “to whom do I write or email? When can we meet? How can I play my part?”

Just as the mighty oceans are made up of tiny drops of water, so each one of us has a significant part to play by participating in the Church Synod and its implementation afterwards.

A challenge for our Church leaders is how best to encourage participation in preparation for the Synod. Will it be the “come and see” approach characteristic of the gentle start of the Gospel where all was familiar, or will

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*Just as the mighty oceans are made up of tiny drops of water, so each one of us has a significant part to play by participating in the Church Synod and its implementation afterwards.*

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it be with the vitality, excitement and danger characteristic of Christ’s last words to the disciples to go and show “to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

As we prepare for the forthcoming Synod, I find it helpful to see such participation as a personal invitation from Pope Francis, “Will you journey with me?” Any journey takes effort and trust but as the Chinese proverb says, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” CM

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Fr. Paul McMahon is a Columban Missionary from Belfast. He has worked in Pakistan. A trained psychotherapist and supervisor, he is now based in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

# Rekindling the Chilean Dream

## A Journey to a Better Life

By Fr. Daniel Harding

Jefferson lived in the transit lounge of the international airport in Santiago for the whole of January wondering if he would be deported.

Jefferson was 35 years old when he arrived in Chile from Haiti in 2017 with great expectations for a better life. He cleaned offices at night and lived with 30 other single men in an old house, sharing a kitchen and a few showers and toilets. He also worked for the Columbans in the migrant ministry. After paying for rent and food, he sent the rest of his salary back to his aged mother, who was taking care of his young son in Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital.

During the height of Chile's economic bonanza between 2017 and 2018, over 100 Haitian migrants were arriving in Chile every single day.

Most settled in the capital, Santiago, working in low paid jobs in factories, on construction sites or as street market vendors, while some took up seasonal work in the agricultural sector.

Even if they only earned Chile's minimal monthly wage, it was still four times what they could make back home. Nevertheless, life was not easy, because the cost of living in Chile is much higher than Haiti and a portion of their salary was earmarked for their families at home.

Jefferson found life difficult in Chile. He struggled with the Spanish language, which is completely unrelated to his native Haitian Creole. In addition, it became more difficult for migrants to renew their visas after the election of Sebastian

Pinera as president in 2018. Many Haitians also complained of racism and discrimination in the workplace and on the street. Since they were part of the first largescale demographic movement of people of African descent into Chile, they were regarded as an unwanted sight on the streets.

### The End of the Chilean Dream

When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in March 2020, the Chilean economy dived into negative growth, plunging to minus 5.8 percent. Millions of jobs were lost. Xenophobic attitudes towards large migrant groups like the Haitians and Venezuelans began to spread as competition for jobs became fiercer.

As the pandemic worsened, Jefferson, along with many other



Haitians, felt the dream of prosperity in Chile was no more. They also felt more and more unwanted. Rumors began to spread by word of mouth and internet chatrooms that the newly-elected president of the United States, Joe Biden, had opened the door to Haitians assembled at the Mexican border.

### North to the American Dream

In the early months of 2020, Jefferson joined thousands of Haitians heading north from Santiago on the 5,600-mile journey through Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico to the United States border. Along the way, many were robbed of their money and belongings. Some became victims of false promises. Others never made it, dying along the way.

Jefferson puts it this way: “We feel we had no option but to make this enormous sacrifice and try to get into the United States. We suffered so much. We were robbed, extorted, abused, cheated, all along the journey. We just wanted to make it to a new life in the United States.”

They journeyed some of the way by bus and walked other sections. They had to pass the 100 mile trail through

the Darien Gap on foot, the road-less, stateless, dense jungle area between Colombia and Panama. Controlled by drug lords and people smugglers that charge migrants a fee to pass, it is one of the most dangerous migration corridors in the world.

### Arrival at the Border and Deportation

When Jefferson and thousands of other Haitians finally arrived at the United States border, they discovered the cut-off date for residency application had passed and the border was closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Nevertheless, Jefferson, like thousands of others, did find an unofficial way to cross into the United States, only to be packed off on a repatriation flight back to Port-au-Prince. At one stage, there were seven deportation flights daily, the largest mass expulsion of migrants in decades.

### Return to Chile

At the end of December last year, Jefferson borrowed money for an airfare back to Chile, but upon arrival at Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport in Santiago, discovered his visa had expired. He was one of a group of fourteen

Haitians refused entry, at least until they had paid fines related to expired visas. If the fines were not paid, they would be deported back to Haiti, so Jefferson remained in the transit lounge for a whole month, sleeping on a windowsill and scrounging for money to buy food, wash his clothes and take a shower. Eventually, he found the money (with some help from the Columbians), just as he was nearing the point of deportation. “It is very cold in the airport at night,” he says.

With his fine paid, Jefferson was allowed to leave the airport. He then had to find a place to live and a job. He spent one week sitting on a bench with other homeless people in the inner city of Santiago and then couch surfing for several nights with some Haitian acquaintances. He now rents a small room and washes dishes at a restaurant. However, life must move on and Jefferson has rekindled his Chilean dream and is embracing his second chance at a decent life in the country, while revelling in the opportunity to once again provide support for his family. 

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Columban Fr. Daniel Harding lives and works in Chile.

# Within My Heart

## Letters Come Full Circle

By Fr. Timothy Mulroy

“I won’t be buying green bananas again!” was Fr. Bernard’s greeting as I approached his hospital bed. He had phoned me earlier that day, requesting that I come to visit him. After we exchanged a few pleasantries, he informed me that the doctor had told him that he had just a few more days left on this earth, and so he now wanted my help to bring his life to a smooth close.

I was shocked and saddened. Fr. Bernard had been not just a colleague, but also a dear friend. Just a few days previously, he had been admitted to hospital with a seemingly minor ailment. However, as the results of various medical tests were analyzed, it emerged that he had a critical underlying condition. As I listened to him describe the diagnosis in a matter-of-fact manner, I felt numb with disbelief.

Once Fr. Bernard had completed his medical report, he began to outline the various concrete ways in which he needed my assistance. He wanted to go to confession, receive Holy Communion, and be anointed in preparation for his final journey. He asked me to contact members of his immediate family and inform them about the seriousness of his condition: if possible, he would like them to come for a farewell visit. These and a few other requests concerned matters that many people would wish to attend to as they approach the end of their lives.

Having reassured Fr. Bernard that I would promptly attend to his various requests, we sat together in silence for a few moments. Then, he spoke again: “There’s one other matter. You will find

a package of love letters in the second drawer of the closet in my bedroom, please shred them.” I simply responded, “Sure!” and then we continued sitting together in silence, though I struggled to conceal my surprise and curiosity.

Fr. Bernard must have read my expression because a few moments later he started to talk about his early life before he entered the seminary. “Ellen and I had grown up in the same town and fallen in love as teenagers, but she went out east to college, while I moved west. Back in those days, we could only meet each other when we went

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*He had always valued his faith, but now to his own surprise he discovered a yearning to dedicate his life to God.*

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home for holidays, which was only a few times a year, such as Christmas and summer. There were no computers or cell phones, so we had to rely on snail mail to keep the flame of love alive. We wrote to each other once or twice a month, and whenever I got a letter from Ellen, I felt like I was walking on air for a week afterwards.”

However, during his final year in college, Bernard found a tug of war going on inside himself between his love for Ellen and a mysterious desire to do something extraordinary with his life. He had always valued his faith, but now to his own surprise he discovered a yearning to dedicate his life to God. Then, during the months that followed, he began to wonder if God was calling him to become a missionary priest. By the time his graduation came around, he had made



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*With a mixture of curiosity and trepidation, Fr. Bernard opened it to discover several neatly tied packs of his love letters to Ellen.*

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up his mind: he would go home and explain to Ellen his decision to end their relationship and he would apply to enter the Columban seminary. To his surprise — and disappointment — that conversation with Ellen seemed to cause her less pain than it did him!

After completing seminary training, Fr. Bernard spent the next forty years on overseas mission. While he had no direct contact with Ellen, he did hear occasional updates about her from family members and neighbors: she seemed to be happily married to Paul, had become a mother, and then a grandmother.

Then, a few years after Fr. Bernard retired back home from the missions, he received a phone call out of the blue from Paul who told him that Ellen had died some months previously and asked if he could come to visit him.

After spending some time reminiscing together over coffee about Ellen, Paul said, “I had thought about blackmailing you ....” and then with a cheeky grin handed Fr. Bernard a plastic bag. With a mixture of curiosity and trepidation, Fr. Bernard opened it to discover several neatly tied packs of his love letters to Ellen from fifty years previously. The envelopes were yellowish, and the ink had faded, but the handwriting was unmistakably his own. For the next several moments he was overcome with a mixture of emotions as memories of Ellen came flooding back. Paul sat in the silence.

Later, Paul explained to Fr. Bernard that, after Ellen’s death, he found the love letters among her personal belongings and that he “didn’t have the



heart to throw away something that was so precious to her.” He was glad to discover, therefore, that he could return them to their author, Fr. Bernard.

Fr. Bernard soon came to realize that he too didn’t have the heart to destroy those love letters, so he kept them in his bedroom closet. However, some years later, as I sat by his deathbed, I promised him with a tinge of sadness in my heart that I would shred them.

However, Fr. Bernard, having just shared with me his love story, was still in a jovial mood. I dared, therefore, to ask him, “And what about those love letters from Ellen that had you walking on air as a college student? Where have you stored them?” Without pausing, and with a smile that stretched from ear to ear, he simply replied, “Within my heart!” 

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Columban Fr. Timothy Mulroy lives and works in Hong Kong.

# An Exemplary Missionary

## Fr. David Arms

By Fr. Frank Hoare

Columban Fr. David Arms has a gift for languages. He used his Ph.D. in linguistics to research the Parkari Kholi language in Pakistan and the Subanen language in the southern Philippines and facilitate their study by missionaries.

He decided to study Fiji Hindi also. He would squat on a mat in the shade each day, and chat and with Rajen, a farmer who had no formal schooling. Fr. Dave wanted to hear only spoken Fiji Hindi. Rajen was delighted. He told his wife to have a nice curry ready for lunch.

After a while Rajen found that he had left his tin of tobacco on the mat just beyond his reach. He shouted for his wife, though she was busy inside cooking the meal. She came out. "Hand me my tobacco," he barked. She obediently stooped down, picked up the tobacco and put it in his hand. "Now carry on with the cooking," he ordered. Fr. Dave said afterwards, "If I am ever reincarnated, I want to come back as an Indian man!"

In 1987 Fr. Dave became the head of VOSA, a Columban translation service. He and his committee put together the lectionary in Fijian. They translated the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament and had them included in a new edition of the Fijian Bible in 2013. Next, they translated the sacramentary into Fijian and had it accepted by the Vatican in 2015. This careful work is time-consuming but essential for the life of the Church.

However, Fr. Dave was not just an armchair missionary. As Parish Priest of the Lau and Kadavu islands in the 1970s, he travelled extensively in the Church boat, the Rogokaci.



Receiving the whale tooth, the highest Fijian honor

His adventures were many: avoiding cyclones, trudging up boggy hills and slipping in mud, flailing helplessly with a seized-up engine while waiting for a rescue boat. On a trip with the Prime Minister to Lakeba Island, Ratu Mara insisted that Fr. Dave, as his priest, take the lower bunk in their cabin. Fr. Dave was further embarrassed to be seated in the front row for the welcome ceremonies for the Prime Minister.

Fr. Dave had a particular concern for justice and democracy. Soon after the 1987 coup in Fiji he joined the Citizens Constitutional Forum NGO (non-government organization). Requested to take the elections portfolio he studied the subject in the library of Victoria University in Wellington during holidays. Later at a conference he realized that he knew more about elections than an invited speaker, so he gained confidence. He made submissions to the Reeves Commission in Fiji, but it opted for the Alternative Voting (AV) system instead of a Proportional Representation system recommended by Fr. Dave.

He was a local observer for the 1999, 2001 and 2006 national elections in Fiji. He demonstrated, in a review of the Fiji election of 2006 at a University conference, that the AV election system was unfair. In 2007 after Fiji's fourth coup, Fr. Dave put his radical proposals for a fairer election system to the cabinet and top military. He was invited to be a member of the Electoral Commission in May 2007. He presented papers in 2011 and 2013 at the Attorney-General's Conference. The Proportional Representation election system he proposed was substantially adopted in the Fiji Constitution of 2013.

Through all this Fr. David's patience, perseverance and scholarship shone through. He is a Columban who has made his mark on public life and pastoral ministry in Fiji.

All his many friends wished him a very happy platinum jubilee of priesthood. ❏

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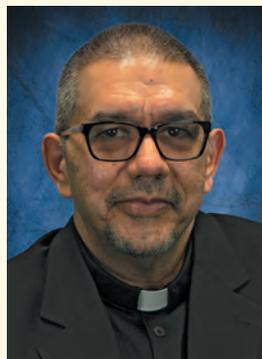
Columban Fr. Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.

# A Day in the Life of a Columban

In my 20 years of mission in Chile, my family and close friends rarely asked about my daily life in the mission. What they saw were the broad strokes of global travel, exotic places, different cultures, colorful cuisines, etc. The general impression was that I lived as a tourist. Also, their basic assumption about my daily life was that I just waited in parish house until someone knocked on the door asking for a sacrament or some pastoral need. They would be surprised that a missionary's daily life was not so different from their own.

Yes, as a missionary, I was able to travel to different places around the world and experience things most don't have the time or resources to do. Yet, that was only a very small percentage of my life. The majority of my time was dedicated to the places I was assigned. For example, my first assignment in Chile was to a small, rural, coastal town called Puerto Saavedra. It was a picturesque place that was popular with tourists in the summer. Once a friend visited me there and commented, "I can see why you want to be here, such an easy life of beaches and sun." As if I spent my days sitting on the beach, sipping margaritas, and soaking up rays!

On the contrary, my time was spent with the daily operations of the church. Believe it or not, we missionaries have to pay bills, deposit money in the bank, buy food for the house, have the car fixed, search for an electrician to repair the wiring in the house, etc. In addition, my daily life was performing

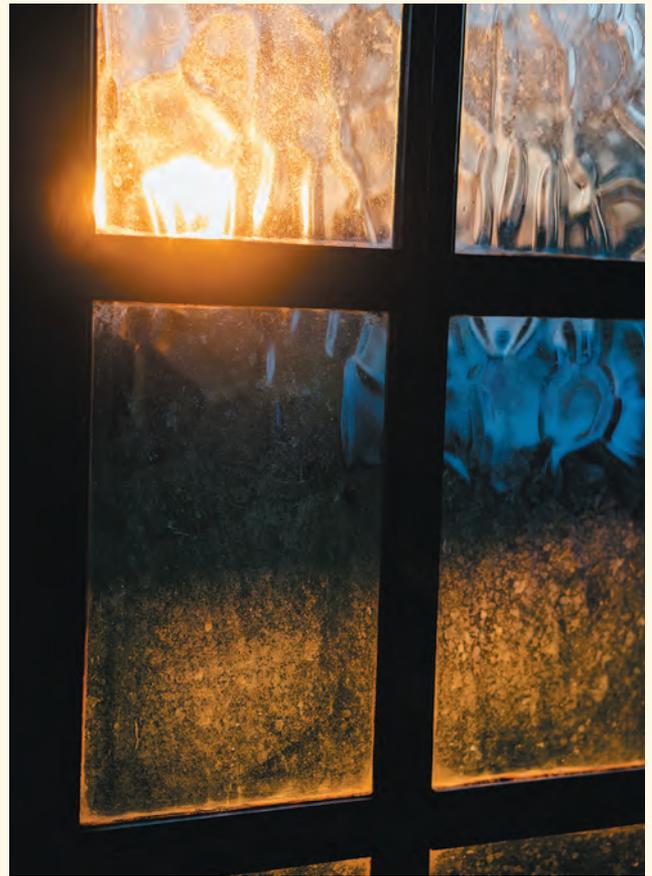


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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Chris Saenz

small acts of public relations of short visits and small conversations. I would pass by houses to visit the sick, or talk to a person to see how they are doing, or try to convince a person to be a new catechist or lay minister. These small things had to be done but were the backbone of mission. If houses, cars, and buildings were not maintained, we couldn't perform our ministry. If people were not visited, or conversed with, there would be no life in the church. As one can see, sitting on a beach all day was not an option.



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*I would pass by houses to visit the sick, or talk to a person to see how they are doing, or try to convince a person to be a new catechist or lay minister.*

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It sounds ordinary but, as one person told me, "what we think is ordinary is extraordinary to the other." No matter who we are, or what we do, our "daily small task" can make a difference in the world. Throughout my missionary life, I was greatly surprised how the greatest conversions and changes came about by a simple daily task such as stopping by a house to say "hi" to a person. That is mission.



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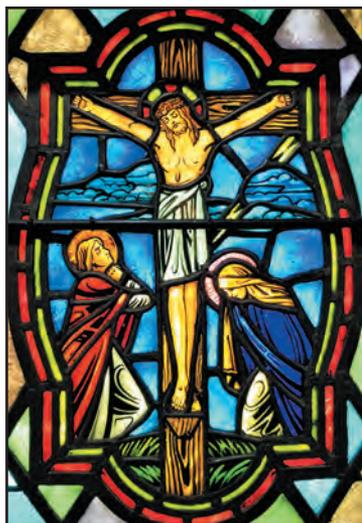
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