

Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

February 2026



The Impact of Missionaries on Local Culture

C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – The Impact of Missionaries on Local 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



A Benediction for the New Year

By A Columban Missionary

The old year folds its weary wings
And drifts into the dusk of time,
Its laughter, tears, forgotten things
Now gathered in God's hands sublime.

A new year dawns with trembling light,
A tender flame of hope reborn;
The Lord who shaped the stars above,
Who knows each breath before it's drawn,
Now crowns the year with steadfast love
And clothes with mercy every dawn.

Though paths ahead seem dark, obscure,
Still You illuminate each place.
For not a moment lies unknown,
Not one small sorrow hid from You;
Our trembling futures are Your own—
Your promises forever true.

Let weary spirits rise anew,
Let every burden be released;
The brokenhearted You restore,
The wanderer finds a resting place;
The humble soul You bless with more
Than all the world could ever trace.

Let this year begin with praise,
With grateful hearts and lifted hands;
Teach us to number well our hours,
To seek Your wisdom, not our own:

Lord, guide the dreams we dare to name,
And order every hope we hold;
Let forgiveness shape our deepest ties,
Let truth shine clear before our eyes
And light the paths we have yet to tread.

And when the midnight bells have rung,
And all the world begins again,
Let praise be first upon our tongue,
And trust be firm where fears have been.
In You alone we stand made strong:
Bless us, Lord, through this new year.

Encountering the Cross

Belonging

By Columban seminarian Lydio Mangao, Jr.

Weekly, I make it a habit to visit randomly the nine chapels of the Columban parish of San Mathias in Bajos de Mena, Santiago, Chile, where I have been sent.

Riding a bicycle, I would try to pedal hard to reach these chapels. It has been a few months since I arrived here, and I am still getting acquainted with the streets. When I know I am very near a chapel, I tend to look up. I gaze and search for the cross among those roofs of the neighborhood of Bajos de Mena. The cross is a significant landmark for me. It is essential too for the church, for the gathered people of God.

Previously, on the 5th Sunday of Easter, a significant day in our liturgical calendar as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the cross remains an integral part of our faith. To gaze lovingly at the cross of Jesus is to bear witness to the defeat of death. It is here that death is devoured by love. What is our experience of death, injustice, abuse, betrayal, and darkness? I believe there is truth in it: We experience resurrection when we try to love. Jesus asked us to live out the new commandment: "to love others as he loved you." He showed this reality as our present-day concrete possibility.

As a Columban missionary, I acknowledge the risks of navigating this neighborhood. I recall that on Pentecost Vigil evening, as I was on my way to a chapel, a guy on a bicycle overtook me and abruptly halted in front of me. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, a car moving in the opposite direction honked loudly after noticing

the incident. It was a distraction that befuddled the man, and so I escaped safe and sound. I recognize the danger of riding the bicycle I borrowed, not only because of the potential for robbery along the way, but also due to the extreme weather conditions here in Bajos de Mena. These are crosses I bear; however, in the grand scheme of the mission I received, these are the least of my concerns.

What draws me more to go outside, to visit houses and chapels, is not the danger that lurks in the darkness of night, but rather the eagerness to be present, to listen to sacred stories, conversations with the faithful — the crosses they bear, their faith stories of resurrection. How they show love as parents, as grandparents to their complex family, as children to their parents, and as neighbors to one another.

At first, gazing at the roof for the cross guided my arrival to a chapel; now I am gazing at the cross in the lives of Chileans and migrants in Bajos de Mena through personal stories they choose to share. Some stories sprang from socio-economic poverty, the painful conflicts in their relationships, where the family struggles to live despite the illness and sickness, despite the betrayal, and the wounds inflicted by ordained leaders of the church. I've seen them still attending Mass. I heard them speak their mind. I savored the bread, the cheese, the Hass avocado, and the warmth of the tea. The smell of coffee was prepared for us to partake. Their faith and resilience in the face of these challenges are truly inspiring.



They choose to love despite the struggle of the cross. This is their cross that devoured death out of love. They loved and kept faith because someone loved them first. They choose to love despite all they have been through. As they share their crosses, I keep those in my heart, placing them in sacred spaces; only God knows the burden of those weights. Their stories of cross and love, despite their challenges, serve as a rich reminder of the tangible grace of God that builds in our human nature. Their life stories fuel me to pedal towards one chapel at a time, one cross at a time, one Spanish conversation at a time.



Now, I am slowly approaching the interior of the church, where the gathered people of God in Bajos de Mena, Santiago, Chile, are present. The next stop, I will focus on three basic ecclesial communities within three chapels; only God knows what the ride will be like. Your prayers and support are valuable and integral to our mission. Let us pray for one another and continue to support each other.

What makes us belong to a place? Is it the time that was spent there or the memories we have of it? Is it the thought “I am here” or the profound sense of comfort and security?

My journey in Chile was marked by unique experiences. I went to the driest desert on Earth, the northern Chilean Atacama Desert. It spreads out in a profound silence. I also ventured to the “fin del mundo,” the Southern Chilean Patagonia, where the world seemed to dissolve into ice and sky. In this surreal landscape, I held a piece of a glacier in my bare hands, feeling it melt against my skin—the closest I could get to Antarctica. These first experiences were so distinct and unforgettable. Were those first experiences substantial enough to instill in me a sense of belonging?

And then there were the people—each at their best selves when I met them, much like Chilean Patagonia in January and February, at its gentlest. When we share joy, engage in meaningful conversations, and live with a sense of adventure, does that foster a sense of belonging? Do shared experiences and warm hospitality foster a sense of belonging to a place?

What makes us belong to a place? I was sent to a place called Bajos de Mena because there is a parish run by Columbans in Santiago, Chile. It never ceases to cross my mind—the unwavering concern of thoughtful locals, faithful Chilean Roman



Catholics, reminding me to “take care of myself” in the dangerous streets that surround my home. Deep in these reminders, there is care from a neighborhood bound by quiet acts of kindness. Does this, then, make us belong?

“What makes us belong to a place?” What if a migrant asks this question? I stepped into a “campamiento” [shanty town], a refuge for migrants, for informal settlers, where most are not of Chilean origin. Campamiento is a sanctuary where people can start a new life, tending to their families. Where they hold onto the hope that, perhaps, belonging and being able to flourish will follow. Some came from Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and others whose stories I have yet to hear. There was a father and a mother who left with their kids because staying in their country entails paying gangs not to inflict harm on their children. The choice to abandon home is a painful decision they made, where a walk in the park could mean assault, or worse. They are migrants who cross thousands of miles, driven by hope without borders — a hope for safety, for dignity, for a life beyond fear. Perhaps

at the very least, a space to survive, if not yet to truly live the fullness of life.

I recall a parish priest cautioning me, “Do not visit public housing projects or shanty towns alone; they are dangerous places.” Some locals shared similar sentiments. Yet, I have already visited two public housing projects, not out of recklessness, but by invitation. Does belonging come from being welcomed?

During a trip organized by a language school, a jarring incident occurred. In a metro station, a woman’s voice pierced the air—sharp, unfiltered: “You are not welcome here, go back to your country.” In the face of such blatant racism, can one truly feel a sense of belonging to a place?


What makes us belong to a place? Embarking on Spanish language studies in Santiago de Chile, I find myself pondering whether the very act of wrestling with language, to meet native speakers where they are, in their own terms and converse with a shared vocabulary we both understand, will allow a profound sense of belonging to a place to begin to take root.

In Bajos de Mena, I entered homes where Chileans welcomed me with

open doors. I ate what was offered—tasting *pebre* [spicy appetizer], the zest of Chilean salad, the warmth of roasted chicken and beef, where I shared a table, whether at lunch or dinner. And in that quiet hospitality, I drank from the same “bombilla” the straw passed around for yerba mate (an herbal tea of South American indigenous origin). Does sharing a meal, surrendering to the unspoken rituals of communion, carve out a sense of belonging?

During a trek far south of Bajos de Mena, I found myself in the company of companions from Belgium, the Netherlands, and North America. We shared the experience of drinking straight from the glacier-fed rivers, and later, that night, tried a sip of the calafate sour, a drink made from calafate berries of the Chilean Patagonia. This act of a shared experience, of lowering our guards to strangers, did it contribute to our sense of belonging to this place?

In Bajos de Mena, I would sleep as close to the Earth as I could. This is Chilean soil, and I had been sent near the Andes Mountains. The floor turned bitterly cold on an autumn night—nine degrees, a freezing sensation for a Filipino accustomed to endless summers. I layered a slab of plywood, a mat, and a sleeping bag—a fragile barrier against the chill. Does surrendering to the ground, feeling the pulse of a place beneath your body, bring belonging?

What makes us belong to a place? Is it the time spent there, or the memories carried forward? Is it presence—the quiet attunement, the peace found despite the specters of danger? St. Columban once said, “We belong to Christ, not to ourselves.” If we belong to Christ, does that, too, root us in a place? Does our belonging to Christ make us belong to a place? 

Columban seminarian Lydio Mangao, Jr., provided this reflection.



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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.

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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.

A Tale of Two Mountains

Closer to the Transcendent

By Fr. John Burger



Mount Fuji

Mountains have a natural religious significance in that they seem to bring us closer to the transcendent, to ecstasy and to God.

— *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*

Mt. Fuji, at 12,388 feet, is the highest mountain in Japan. Its location in central Honshu is only about 60 miles west of the Tokyo-Yokohama metropolitan area. It is a classic volcano with a large crater in the center, and it has been dormant since 1707. It is certainly one of THE sights to see in Japan and is considered a holy place in the Shinto religion.

The Japanese have a proverb that says, “You are a fool if you never climb Mount Fuji and you are a fool if you climb it twice.” I am a fool of the second type in that I climbed Mount Fuji twice!

The climbing season is short, just a little over two months, and does not extend past September 10. After that date, you may encounter dangerous high winds.

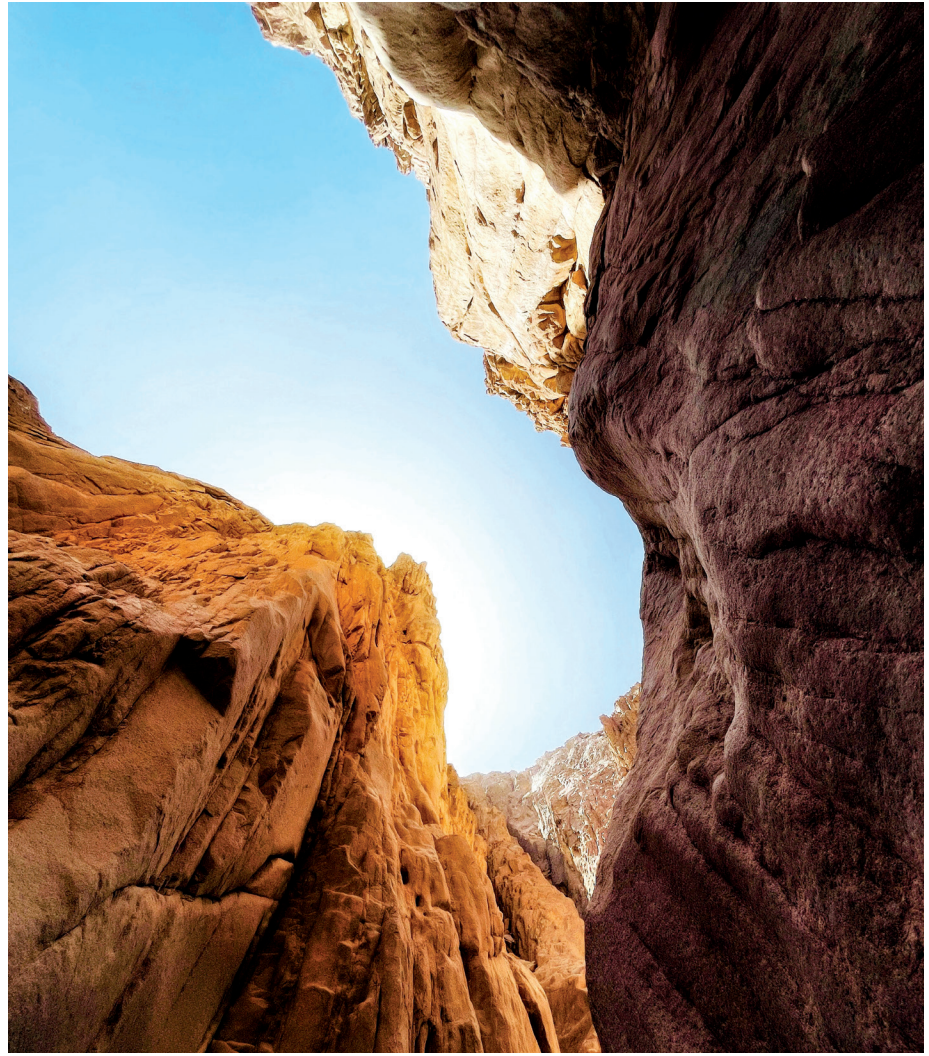
The first time was very early on in my time in Japan, September 29, 1973, which was exactly one month after my first arrival. The group I was going with apparently did not know that, for good reason, there are rules about when you can climb and when you are advised not to. The climbing season is short, just a little over two months, and does not extend past

September 10. After that date, you may encounter dangerous high winds.

Despite being outside the climbing season, it turned out to be a fine day. We drove up to the fifth station and parked and headed up the mountain from there. Although Fuji is the inspiration for many artistic scenic pictures, up close, it is a disappointing sight: a huge pile of cinders! I suspect that is the reason that, as the saying goes, “...you are a fool if you climb it twice.”

Anyway, we made it to the top and were able to descend more quickly than we went up. I did not know it, but I was in for a treat: my first Japanese bath. It felt great to ease my tired legs and torso into hot water up to my shoulders. Relaxation at its finest!

My second “foolish” trip to the top of Fuji came almost three years later.



Mount Sinai

By this time, I had heard one or two horror stories about mishaps that can happen outside of climbing season. This second trip followed the rules and was probably less foolish than the first. We climbed almost to the top in the evening, so that we would be in position to get to the top in time to see the sunrise on the morning of July 1. We stayed for a few hours in one of the huts along the route and successfully made our way to the top to greet the sun emerging from a sea of clouds. One of the priests had carried a Mass kit, and we had Mass at the summit, breakfast and a little rest before starting down the long slope.

The other mountain trek that I thought I would mention was the climb up Mount Sinai. A few years ago, after twelve years in administrative

What a privilege it was to be on this holy mountain that is associated with Moses, the Exodus from Egypt, the gift of the law and the appearances of God to Moses.

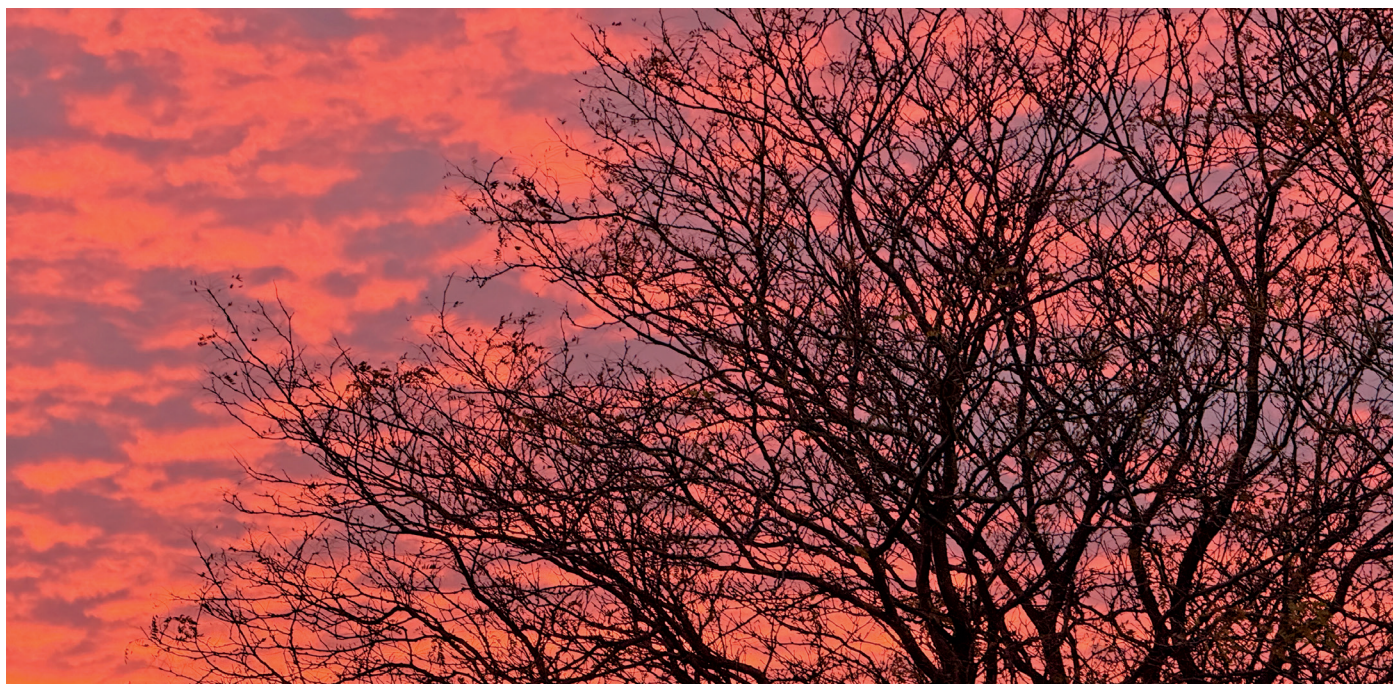
jobs for the Columbans, I had the wonderful opportunity to do a six-week sabbatical program at the Tantur Institute in Jerusalem. One of the high points of the program was a trip to the Sinai Peninsula with the opportunity to stay at the famous Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine at the foot of Mt. Sinai. After exploring the monastery and its environs by day, I

went to bed early on the second night we were there and got up in the middle of the night and started climbing, so that — as on Mt. Fuji — we would be in a position to see the sunrise from the top of the mountain.

What a privilege it was to be on this holy mountain that is associated with Moses, the Exodus from Egypt, the gift of the law and the appearances of God to Moses.

The morning light revealed the harshness of the terrain all around us. And everyone who was there to witness the morning spectacle seemed to be in a good mood and yet absorbed in his or her own thoughts and closer to the transcendent. **CM**

Columban Fr. John Burger lives and works in the United States.



At 94, Still in Japan!

Why?

By Fr. Barry Cairns

I am Fr. Barry Cairns, and I am 94. I am 70 years ordained as a Columban missionary priest and 69 years ago I came, compared to today, to a very different Japan. War devastation, poverty, war widows, fatherless children and limbless ex-soldiers dressed in white begged for alms in front of railway stations. Tuberculosis was rampant. These conditions were quite obvious in the country areas outside of Tokyo and Osaka.

After language school, I was appointed to Yakata parish in the mountainous country province of Wakayama. In my first week on this mission, I was taking part in team teaching for those preparing for marriage. Here, I had an experience that is very much alive for me to this day. It is basically the reason why I am still in Japan today.

In this group, many of the men were non-Christian, and the women were parishioners. I was still weak in



Meeting Christ is a wonderful gift, the experience that has set the needle of my missionary compass to this day.

the language, so I resorted to asking questions, such as “When you hear the word ‘God,’ what words or images come to mind?” and “What is your main interest in life?”

The answers to the first question showed me that Buddhism and Shintoism had little influence on their lives. For some, God was someone who punishes evil (how sad!); for others, God was a vague, distant something in space.

To the second question about one’s main interest in life, the answers included “the company I work for,” “the Hanshin Tigers (the area’s pro baseball team),” and “photography.” It hit me that my faith, gifted to me by God, was a wonderful treasure and that I wanted to share it. I thought then, and still do, how superficial, how truly unsatisfying and how transitory were their main interests.

Meeting Christ is a wonderful gift, the experience that has set the needle of my missionary compass to this day. I want to give my life to show the Japanese people, in my limited way, that God loves them.

In my early years of mission, I was afflicted with a spiritual affliction



called a “Messiah complex.” I thought mission depended on my own strength and effort. And I did work hard! Now mostly cured, I am Christ’s representative, not his plenipotentiary!

At 94, I am “priest in residence” in a mission parish in Yokohama city. Many of my Columban confreres have retired to their home countries. They are still very much “on mission” by their prayer which has no boundaries. I have chosen to stay in Japan to live among the people I pray for.

This is my typical week. For Sunday Mass, the average attendance is 70. In this digital age, I have my homily put on the parish homepage both in Japanese and English. There are two million foreign workers in Japan. I usually end my homilies with words like this: “Let us share the gifts that God gives us with others this week.” My aim is to encourage parishioners to be missionaries in their own milieu.

*I want to give my life to
show the Japanese people,
in my limited way, that
God loves them.*

The parish also hosts a Chinese community and an Indonesian community, with priests from these countries celebrating the Masses.

Monday is my recreation day. My hobbies are do-it-yourself (DIY) carpentry and a vegetable garden plot. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, I have classes for those preparing for baptism and a class called “Praying with the Scriptures.” I go as the Japanese say at “my pace,” a slow one! I am not busy!

I am a member, with five Japanese priests, of the Formation Group for Yokohama diocesan seminarians. One seminarian comes each weekend for

a hands-on experience. The present seminarian is the nineteenth, so I know many of the young priests of Yokohama Diocese.

I delegate jobs and authority. Our bishop has recommended “subsidiarity.” A United Kingdom Labor Union leader used the word and described it as, “Sharing out jobs with others, and trusting the blighters to do their jobs!” In our church, this has helped build community, and it sure relieves stress! I find that just being “in residence” can help faith and mission.

So even with three stents in my heart, I am still in Japan sharing the great gift given to me—my faith.

Psalm 97:7 tells why I am still here: “Among the nations, I will praise you, Lord.

Your love reaches to the Heavens.” CM

Columban Fr. Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.



The Flight of the Pelican

How the Pelican Became the Symbol of a Christian Tradition

By Fr. John Boles

Ask anyone what they know about Bridgend in South Wales, and they'll almost certainly mention the rugby team. Bridgend Ravens (formerly Bridgend RFC) have been stalwarts of Welsh rugby for 145 years. However, just a mile or so away lies St. Mary's Catholic Church, with a history that goes back nearly 2,000 years.

Christianity arrived in South Wales with the Romans. During the chaotic days of the break-up of the Roman Empire and the Anglo-Saxon invasions, Christianity clung to

Britain's western fringes, including the shores of the Severn Estuary. Tradition has it that St. Patrick came from these parts. Moreover, just a few miles from Bridgend lie the remains of St. Illtud's Monastery, perhaps the most important center of Celtic spirituality and learning of the 5th century, and Christian gravestones from the period have been discovered in Bridgend itself.

Fast-forward seven centuries, and the Normans arrive on the scene, bringing with them a different style of monasticism courtesy of

the Benedictines, who built the magnificent Ewenny Priory on the edge of Bridgend. The old priory church survives to this day, a glorious example of Romanesque architecture. Ewenny dominated Christian life in the area throughout the rest of the Middle Ages.

It was during the medieval period that we first encountered the pelican used as a Christian motif. According to legend, the mother pelican feeds her chicks from blood pecked from her own breast (a belief based on the habitual way a pelican shields its famous long beak in its front parts). Early Christians saw in this a metaphor for the Paschal Mystery and Eucharist of Jesus: just as the mother pelican gives life to its offspring by the shedding of her blood. So, Christ redeems God's children by the shedding of HIS blood and gives them eternal life through the receiving of His blood at communion time.

In 1536, Henry VIII dissolved Ewenny Priory, along with all the other monasteries of England and Wales. The property was purchased by the Carne family, who, despite Henry's takeover of the Church, managed to retain their Catholic faith into the reign of



Ewenny Priory 1141 founded by the Benedictines on the edge of Bridgend

Elizabeth I. And their coat of arms was.... the pelican.

As it turned out, the “vulning” (or, ‘self-wounding’) pelican was soon to become a true symbol of Bridgend’s embattled Catholic population, for troubled times lay ahead. This area was one of the few parts of Wales that hung on to the faith and paid a heavy price for doing so. During the 17th century, Saints John Lloyd and Philip Evans were active in the locality. Both were arrested in 1678 on properties owned by the recusant Catholic Turbevill family (who, coincidentally, would later become proprietors of Ewenny). Both saints were eventually hanged, drawn and quartered at Cardiff during the hysteria of Titus Oates’s “Popish Plot.”

In the first part of the 19th century, the faith was rekindled by the arrival of immigrants from Ireland. As there was no church in Bridgend, they periodically assembled outside the “Coach and Horses” tavern and trekked the twenty miles or more to receive the sacraments in Cardiff — eventually, a member of the local gentry who’d converted to Catholicism, a certain Capt. Iltid Nicholl came to the rescue and offered to buy the site of an old sawmill and build a church. The site became St. Mary’s, which opened in 1855.

The congregation was soon swelled by immigrants from another quarter – Italians, who came to work in the local quarries. The rocks around Bridgend include a rare and valuable formation known as quarella. Quarella stone is more commonly found in Italy, hence the attraction for skilled quarrymen from that country. Unfortunately, this chapter took a dark turn. At the outbreak of the Second World War, many of Italian origin were rounded up as “enemy aliens.” Tragically, a number later found themselves aboard the ill-fated “SS Arandora Star,” which was en route to internment camps in Canada when it was torpedoed by a U-47 off




Columban Fr. John Boles (right) with Fr. Tim and the pelican church

the coast of Ireland on July 2, 1940. The ship sank, with the loss of over 800 lives.

All this rich and sacred history came to a head in the 1990s when it was decided to build a new church on the same site. Courageously, the diocese chose to base the design and ornamentation of the church upon the symbol of the pelican, which by then had become so representative of the community’s sufferings and triumphs. When I visited St. Mary’s to deliver the Columban appeal, the current parish priest, Fr. Tim McGrath, was overwhelming in his desire to point out every example. “Here is the pelican, on the doors of the church...Here it is again, on top of the

tabernacle...See we’ve even got it as the parish logo on all our correspondence,” he enthused.

However, he left the best until last. Taking me outside, he pointed out the crowning glory. It turns out that the WHOLE CHURCH had been designed to echo the same symbol. “Look,” said Fr. Tim, “the building looks just like a pelican with its beak in its breast and its wings outstretched!”

Perhaps the comparison isn’t immediately apparent to the untrained eye. Yet, as the Gospels teach us, sometimes the “eyes of faith” count for more than the “eyes in the head.” 

Columban Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.

The Camino de Santiago de Compostela

It Never Leaves You the Same

By Fr. Alvaro Martinez

The Apostle Saint James, who, according to popular tradition, is buried in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, was a man chosen by Jesus and a favored witness to Jesus' public life, death, and resurrection. In his apostolic and missionary zeal, he embarked on a pilgrimage to the lands that are now known as Spain and Portugal. His evangelizing efforts began to bear fruit, leading some to become disciples, and it was they who would carry on the missionary work in these Mediterranean regions.

Tradition also indicates that before her death, the Virgin Mary called each apostle through apparitions to return to Jerusalem to be with her in their final days. It is here that the apostle James met his martyrdom, which is not only a painful death but also a testament to a missionary life dedicated to preaching the Gospel. Thus, tradition tells us that his remains were taken back to his missionary lands where he was buried,

with his tomb not discovered until the 9th century. When his remains were found, a church was built for this missionary apostle, which then sparked pilgrimages to visit his tomb and rekindle missionary zeal. Over the years, this devotion has brought together thousands of people each year who make the journey to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

I was one of the pilgrims last year. It was both an opportunity and a

blessing to walk "The Way." I set out from Baiona, situated in the region of Galicia, Spain, and walked each day until I reached this missionary apostle.

The route is challenging; each day brings its own struggles and pains. However, one of the spiritual graces I experienced along the way was listening to God reveal how my entire life has been directed toward missionary apostolate. I recognized once again that He exists in the personal history of each individual and in my own history, urging me to follow in the footsteps of this missionary apostle, who witnessed the life of Jesus and His resurrection. I realized that, in some ways, my missionary life has also involved observing and learning from the experience of Jesus and discovering the spiritual traces of His resurrection through sharing as a missionary.

Like every journey, it had its tough days. My feet hurt, and with each new location, a question arose,





Columban Fr. Alvaro Martinez on the journey

almost as if inviting me to stop: Why continue walking so many miles? Why endure the discomfort? Without a doubt, this question, like chairs on the way, urged me to stop during the missionary journey. These days were the hardest because I had to answer my questions in every prayer and at daily Mass, which I attended out of love for God and the desire to deepen our experience of the Risen One.


On the other hand, along the way, I met many people from diverse countries, languages, and cultures. Sharing a fact, words of encouragement, or a short or long chat with them transforms the Camino de Santiago into a multicultural and interreligious experience, as each pilgrim has motivations for walking

I was one of the pilgrims last year. It was both an opportunity and a blessing to walk “The Way.”

“The Way” that change or deepen along the way. Simply put, no one arrives in Santiago the same.

Upon arriving at the Plaza de Santiago, you feel a surge of joy, not only from the company of thousands of pilgrims, the shouts of happiness, the songs of triumph, and the ache in your feet, but also from the deepest affirmation that “The Way” was worth it. Every step and every refusal of the chairs that urged us to stop brought us

to the foot of the tomb of Santiago, the apostle, missionary, and martyr.

At the end of the journey, I had the blessing of concelebrating Mass in the cathedral and participating in the “Botafumeiro” ceremony in this church. It was an experience rich in culture and tradition, reflecting how the scent of incense that spreads throughout every church evokes the good aroma each pilgrim carries from their experience of “The Way.” For me, this experience was embodied in sharing the experience of Jesus and, above all, the joy of the risen Christ. 

Originally from Chile, Columban Fr. Alvaro Martinez is living and working in the United States.

Home Renovation

Securing the Future

By Fr. Timothy Mulroy

Anyone who owns their own home is familiar with the ongoing demands of maintaining it, as well as the necessity of renovating it every decade or so in response to changing circumstances within their family, or simply to rectify the wear and tear wrought by time.

During these past twenty-eight years, the Children's Home in Lima, Peru, has undergone annual maintenance, as well as a few major renovations, in order to become more suitable and responsive to the needs of the children in the surrounding, economically deprived community. Now as the Home begins to actively prepare for its 30th anniversary, it is preparing for another extensive renovation which is estimated to cost U.S. \$ 54,000.

The large and colorful Children's Home today looks nothing like the shabby building on a rocky hillside that Columban Fr. Tony Coney bought in 1996. "Over the years, it has changed and developed in ways that I could never have imagined," Fr. Tony reminisces. "It started out as a response to the urgent need of local children to have a safe place to play, and to get help with their homework. Then, as the number of children grew and grew, the house was extended again and again. The size of the current building is at least ten times that of the original! And as the number of children coming here daily grew from about 40 to around 400, so did the range of activities that were made available to them, from crafts to computers, from dance to

drama. Our most recent addition has been a gymnasium with all sorts of equipment for physical exercise, which the teenagers really enjoy."

However, as the size of the building, the number of children, and the variety of activities multiplied, so also did the number of staff required to ensure a safe, caring and supportive environment. At present, 25 workers including specialists in areas such as child psychology, safeguarding, and speech development — are employed, at a total annual cost of U.S. \$180,000. "While our benefactors in other parts of the world are faithful in helping us cover a large part of these annual expenses, the local people are also very supportive," Fr. Tony emphasizes. "In July of each year we hold a large, outdoor festival with traditional music and dances, a raffle, children's games, pony rides, food stalls, and so much else. It is both a fun day for families and a major fundraising event. Many of the people who attend it are parents who recall the enjoyment they experienced at the Children's Home fifteen or twenty-five years ago, and who now want to help form similar, happy memories for their own children. They understand therefore just how important it is to support the Children's Home. This past July, the festival raised U.S. \$32,000, which helps greatly to cover the wages of our employees."

Yet, while Fr. Tony relies on many faithful supporters — both locally and internationally — to cover the annual expenses associated with running the Children's Home, he is now faced with the challenge of overseeing major renovation work - and securing the necessary funds to cover it: "We have been talking about this renovation work for a few years, and the longer we delay it, the more the building is



Fun at the annual festival

"In July of each year we hold a large, outdoor festival with traditional music and dances, a raffle, children's games, pony rides, food stalls, and so much else. It is both a fun day for families and a major fundraising event."

~ FR. TONYCONEY

going to deteriorate, and the greater the expense will be" he explains. "The sole purpose of the renovations will be to ensure that the children who come here daily can participate in various activities in a safe, comfortable and nurturing environment. For example, at present the top floor has railing around the sides and a faded nylon sheet as a roof covering. That means that the breeze coming in from the sea makes it a damp and chilly place to engage in activities during the winter months. We plan to replace the rails with laminated glass, and the nylon sheet with an aluminum roof. We'll also take care of some troublesome plumbing matters. And we're going to reinforce the columns and beams in the original building, as well as repair the retaining walls, so that the overall structure remains sturdy and secure for another thirty decades."

Since the achievement of such a long-term goal will require short-term sacrifices, the Children's Home will close for the duration of the construction work, approximately three months. However, Fr. Tony is already focusing on the joy that lies ahead: "The last step of the renovation project will be to apply a fresh coat of bright paint to the inside and outside of the Children's Home. Since it is located on a hilltop, that will be like



Art at the Home



Children participate in musical activities

Budget Summary

Reinforce columns, beams and repair retaining walls	\$14,000
Remove rails, install windows with laminated glass	\$12,000
Install aluminium roof	\$15,000
Re-plastering	\$ 3,000
Plumbing	\$ 2,000
Paint interior & exterior	\$ 8,000
Total	\$54,000

a sign from heaven for the children and teenagers in the surrounding community — then they will know that the reopening is just around the corner! Our plan is to celebrate the re-opening with a large party and a gift for every child and teenager. I

can already imagine the joy that the renovated Children's Home will give all those hundreds of young people during the coming years. **CM**

Columban Fr. Timothy Mulroy lives and works in Britain.

Living Witness

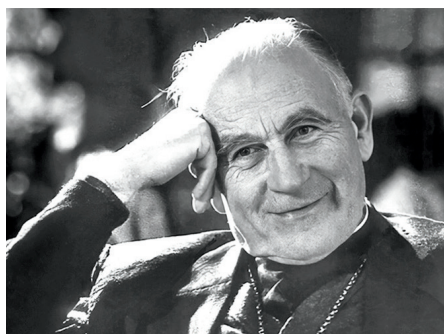
Families of Faith

By Fr. Robert Mosher

“There are no foreigners in the Church,” Cardinal Silva of Santiago, Chile, once proclaimed. He said this at a press conference that he convoked, in order to read his own declaration, in the name of the Catholic Church in Chile, in regard to the expulsion of two of our priests—one from Australia and the other from Ireland, in 1983.

The foreign priests’ work among the poorest of Chile’s people was a cause of deep concern for the military leaders of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990), who in their paranoia suspected such missionaries of helping subversive groups and encouraging hatred towards them, if not insurrection.

Such a view was a product of their own paranoia, however—we knew of their deep love for the poorest Chileans, and I personally admired and tried to imitate their capacity to win the hearts of their neighbors and chapel community, their energy in building a simple house in their neighborhood, washing their clothes and cooking in the local manner, enjoying the company of the families there over an evening fire, as a tea kettle boiled, and as they sat for hours on low, battered wooden stools,



Cardinal Silva



listening to the songs of the people and speaking themselves of the love of God for the people, and His promise of full liberation in every sense for them.

The cultural impact of missionaries like the Columban Fathers and Columban lay missionaries is intended to be as light-footed as possible, as we work more to adapt to, rather than to influence, the local way of life. Evangelization is not a project, but it is something that happens by the working of the Holy Spirit—we can only do the spade work, for the plant to put forth leaves, grow and bear fruit.

In the history of the Church during the times of massive colonialization, mission was considered as something to be coordinated with the conquering State, and a duty of the more scientific and enlightened civilizations towards the poor and ignorant peoples subject to them.

As a result, the local cultures were devalued as inferior to “superior” ones. Many massive abuses and violence took place during the political and military conquests of some nations by others, as well.

“It pains me to think that Catholics contributed to policies of assimilation and enfranchisement that inculcated a sense of inferiority,” the late Pope Francis said, towards the end of his life, to the Original Peoples of Canada, “robbing communities and individuals of their cultural and spiritual identity,

severing their roots and fostering prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes.”

His apologetic remarks sum up succinctly the present view of those sent out on mission today: We must respect local cultural norms, as we accompany the Christian communities that appear and flourish after hearing the Gospel, accepting it freely and without pressure, embracing it with all their hearts, and putting it into practice. Such Christian communities find that their own customs, cultural values and way of life are both challenged and embellished by the Gospel, without any pressure to become like other peoples in language, dress or culture.

Giving living witness to Gospel values is our foremost task—for all of us—as followers of Christ and members of His missionary Church. We Columban missionaries in particular value having the chance to listen, learn, dialogue and explain the motivating cause of our presence among them, to those to whom we are sent, and who are warmed by curiosity. We grow to be accepted as brothers and sisters by the young Churches that grow up around us, families of faith that proclaim, “there are no foreigners here,” just members of the universal Body of Christ. CM

Columban Fr. Robert Mosher lives and works in the United States.



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

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



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

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

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

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- Charitable Remainder Unitrust Gifts
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- 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, 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.

Recovery

Fond Memories

By Fr. Ron Kelso

Recovering from hip surgery is a long process. I suspect that many of you reading this article know that firsthand or know someone who experienced it! The physical therapist advises lots of walking to bring about a

full recovery. Recently, after Sunday Mass at our Columban residence, I was speaking with one of the people who attended about this need for walking and she said, “Get a dog.” It was a great idea, but not so practical in a house where we are not set up to raise a dog.

However, it did bring back very fond memories of “Brownie,” the only dog I ever raised (with a lot of help from those around me!). During my years of serving in Japan, I was active in Marriage Encounter for several years. My team was located near Yokohama, but I was more than eight hours away in a seaside parish called Shingu.

Once, when I was up working with my team, one of the members brought her beagle with the new litter of puppies to the session. They were just beautiful dogs, and I was petting one so much that the owner presented it to me when I was leaving for home. What a surprise!

The next thing I thought of was how am I was going to get the dog home? The beagle’s owners gave me a cage to transport the puppy, but it would mean that I had to carry it along with my luggage on the train.

As luck would have it, the day I was heading back to the parish was also the first day of summer, when all the middle school students were on their excursions around the country. The train was packed, and there was



standing room only. There wasn’t even room to put the cage down. I had to hold onto it with eight hours of travel ahead of me. The puppy slept in the carrying cage for a while, but then it woke up and was moving all over the place, whimpering to get out of the cage. It’s important to be a good neighbor in Japan, so I was nervous about how the puppy would affect the people around me.

The trip was moving along smoothly when suddenly the train stopped. There was an earthquake and so all the tracks had to be checked to see that there were no disruptions. This took about an hour, and my arms were getting so sore from holding the cage that I finally opened the cage door, took out the puppy and folded the cage and put it between my legs. The puppy was delighted and was licking and squirming all over the place. Then a lady next to me offered to hold the puppy for a while and before you knew it, the dog was being passed from person to person all through the train carriage. The puppy was a true missionary! I was enjoying every moment of meeting new friends and expressing God’s love to them.

Well, the remainder of the trip home was a delight, and it gave me an opportunity to meet so many people in such a short time. The rest of the trip home was a breeze.

Then I had to figure out how I would manage giving a home to a dog in my rectory. Shoji san, the housekeeper, took care of that right away by getting a dog house that was put in the back of the rectory. Of course, she wanted to know the puppy’s name, and I decided to name him Brownie.

Brownie was a huge hit with the children and parents at the kindergarten, and you could hear “Bwouni” “Bwouni” all over the school yard. The children had a hard time pronouncing the ‘r’ in Brownie. Fortunately, one of the parents of the children was a veterinarian and immediately took charge of Brownie’s medical needs.

Dogs need to walk every day, and Brownie kept me in the best of health through our walks and runs. All I can say is Brownie was a lifesaver!

God bless! 

Columban Fr. Ron Kelso now lives in the United States.



The Joy in Nurturing

Unrelenting Spirit

By Michael Javier

The Columban house in Myitkyina, Kachin state, Myanmar (formerly Burma), is in the compound of Eden. It is surrounded by bamboos and various types of trees that are more than enough to shelter the different kinds of animals including birds, snakes, bees, etc. There is also space for growing flowers and vegetables.

Since planting is not new to me, and because of high inflation in Myanmar, I use my free time in the morning to cultivate the soil to prepare it for planting any available vegetable seeds. I have planted Lady fingers, chilis, roselle and mustard. I also tried to plant radish and carrots, but they did not thrive.

I need to have more patience growing seeds. Some grow too quickly, but some grow a bit slower. When they are fully grown, they need extra care because they are still vulnerable. I have to water them every day and protect them from extreme weather conditions and predators, like snails and birds. Most of the time, their soft, tiny and young stalks can bend easily, which

After a few months of caring, they will be bearing fruit, and soon ready to be harvested.

is the reason why I have to put some support for them to grow straight. After a few months of caring, they will be bearing fruit and soon ready to be harvested.


I believe that there are similarities between planting and teaching. As I teach the young fellows, I feel like I am cultivating innocent minds in order for the seeds of learning to grow and bear fruit. I also realized that my students are akin to the plants—vulnerable and needing extra care and guidance.

I have to be really patient in pushing them to keep on learning, especially the slow learners. I do believe that once I provide them with the necessary schooling and skills, they can face the real battle in life with courage and confidence.

There can also be challenges in caring for the young learners. If plants

need to face the extreme weather conditions in their early days of growth, these young learners have to face extreme poverty and disconcerting social issues that are threatening their security and making their future dimmer.

The ongoing political and economic crisis is alarming. However, despite all these challenges, their eagerness to learn and their indomitable spirit to pursue their ambition in life are quite admirable. I see them cultivating their own pathway towards success in life little by little, day by day, as they continue their studies with determination and diligence.

For me, the real joy in nurturing the innocent minds is when I see them trying their best and never wanting to stop learning, no matter what kind of weather they have to go through each day. With this unrelenting spirit, I do believe that they have nurtured me, too. 

Columban lay missionary Michael Javier lives and works in Myanmar.

Ongoing Outreach

Sharing Gifts

By Angela Bennett

I recently had the opportunity to travel to Pittsburgh and Philadelphia with my fellow donor relations officer Angie Determan and Columban Lay Missionary Sainiana Tamatawale, affectionately known as Sai. As a donor relations officer, visiting our benefactors is a major part of our work. Our focus during these visits is to express our sincere gratitude for their support of Columban mission work and to provide updates about various projects around the world and answer any questions that they may have. Whenever possible we like to bring a Columban priest or Columban Lay Missionary with us so they can share firsthand the work that is being done in the Columban world. While we were in the Philadelphia area we were able to visit with Columban Fr. John Burger at his residence at Camilla Hall in Malvern, Pennsylvania.

Fr. Burger has been a Columban priest since 1973 and has done mission work in Japan and Hong Kong. He

was the director of the United States region from 2000-2006 and again from 2019-2022. During his final term as director, he was selected to become the Chaplain of Camilla Hall, a convent and healthcare center for Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Fr. Burger explained to us that Camilla Hall is a convent as well as a home for the Sisters who need assistance or care. Camilla Hall includes independent living, assisted living and skilled care. The Sisters there enjoy being able to receive the Sacraments regularly, such as attending Mass, receiving the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

We visited Father Burger at his residence where he shared some of the beautiful paintings that he has painted over the years. He still actively paints and usually has a “work in progress” painting at his desk. He talked about some of the work that he does at Camilla Hall — which includes Mass, confessions, visiting

the Sisters who are bedridden, and Anointing of the Sick. He shared that it brings him great joy to journey with the Sisters, particularly when they are nearing the end of their earthly life. The Sisters are very grateful for him which was evident when Fr. Burger took us on a little tour of Camilla Hall. As we walked around the beautiful building and grounds, we were able to meet with a few of the Sisters. Each Sister that we met was overjoyed when speaking about the wonderful gifts that Fr. Burger brings to Camilla Hall with his personality, wit and his smile.

I was grateful to be working in the Omaha office during Fr. Burger's second term as regional director, but it was even more special to see him enjoying his new ministry of bringing Christ's love to the Sisters in beautiful Pennsylvania. **CM**

Columban donor relations officer Angela Bennett lives and works in Omaha, Nebraska.



Angela Bennett, Sister Mary Ellen, Fr. John Burger, Angie Determan, Columban lay missionary Sainiana Tamatawale.



Chapel

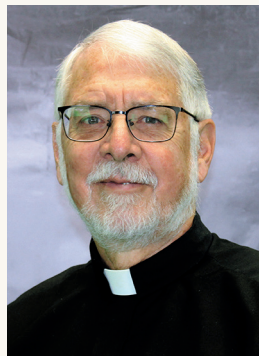
Impact of Missionaries

Sometimes the older Columbans sit around the dinner table sharing stories of the eccentricities of one or another brother Columban — strange habits, eccentricities, etc. And it has been mentioned more than once how “it’s amazing that the people still have faith” even with that guy having been their pastor or curate. We joke about ourselves being odd.

And yet, looking around here in the United States, we find so many people who knew Columbans in the Philippines, or Korea, or China, or Fiji and continue to look for us and keep in touch with us after so many years. Something good obviously happened.

It’s very hard to pin down what impact we have actually had because we don’t know what would have happened if we weren’t there. The Spirit moves as the Spirit moves.

When I was discerning about my vocation in 1975, working as an engineer in a glass manufacturing plant in Pennsylvania, I sent inquiries to three missionary congregations. One sent a lot of nice literature. One did not respond. The Columbans sent me a brochure and a letter. I responded to the letter. It was then followed up with an offer of a visit by a priest. Fr. Paddy Madden, an “old Burma hand,” came to visit me and we talked. He was so sincere about how the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament was such a comfort to him when he was alone in a parish in the mountains of Burma (Myanmar). And he offered to buy me a steak dinner that evening. I rejected the steak, telling him how my aunt sent \$5 a month from her Social



FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Al Utzig

Security check to the Columbans and it would not be fair to waste that money on a steak for me. We had hamburgers.

These two little incidents and then coming to the Omaha offices to do my psychological evaluations and interviews and seeing that my room was furnished with odds and ends, a lumpy bed, old army blankets, etc. convinced me that the Columbans were for me. The point is that simplicity of lifestyle was important to me and I saw it with the Columbans. Many have shown

it to me. When I see some insisting on “nice” things, it bothers me still.

I recently left the parish of St. Mary’s in Fontana, California after 13 years as pastor. Before me were two other Columban pastors and five or six other Columbans. It is fair to say that most of us lived fairly simply and the people noticed it. And they noticed how we were not overly directive in our styles of leading the community. Being “missionaries,” we had learned in our overseas experience to “inculturate,” to appreciate that there are many ways to “skin a cat” and we don’t have all the answers. So, while many pastors insist that things be done their way, we often allow things to unfold more organically. And many folks appreciate it. In a way, we were practicing what Pope Francis called

It’s very hard to pin down what impact we have actually had because we don’t know what would have happened if we weren’t there. The Spirit moves as the Spirit moves.

“synodality” before we knew the word. We were watching and listening, trusting that people know more than we realize. This gives the people faith in themselves and their leadership abilities.

Here in Omaha, the Columbans have a “Community Garden” with 45 little plots for folks in the area to grow their own food. Very small, but we insist they be organic. I’m new here but I’ve always liked to garden. The garden is a place where people can work together, exchange ideas and food, and reinforce our desire to grow healthy food for our families and live a little outside the corporate culture of packages and plastic. They already know a lot, but our being with them here reinforces all of our commitment to simplicity and in a tiny way our sense of community. It’s good for everyone to have some different kind of people among them. That’s who we are as missionaries.

Fr. Al

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