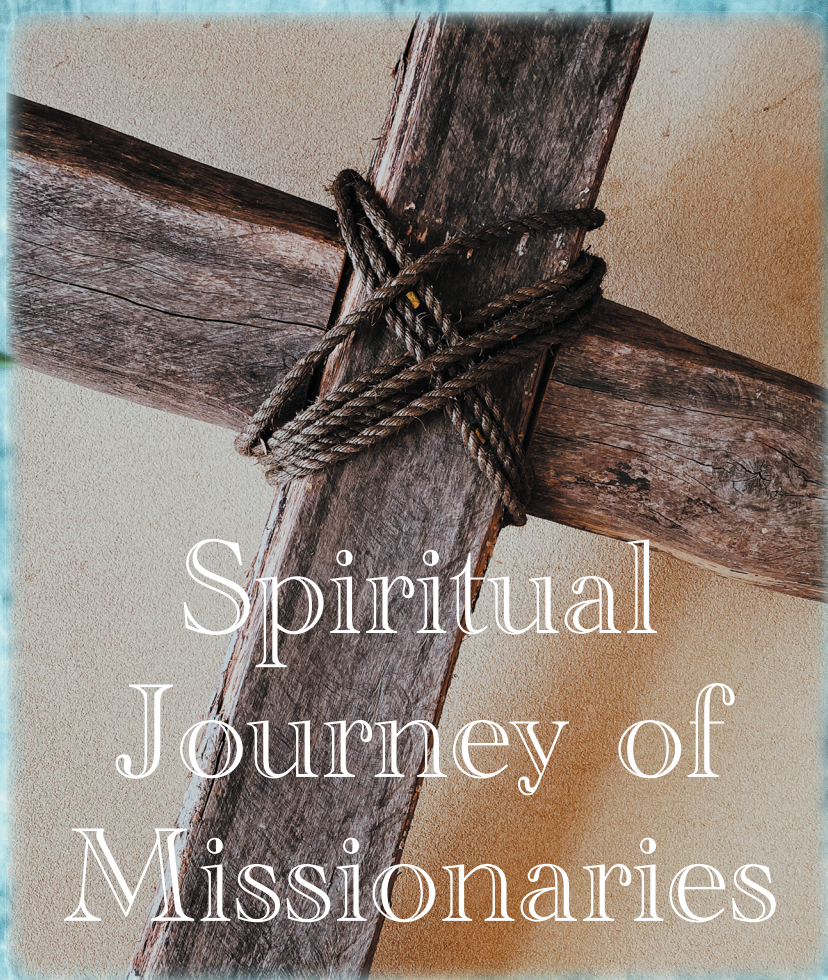




# Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

March/April 2025



Spiritual  
Journey of  
Missionaries



# C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Spiritual Journey of Missionaries

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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 Fr. Timothy Mulroy

## A Neighbor in Need

The season of Lent invites us to alternate between meditating on Jesus as He embraces His cross going with outstretched arms to assist our neighbor in need. Can you imagine, however, doing both of these activities at the same time? As one of the many legends about St. Kevin illustrates, such an imaginative, prayerful exercise might require us to ponder deeply on the ways in which God calls to us from the natural world, as well as to radically expand our thinking about who to include in our list of neighbors in need.

Living as a hermit in the remote countryside in the sixth century, St. Kevin was praying one day with his gaze turned to the sky and his arms outstretched to the world, so that his body posture resembled a cross. Such was his concentration that he remained perfectly still.

A blackbird, which happened to be flying nearby in search of a secure place to build her nest, spotted him and alighted on the palm of one of his hands. Upon realizing that she had found not just a sturdy “branch” but also a serene setting, she proceeded immediately to gather twigs, leaves, grass and mud to build her nest there. Then, during the following weeks, she laid her eggs, hatched them, and tended to her chicks until they were ready to fly.

And what about St. Kevin? According to the legend, once it dawned on him that the blackbird was including him in her plans that spring, he decided to cooperate with her, and maintained a fixed posture while engaging in fervent prayer throughout the entire period.

How long might that have been? The task of building a nest generally takes the female blackbird from one to two weeks. Once completed, she lays her eggs over a three-to-five-day period and then hatches them during the following two weeks. It takes a further two weeks for the chicks to open their eyes, grow feathers, and develop the strength and confidence to take their first flight. A grand total of about 40 days!

The season of Lent also spans 40 days. Since the blackbird begins building her nest in early March – and Ash Wednesday frequently falls around that time, can you imagine how St. Kevin labored throughout that Lenten season? And the ecstasy that he must have felt when the brood of chicks took flight at Easter!



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*An imaginative, prayerful exercise might require us to ponder deeply on the ways in which God calls to us from the natural world, as well as to radically expand our thinking about who to include in our list of neighbors in need.*

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This story is one of several concerning St. Kevin’s devotion not only to God but also to the natural world. While most of them are legends, they have succeeded in capturing the imagination of so many people throughout the centuries. These legends continue to resonate in our hearts because they remind us that we are stewards of God’s creation and that this responsibility entails Lenten commitment and sacrifice so that our feathered and furry neighbors might also share in Easter joy.

*Fr. Timothy Mulroy lives and works in Ireland.*





The Opening Vision (Rev 1)

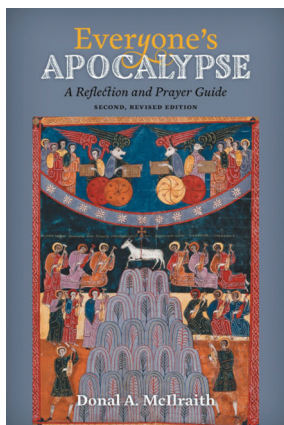


Kings Worship the Dragon and the Beast (Rev 13)

# Writing Everyone's Apocalypse — Again

## Loving and Believing in Jesus

By Fr. Donal McIlraith



The Columbans sent me to study scripture in Rome back in the 1970s. Eventually, the Jesuits gave me a doctorate for finding “love” in the Apocalypse. I just but did end up doing a thesis entitled “The Reciprocal Love between Christ and the Church in the Apocalypse” under a very wonderful Jesuit professor, the late Fr. Ugo Vanni at the Gregorian University. As I was

finishing my studies in Rome in September 1988, our then superior General, Fr. Bernard Cleary, called me and told me there had been a request for my services in the Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva, Fiji. They would be willing to

release me there for a year, but I should be ready to leave at the end of the year if required. What did I think? I said yes and arrived in Fiji on March 25, Holy Saturday, 1989, taking up residence at the seminary under Fr. Larry Hannon SM, the Rector. I started teaching and as there have been no further phone calls, I am still teaching there. I get to teach the Apocalypse once a year.

Vatican II asked that people have access to the scriptures (DV 22) and in response I decided to write as simple, clear and as accurate a commentary of the Apocalypse as I could for the people of Fiji. I did this in a series of articles for the weekly Fiji Catholic newspaper, the Contact, founded — and refounded — by Columban Fr. Dermot Hurley and at that time edited by Mr. Mika Turaga. It was taken up in Tongan by its local Catholic newspaper, the Taumua Lelei. Since I had all the articles on the computer, I decided to make a book of it, added to and edited what I had,





The New Jerusalem (Rev 21)



The Adoration of the Lamb on Mt. Zion

and included appendices. Perhaps the most valuable one was the four-page one that gave the main Old Testament allusions found in many verses of this book. I managed this by copying them from a book Fr. Vanni had published in which he gave each Apocalypse verse on one page and on the opposite page he printed the Old Testament text to which this verse alluded. I just gave the references, chapter and verse without the text.

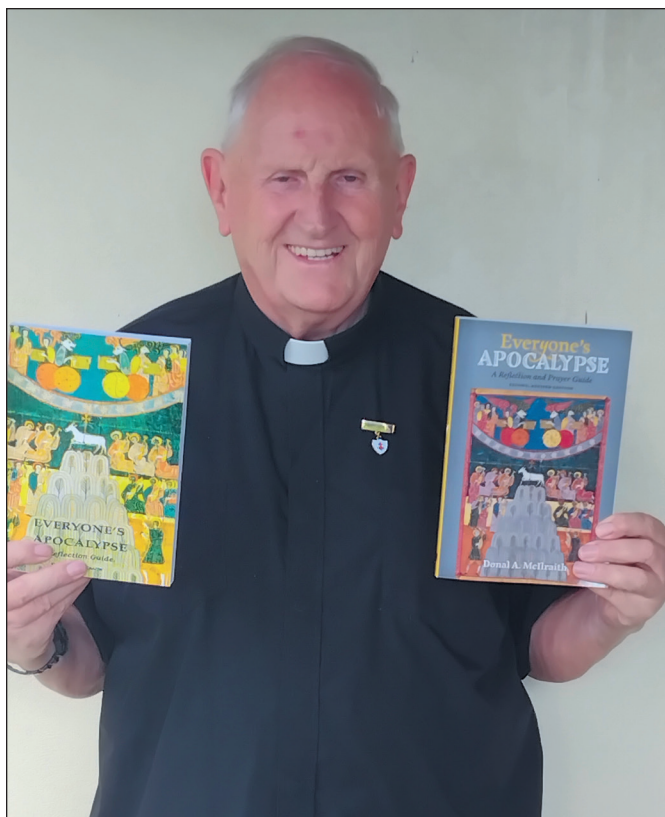
With the help of our wonderful secretary, Mrs. Morven Sidal at the SPATS office where I helped out (the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, still prospering), I published 1000 copies of Everyone's Apocalypse for about 2000 Fiji dollars (less than 1000 Euro). My uncle, Canon Seamus Corkery of Charleville, Cork, Ireland, my other maternal uncle, Tadhg, of Mallow and other priests on my home diocese of Cloyne, especially Fr. (later Canon) Jackie Corkery, assisted financially. I was able to sell it for about 5 Fiji dollars, an affordable price here in Fiji. I have since managed to reprint it three or four times and it has been translated into Fijian and Samoan. Some U.S. seminaries found it useful including St. Charles in Philadelphia and the Saint Paul Seminary in Minnesota. I had taught in both places at various times.

Why did I want to write it? Well, many people are fearful of this wonderful last book of the bible with its

dragon, beasts and fearful visions of the end. I suppose I was also until I met Fr. Vanni and attended his courses. They opened my eyes to see that this was a really marvelous book about the Risen Jesus who gets authority over history and all its rulers from God his Father, Jesus who leads us, the Church, to heaven.

It is full of symbols that puts people off. But we all know that the Lamb is not an animal but a symbol of Jesus, who gave his life in love for us, just as the Pascal Lamb was sacrificed and given to the People of Israel and his blood enabled them to escape from Egypt. In fact, the Lamb means Bridegroom in this book as we learn from the passage "the Marriage of the Lamb has come" in Rev 19:7. We find that Jesus is the bridegroom and we are his beloved wife and, finally, in heaven, his Bride. The book opens with the Bridegroom, the Risen Jesus. The text shows him leading us like a shepherd and guide from being his espoused Wife to his beloved Bride, the image with which the entire book — and the Bible — ends. Yes, there is the dragon, Satan, who tries his best to stop Jesus, and us from getting there, using beasts, symbols of atheistic governments or power structures that try to obliterate Christianity, but God, the creator of all, only allows these limited power and Jesus prevails in bringing his Bride(us) to glory.





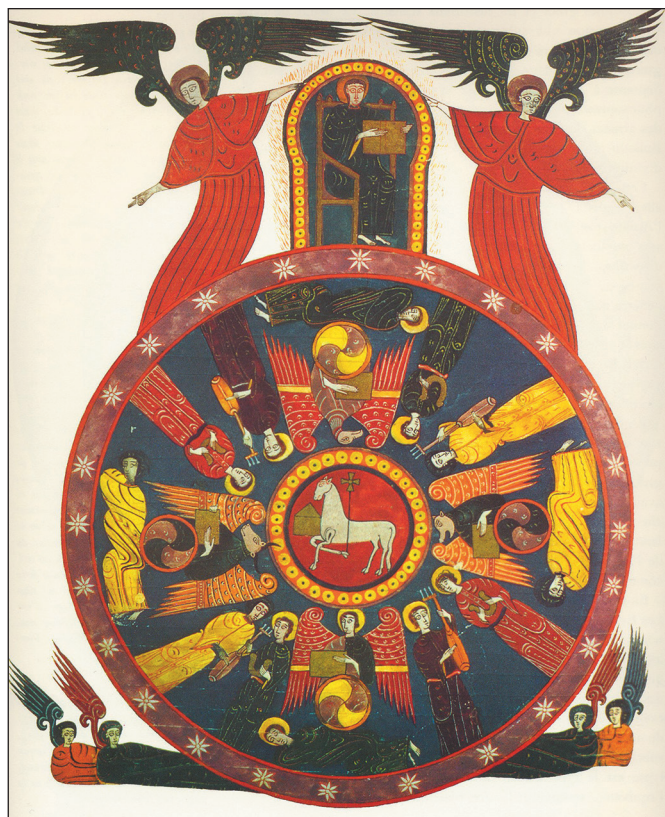
Fr. Donal McIlraith

So, the Apocalypse is really a love story or perhaps, more accurately, the final chapter of the ultimate love story between God and us that began with creation and was reflected in the love of Adam and Eve, created in the image of Jesus and his bride. It is the happily-ever-after story to beat them all. The key is loving and believing in Jesus. I thought everyone should be helped to see this.

And then, in June 2023, I had an email from Dr. Kevin Zilverberg, the editor of the St. Paul Seminary Press, saying their students found the book useful and they would like to reprint it. I was delighted but said “Yes” and “No.” I told them I was delighted with their request but that so much fine material had been printed on the Apocalypse since I wrote the book that I needed to revise it. They agreed and gave me until April 2024 to finish it.

What a year it was! Every minute from teaching and Columban duties (light, since I am supposed to be retired) was given over to the revision. I followed my original outline, basically Fr. Vanni’s critical structure of the book, based on his careful doctoral study of its Greek structure, and kept some of my original material but rewrote the text.

Essentially, I highlighted that this is a love story showing the nuptial love between Jesus and us. This was present in the first edition but I used it as a key to interpret the entire book in this edition. I was helped in this by an academic article I wrote that argued on this. In this article,




The Throne and the Lamb

I outlined the marriage imagery as fully as I could, as it is found in the text. It makes most sense when you see it as a first-century Jewish marriage (like the wedding in Matthew 22 and the bridegroom coming for the wise virgins in Matthew 25 and Cana in Jn 2). I also presented my analysis of the nuptial love between Jesus and us, his wife, the study I had done under Fr. Vanni. I was encouraged when the article was accepted by a well-known Catholic theological magazine called *Communio*. They published it in their Summer 2024 edition.

The deadline was moved to March 15: Ouch. It made for a frantic final month but by God’s grace, I got it done. Fr. Zilverberg was most helpful throughout. We managed to include about 10 full-color illustrations from the 8<sup>th</sup> century commentary by the Spanish Abbot, Beatus. I had used lots of Beatus pictures in the original book but only in black and white as I could not afford color.

Much proofreading followed, mine and theirs together and finally, it was finished. I hope it helps people appreciate this sacred text as the final word on the great love story between our Risen Lord Jesus and us, his beloved wife and, hopefully one day, His Bride in the glory of divine love, the destiny of humankind.

The book is available in paperback and e-book form from the St. Paul Seminary Press, St. Paul, Minnesota. 

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Columban Fr. Donal McIlraith lives and works in Fiji.





# Help Future Generations with a Donation Today

Your gift helps people break the chains of addiction through Columban programs like the Rebirth Rehabilitation Center in Myanmar (formerly Burma).



***Thanks to the generosity of the Columban donors we were able to complete and open the first residential center in the country for women suffering from addiction. In addition, the program provides vocational education training to help young men obtain jobs. We hope to expand this program and offer the men and women who come here a path productive employment and ongoing recovery.***

By making a gift from your IRA, you can provide long-lasting support for the Missionary Society of St. Columban while enjoying financial benefits for yourself.

If you want to make help the Missionary Society of St. Columban spread the Light of Christ around the world, a gift from your IRA will make a tremendous impact on our mission. If you are 70½ or older you may also be interested in a way to lower the income and taxes from your IRA withdrawals.

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

- Avoid taxes on transfers of up to \$100,000 from your IRA to our organization
- May satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year
- Reduce your taxable income, even if you do not itemize deductions
- Make a gift that is not subject to the deduction limits on charitable gifts
- Help further the work and mission of our organization

If you are 70½ or older, you can use your IRA to fulfill your charitable goals. You can use the "Make a Gift from My IRA" tool to contact your IRA custodian and make a qualified charitable distribution. We will acknowledge your generous gifts as a qualified charitable distribution, which may satisfy your RMD, if applicable.

For more information, please contact us at [donorrelations@columban.org](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.





Fr. Kurt, left

# The Crosses We Carry

## Being Hopeful

By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala

Myanmar, formerly Burma, was for a little while hopeful after it held its very first democratic elections after a long time. But it did not last long, soon after the pandemic the military declared a coup declaring that there was massive cheating after its last elections in 2021. But the people had already gained access to greater education and freedom through the internet. They were able to encounter the world outside of Myanmar.

Now years after the coup, many areas of Myanmar are now under control of different ethnic-armed organizations. Myitkyina in the

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*These young people have only one dream and that is to leave the country. Sadly, this has led to many consequences.*

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northernmost part of the country remains in a very fragile situation. Fighting between the Kachin Independent Army with the assistance of many young people who have joined the Peoples' Defense Force (PDF) continues. There would be weeks of shelling in areas around the city. In many townships, the fighting has led to many casualties even among civilians.

On the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, every September 14, a huge crowd of people would gather at the foot of the Holy Cross Mountain and climb it as a pilgrimage and devotion. Last year the Diocese decided to keep the celebrations simple at every parish. The roads to the mountain have been controlled by the Burmese army and many fear being checked and arrested.

I recently returned from Yangon to take a few days off and also to get some resources for the student center. I met many of the alumni of the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina. It was great to see them again after a long





One of the crosses



Singing



At the stations



Reading a reflection

time. This group was one of the first students that joined the movement. I asked one of them, “When are you returning to Myitkyina?” He replied, “Never.” That would be the common answer for many young people who are now displaced by the ongoing war and conflict in every part of Myanmar.

These young people have only one dream and that is to leave the country. Sadly, this has led to many consequences. We are losing badly needed human resources like teachers and mentors. Even in church, I overheard one catechist ask an elderly person to learn to play the keyboard because he explained every time he

trained a young person to play or when the person can already play they leave after a few months for work or abroad.

On the Feast of the Holy Cross, we decided to celebrate with a special Stations of the Cross for the youth. About 40 youth joined the activity. In place of the 14 stations, we highlighted different struggles and challenges young people in Myanmar continue to face today. These represents the 14 crosses of young people which includes the following:

- War and Conflict in Kachin land
- Violence Against Women and Children
- Young persons in prison

- Child Labor
- Climate Change and Pollution
- Internal Displacement
- Poverty
- Mental Health issues
- Human Trafficking
- Access to Education
- Unemployment
- Broken families
- Drug Addiction and HIV /AIDS
- Teenage Pregnancy and Abortion

At every station we read a reflection and pause for a few minutes to pray for young people struggling with the particular situation. We then pray together for the intentions of this young people.





On the journey

On the Last Station, a huge cross was placed in front of the grotto, to remind the young people that they are not alone. The Cross is a reminder to them that there is hope in their suffering and struggles. Life in Myitkyina is not getting easier. Prices of basic commodities have increased. Phone connection is limited and access to the internet has been restricted. Now you need to go to “internet shops” to access the internet.

Returning from Yangon to Myitkyina, I carried very little cash.

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*Life in Myitkyina is not getting easier. Prices of basic commodities have increased. Phone connection is limited and access to internet has been restricted.*

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I was stopped by the immigration at the airport upon seeing the cash I was carrying. For a few seconds I panicked but I got hold of myself. Good thing I still remembered by Burmese so I spoke to them to explain what I am doing in Myitkyina. “Krian Ponjee, I am a Christian monk. I work for the Church. I teach English to young people.” I have to be careful with the words I use to avoid suspicion. That is mostly how I explained myself to people here. The lady officer smiled



Sharing a meal



Concluding the stations


after hearing me speak in Burmese. I was relieved after she told me to go.

Living in Myanmar for the last six years has taught me to start living one day at a time. It is very difficult to plan ahead. Situations can change in an instant. But it has taught me to be grateful for the little things even more. It has taught me to be more compassionate and generous. It has taught me above all to be hopeful.

Help us bring some relief and hope to many distressed young people. Support our Student Learning Resources Center (SLRC) and the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM) movement. We provide important leadership, livelihood and employability skills training to build the resilience and confidence of young people to face these struggles and challenges.

Currently, we welcome 24 new students participating in our Positive Youth Development Certificate Program Batch 4. They will undergo 9 months of training in English, Computer, Accounting, Life-Work Skills, Personal Development and Entrepreneurship Skills.

In the last two years, we have formed and prepared 54 students in the Positive Youth Development Certificate Program but also provided different trainings in English, Computer, Teaching Skills, Leadership Skills and Mental Health Awareness and interventions to hundreds more.

Thank you for your support and prayers. 

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Fr. Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar.



# A Little Girl from Narulang

## Helping Children

By Ana Flores



Ana Flores (front center) with women and children in Narulang community

When I attended Mass in Narulang, I noticed a little girl who was walking with difficulty.

After the Mass, I had a conversation with the girl's mother Jenny about her family. She shared with me that her daughter was born with a problem with her left foot; it was different from the right foot. When the little girl was one month old, they brought her to the Provincial Hospital for a medical check-up, but due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the hospital did not accept them. So, they went back home without any advice.

Jenny also shared about her husband's work and his small salary. She wanted to go back to the hospital, but it was difficult for them because their place is quite far from the city. The family has five children and the father is working on the farm. His meager salary is just enough for their daily food and for sending their children to school. I talked immediately with Columban Fr. Enrique who is the parish priest in that place. He and I decided to help Jenny's family, especially the little girl.

When I was talking with Jenny about her little girl, I remembered a similar experience with two children from my previous ministry. One of them had a problem like the little girl from Narulang. I encouraged the mother to bring him to the hospital for treatment. She agreed. However, it was a long process and she had to spend a lot of money. Sometimes, it is difficult for those families living far

away from the hospital to go through this very tiresome process. For this reason, the mother did not continue with the treatment, particularly because the child was a bit bigger already. He is still walking with difficulty, unlike other children. I feel sorry for him, even though I tried my best. I just could not do more.

The other child was a girl who had a motorbike accident. Her hip was badly affected. When her parents brought her to the hospital, the doctors just took an X-ray and didn't find any problem. So, they sent her back home. After a few days, I saw her walking with difficulty. I asked her mother what was going on. She said that it would be okay after a few weeks. Time passed by, but her condition didn't change. I encouraged her mother to bring her to the hospital again. This time I went with her. I listened to what the doctors said and talked with them about the girl's condition. After all the examinations, they admitted the little girl. It was a long, very hard, and painful process for the little girl. Fortunately, it was very successful. Now she is already 13 years old and walking normally, without any problem. I'm happy for her because now she lives her life with a walking issue.

Having this kind of experience with these two other children, I encouraged Jenny to go back to the hospital and have her daughter receive a medical check-up. By 2022, the situation with the pandemic had become better than in the previous year. The little girl was attended to by

the doctors in the hospital. We helped the family with a small amount, but I needed to follow up on the little girl's improvements. Once a week, they had to go back to the hospital to check and change the cast to see if she had improved or not. This going back and forth to the hospital continued for almost one year. Jennifer, the little girl, had surgery after a year. It went well, and she recovered quickly. Afterward, the doctors recommended special shoes for her to use. She wore the shoes for quite some time. It was also a long, painful process, but again, it was very successful.

Now, I still visit families in Narulang as a part of my ministry. I see the little girl Jennifer running, walking and playing with other children without impediment. I'm really happy for her and her parents because she is continuing to live a happy life. I am just thinking, if children like Jennifer grow up without being treated it will certainly be very difficult and painful for the children and their parents.

I believe that every child has the right to have a good childhood and a better life. However, circumstances in life sometimes prevent them from having it, especially for the poor ones in the community. Jesus encourages us to be like a child, therefore, we need to feel how they feel and find ways to continue helping them to have a healthier and livelier existence. **EM**

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Columban lay missionary Ana Flores lives and works in the Philippines.





Adam Williams



St. Winefrede

# The Columban, the Saint and the Hermit

## Discovering Family Roots in Wales

By Fr. John Boles

“Croeso y Cymru” (Welcome to Wales) announced the sign as we crossed the River Severn, reminding us that the Principality has a language, history and faith tradition quite distinct from those of neighboring England.

Ostensibly we were on routine Columban ministry, undertaking a weekend mission awareness visit to a local parish — myself, in my capacity as Columban priest, and my colleague Mr. Adam Williams as our Mission Appeals Coordinator for Britain. However, we had an ulterior motive. Our destination was the North Welsh town of Holywell, the former home of Adam’s ancestors, and while there we were hoping to discover something of his family roots.

Little did we suspect that a series of adventures awaited us.

As we turned inland from the coast road we were stopped in our tracks by the great brooding presence of Flint Castle, which guards the approach to Holywell. Dating from 1277, Flint was the first of many fortresses that Edward I was to erect during his brutal conquest of Wales.

Further up the valley, we came across another, but rather more comforting, medieval relic, that of Basingwerk Abbey. Built by the Cistercians in 1132, it was testimony to the deep-seated faith of the Welsh people, who’d clung to their Christian beliefs since Roman times. Unfortunately, like all such

foundations, Basingwerk eventually fell foul of Henry VIII’s policy of monastic dissolution and was left in ruins.

On a happier note, we then spied an ecclesiastical jewel that had miraculously escaped the ravages of the sixteenth-century Reformation — the Chapel Shrine of St. Winefrede’s “holy well,” giving its name to the surrounding town of Holywell.

Winifrede is one of those notable Celtic holy figures of the so-called “Dark Ages.” She was active in the 7th century, and, therefore, a near contemporary of St. Columban. According to a colorful legend, Winefrede fled to the church of her uncle, St. Bueno (pronounced Bayno) to defend her virtue against a violent





Columban Fr. John Boles



Sr. Seraphim and Adam

sutor. She wasn't quick enough, and her pursuer proceeded to cut off her head, but as the dismembered head struck the ground a spring of water suddenly gushed forth. Fortunately for Winefrede, Uncle Bueno then dashed out and miraculously restored her to life by placing the errant head back on her torso. She then enjoyed many years as a holy and much-revered nun.

Whatever the truth of this tale, Holywell became a great place of pilgrimage, first for the Welsh, then for the conquering English. The present structure is an unusual two-story affair, a magnificent example of late medieval "Perpendicular-style" architecture. An upper chapel protects a well crypt below, where gorgeous fan vaulting covers the famous spring and pilgrims' bathing pool. The fact that the shrine was able to "re-brand" itself as a parish church saved it from the attention of the Reformers.

Adam and I were royally entertained by the Bridgettine Sisters at the Pilgrims' Hostel before celebrating the weekend Masses and seeking out evidence of Adam's family roots. We were directed to Holywell Cemetery. Located on a hillside overlooking an impressive stretch

of the North Welsh Coast, it is a graveyard as beautiful as it is peaceful. There, we traced the resting places of many members of the Williams family. We knelt and prayed a while by the graves of Noel and Edith, Adams' great-grandparents.

However, our search was not over. In fact, the best was yet to come.

Adam was anxious to locate the last family home the Williamses had lived in before emigrating to England. Tantalizingly, the kind Sisters at the hostel recognized Adam's description of the place as the one currently serving as a modern-day hermitage, occupied by a Poor Clare Sister, duly registered as a hermit by the Bishop of Wrexham.

Knowing roughly where the house lay, we proceeded to knock on doors in and around the vicinity, eliciting some rather bemused reactions from the neighbors as we asked in turn, "Excuse me but, by any chance, does a hermit live here?" Fortunately, the lady in question was fairly well known, and finally, we found ourselves being greeted by an overwhelmingly active and cheerful 80-year-old nun who — by an incredible coincidence — had chosen the former residence of the

Williams family as her hermitage some forty years ago.

Delighted to see us, Sister Seraphim recounted her remarkable life history. As a child she'd been given to an orphanage and raised by nuns. Sensing she had a religious vocation herself she later asked to join them but was turned down because of doubts regarding her academic ability. Determined to prove them wrong, she left the convent, got a job, arranged for her own further education and re-applied to the Poor Clares, now armed with outstanding academic qualifications. After serving her Order in a "conventional" manner, she then felt God was calling her to serve Him in a rather less orthodox fashion, as a hermit, and now joyfully lives out her calling both through prayer and as a renowned scholar of ancient Hebrew literature and the Jewish Scriptures.

It is true that God has a plan for all of us, through many generations. Sometimes, those plans reveal themselves to be fascinating, varied and Faith-filled, like that of Columban co-worker Adam Williams. **CM**

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Columban Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.





Making lunch



Enjoying the week!

# Children Delight in an Action-Packed Week

## A Unique Winter School Holiday Program

By Fr. Dan Harding

July is the coldest month of the year in Santiago, Chile, with the nearby Andes Mountain Range covered in snow. July is also time for the two-week winter school holidays. It is a difficult time of the year, especially if one comes from a disadvantaged family with few holiday options for their children.

San Matias is a large, sprawling Columban parish on the southern periphery of Santiago, Chile. It is known for its many social problems,

such as poverty, unemployment, crime, substance abuse, violence, gangs, and drug trafficking. During the winter school holidays, many of the children of the parish become confined to their apartment blocks due to these surrounding social conditions as well as the cold. They have very little to do all day.

To reach out to the many underprivileged children of the parish, a unique Winter School Holiday

program was organized for July. It came about thanks to the coordinated efforts of three groups working with the Columban missionaries.

### The Three Groups

The first group consisted of the parishioners of San Matias Parish, including a team of female volunteers in charge of buying and preparing food each day, and a local high school teacher who organized the calendar of activities and the roll call each morning.

The second group included Columban seminarians from Korea — Pepe Seong from San Matias Parish and Ambrosio Shim from San Columbano Parish — on their two-year First Mission Assignment (FMA) in Chile.





The third group was made up of three participants of the Columban SIM program in Chile (Society Invitation to Mission), which offers interested persons opportunities to participate in mission with Columbans in the countries where Columbans work for different periods. The three SIM participants were: Danny Sweeney from England for a one-year mission experience in Chile; Josh Eagan from Ireland for a ten-week experience in Chile; and Francisco Martinez from San Columbano Parish, Santiago, Chile, for a six-week experience in his home country.

### **How Was This Program Organized?**

The program was organized for the first week of July from Monday to Saturday. Three nourishing meals, plus morning and afternoon tea, were provided each day with lunch the principal meal of the day. This was greatly appreciated by parents as sometimes poor families struggle to provide adequate nourishment for their growing children.

After much publicity from the parish priest, Columban Fr. Genovio Cho, the parents of 60 children enrolled their children ranging in age from eight to fifteen years. The chapel where the program took place, has a youth center located next to a large public park.

Each day began with morning prayer and Bible stories provided by a visiting congregation of religious Sisters. After this, the children were divided into four groups, which would rotate morning and afternoon between the four workshops that were offered.

### **The Four Workshops**

#### **1. Korean cuisine and culture:**

Our two Korean seminarians, Pepe and Ambrosio, held cooking classes in Korean cuisine and other special craft activities such as paper folding. Korean Columban and parish priest, Fr. Genovio Cho, also helped in this popular workshop.

**2. Self-Defense Classes:** English SIM volunteer, Danny Sweeney, taught basic self-defense moves in his workshop. Danny has a black belt in Jujutsu and studied under a Jujutsu Master in China.

**3. Basic Fitness and Irish Football:** Irish university student in Physical Education and SIM volunteer, Josh Egan, taught fitness skills with balls, cones and hoops and many other moves, as well as the basics of Irish Football.


**4. Rugby Union Football:** Chilean SIM volunteer Francisco Martinez taught Rugby, which he had played at the university in Santiago. By Saturday, two teams were ready for a small match.

### **The Special Friday Outing**

A bus was hired on Friday to bring the children and accompanying adults across the city to the Natural History Museum in Santiago and the nearby Our Lady of Lourdes Basilica. This was a wonderful opportunity for the children to visit new places, have new experiences, and to bond as a group.

### **Saturday, The Final Day**

The Winter School Holiday program finished on Saturday with a special Mass, followed by a lunch of Chilean hot dogs. There were plenty of tears and pleas to be able to continue during the second week of the school holidays but sadly, this was not possible.

The smiles of contentment on the children's faces showed that this Winter School Holiday program had been a resounding success. They made new friends, learned new skills, and had many memorable experiences. The parents who collected their children were also very grateful to the Columbans. Both parents and children asked many times whether this experience would be repeated next winter. 

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Columban Fr. Daniel Harding lives and works in Australia.





# Encouraging Educators

## A Tough Mission

By Fr. Louie Ybanez

Looking after the schools in six villages is a huge task that requires constant monitoring. There are many challenges we face, most of which have always been enduring problems for many years. A renewed vision with an action plan in place for these schools is needed.

Part of the plan is to train teachers with the necessary skills for teaching. This includes class preparations like syllabus breakdown and lesson planning to hopefully go through the lessons for the entire year smoothly. It is our hope that the teachers will advance in their careers and develop not only skills but also a passion for honing young minds in the village. The teachers' educational backgrounds are not up to the standard and thus there is a need to facilitate constant workshops for them to acquire knowledge in class

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*It is our hope that the teachers will advance in their careers and develop not only skills but also a passion for honing young minds in the village.*

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preparations and teaching strategies.

We have a total of seventeen teachers in six primary schools which is an insufficient number considering that the six schools cater to children from kindergarten to class five. Many of them are multi-grade teachers — handling two or three classes in one setting. Both learners and teachers suffer when the teacher is unable to cope up with the demands of teaching in this kind of setting. This as well is one of the aims of the workshop – to

teach teachers to devise a scheme to manage multi-grade classrooms.

Part of the constant challenge is also the children's attendance due to seasonal migrations. Our children are mostly Parkari Kohli Christians and Hindus with one school having a few Muslims. They come from families of "Haris" or farm daily wage workers. Most of the schools are built on land owned by the church. Children have easy access to these schools on foot but during harvest seasons, which could be several periods during the year as they cultivate different crops within a year, the children are taken by their parents when they go for labor work. This disturbs the rhythm of the school and affects the aptitude of the children being able to learn. For a family challenged by the quagmire of poverty, putting food on the table is the utmost





priority and education is of something at the periphery.

We hope to be able to respond to this problem by encouraging our teachers to follow-up on the children by meeting the parents to discourage this practice and at the same time to hopefully formulate a lesson program which will enable the children to catch up with the lessons when they return.

The odds are enormous and they could weaken the will in us to face many issues. “It is tough in the mission!” as one confrere here would exclaim in a rather antithetical manner when one is a bit slack. I say that, it is equally tough when one finds oneself not having the right attitude or just trying to endure the work that one is compelled to do. In any work in the mission, there is a call to go beyond mere submission,

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*For a family challenged by the quagmire of poverty, putting food on the table is the utmost priority and education is of something at the periphery.*

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to push one’s self to advance the Gospel values; in this case, making sure that teachers have the vision for the vocation that they are called for as educators and that they will own to themselves this call — not falling into being neither hot nor cold. For this attitude can affect not only those who render service but especially those at the receiving end, the future of the children in the village is at stake.

When I applied for college, I had this feeling that a teaching job

would not be suitable for me, that I didn’t have the right attitude and the drive to endure being a teacher or to be involved in any work related to education.

Yet here in Pakistan together with a fellow Filipino Columban Fr. Jerry Lohera, we are juggling parish work, looking after six village schools, and I am also doing a teaching stint in the minor seminary of the diocese— something I didn’t expect myself to be doing.

The call is to go beyond how I see myself and my leanings and to look at how to courageously respond to what is there before us — in this case encouraging our teachers to be noble educators. **CM**

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Columban Fr. Fr. Louie Ybanez lives and works in Pakistan.



# Dialogue, Faith and Friendship

## Our Hope Is in Christ

By Fr. John Burger

Five relationships are fundamental to traditional Chinese Confucian thought. Together they emphasize the importance of social order and interpersonal dynamics. These five are:

- Ruler and subject
- Father and son
- Elder brother and younger brother
- Husband and wife
- Friend and friend

These relationships exemplify the proper roles and responsibilities within society, guiding people to fulfill their duties and maintain harmony. Confucianism emphasizes the importance of respecting and fulfilling one's role within these relationships.

Where should we characterize the relationship between the Missionary Society of St. Columban (originally founded for mission work in China) and the Catholic Church in China today? Well, the “friend and friend”

relationship is probably where we Columban missionaries would prefer to see ourselves placed. That position was given affirmation recently when I attended the 29<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the U.S.- China Catholic Association at DePaul University in Chicago. The theme of the conference was “Our Hope is in Christ.”

At the opening session of the conference, Dr. Anthony E. Clark of Whitworth University spoke movingly. He retold an ancient Chinese parable about how “when one keeps the hill green, there is no fear of looking for firewood.” Dr. Clark then went on to give a short historical survey illustrating how over centuries, despite difficulties, the hill of Chinese Catholicism has been kept green despite multiple setbacks. He also spoke of how Matteo Ricci advocated the friend-and-friend approach to evangelization. Incidentally, just last

year, recognizing that Matteo Ricci “lived the Christian virtues to a heroic degree,” Pope Francis officially put the famous 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian Jesuit missionary to China on the path to sainthood declaring him venerable.

The Sino-Vatican agreement of 2018 that was renewed in 2020 has been controversial, but Dr. Clark reminded us that as one can read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “To avoid rash judgment, everyone should be careful to interpret insofar as possible his neighbor's thoughts, words, and deeds in a favorable way: Every good Christian ought to be more ready to give a favorable interpretation to another's statement than to condemn it.”

Father Augustine Tsang, S.J., from Taiwan and Bishop Junmin Pei from Manchuria gave hope-filled talks about the creative pastoral initiatives being carried out in China, despite challenges related to urbanization, secularization, materialism and fewer vocations.

There is indeed much work to be done. Although she was not the last to speak, I would like to close this article by quoting Maryknoll Sister Antoinette Gutzler who, speaking of doing theology in East Asia, quoted the sage, Chuang Tzu, who in his story of the woodcarver said:

*“I am only a workman;  
I have no secret. There is only this:  
When I began to think about the work  
you commanded, I guarded my spirit,  
did not expend it on trifles that were not  
to the point.  
I fasted in order to set my heart at rest.”* **EM**



Fr. Burger with Raymond Lee, a Maryknoll seminary student from Hong Kong

Columban Fr. John Burger lives and works in the U.S.





# 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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- 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.



# A Letter from Taiwan

## Gifts from God

By Bae Sihyeon

I live with the Atayal community, who call me by my aboriginal name, MaHong. I serve in the eight churches which make up the parish nestled in the mountains of the Hsinchu diocese, Taiwan. As a member of the parish team, my ministry includes celebrating Communion services, visiting parishioners in the hospital, facilitating youth activities, community gatherings and house prayers.

Most indigenous people make a living by growing various varieties of fruit such as persimmons and peaches and growing vegetables. In the past, roe deer, wild pigs, and flying squirrels were hunted and eaten as staple foods, but now the tradition of hunting continues only for recreation or special celebrations.

Sometimes I help the parishioners with their work to understand them better. In the beginning, it wasn't easy, and I felt anxious because I had no experience, but it was an excellent way to be with parishioners and get to know them.

Recently, I harvested oranges for the first time. We gathered very early in the morning and headed to the top of the mountain, where the slope was steep and narrow. When we reached there, we began picking oranges. Oranges are harvested from mid-November to mid-March. This is good for the people's livelihood because oranges are very popular and in demand during Lunar New Year.

Since it was my first time, I only took oranges from low-lying branches. I noticed how firmly each branch bore



Bae, left, with village women harvesting oranges


plentiful fruit, reminding me of the sturdy way these farmers, as parents, also care for their own children. Looking at the parishioners, their families are like these oranges - the fruit are like their children, each varying in size and color, and yet all coming from the same tree. At that moment, I remembered the heart of God. How amazing it was for God to take care of each person, each piece of fruit. It became an enriching and meaningful time for me, harvesting oranges and feeling gratitude to God.

During our lunch break, we enjoyed a simple, yet delicious “bento” lunch box. After finishing our meal, I was surprised to see everyone heading in different directions. When I asked what we were to do next, one parishioner said, “MaHong, rest!” After watching them find shade and stretch out on paper boxes, I followed their lead and also laid down on the ground. The gentle breeze lulled me to sleep. In that moment, that same breeze made me aware of God's subtle presence.

After our nap, we went back to work. After harvesting, we packed the oranges in a well-organized group effort, wherein each person was assigned various tasks such as sorting, checking each orange, filling, and marking each box. Each task is important to keep the process going quickly. My part was to check that the oranges were sorted by size. I had to keep pace with the rest while watching each take up their allotted task. It

gave me great comfort and strength to share the joy and reward of our hard work together this way. Afterwards, we gathered to celebrate the day's work with snacks, drinks, and shared stories.

I learned about the parishioner's gratitude to God for the abundance of the harvest, humbly aware of how much they relied on God for their livelihood. Being with the aborigines has enriched my life and taught me the importance of gratitude. They have experienced difficult times, like the fire that destroyed one of the churches a few years ago. We began finding ways to make rebuilding the church a reality. Now, six years later, we have only raised half of the funds, so we continue our efforts in fundraising, despite setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The community's resilience and constant faith is inspiring. Living with the aborigines, I have learnt about God's love for a neighbor who is sick, prayer for others in times of difficulties, and sharing our burdens. I appreciate how our meetings and farewells consist of the common Chinese Catholic greeting of praying to God to bless the other - “Tianzhu Baoyou “ (May God bless you and protect you) — and the local Atayal greeting “Lokah “ (Cheer up!). Through the lives of the parishioners, I can feel the living God and learn to practice love. For me, this is a significant gift from God, and it brings me joy and happiness as I continue living as a missionary. 

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Columban lay missionary Bae Sihyeon lives and works in Taiwan.





# Shout for Joy

## Experience of Empowerment

by Columban Sisters

The Community of Hope Special Education Center is a religious and charitable organization run by the Columban Sisters. It delivers services to children and youngsters with disabilities in Ozamiz City, Philippines, and its neighboring towns in Misamis Occidental aimed at making a difference to their lives. The love of God becomes a reality for them as they see their own transformation. At present the Center is providing services to 125 children and young adults with disabilities. They receive physiotherapy and other rehabilitation services.

Leslie is a youngster with autism and an intellectual disability. In addition, she also has a potassium deficiency. Eating bananas and more exposure to the sun are not enough anymore. The medication she gets at the Center strengthens her muscles to enable her to stand and walk. She was only 10 years old when she was referred to the Community of Hope Special Education Center by the principal of her school.

She was defiant and disobedient with her teachers as she hated school. She was being bullied both in school and in the community for being perceived as different.

Her mother wanted to give her a good education in preparation for her future. She worked hard selling cakes to add to her husband's meagre income. He was an alcoholic and had no regular job. Later he died of

depression. Her older children got married and had families of their own. She herself was sickly and died when Leslie was only 13 years old. Leslie was the youngest in the family of four.

With her parent's dead, she suffered intensely. She was moved from one relative to another. At one time she stayed with her married older sister who has three children and whose husband does not have a steady income. It did not work. Leslie was back to her old problematic behavior. God, who is rich in mercy and compassion, touched the heart of her paternal married aunt who decided to take her as part of her family. At present she is living with them. Her aunt has become her legal guardian, and it is with Leslie's aunt that we are carrying out the rehabilitation process.


The Community of Hope's social worker drew up a rehabilitation plan for Leslie. The intervention includes pre-academic one-to-one intervention and activities for daily living (ADL) which covers simple, practical and appropriate livelihood skills training. Socialization among her peer group has helped her develop her self-confidence.

Every year, the Community of Hope organizes a Youth Summer Camp. Leslie always looks forward to it. It is the one time of the year that she experiences psychological and emotional security. During this event, there are young people from the community who volunteer to

accompany our young people with disabilities. Each one gets a friend/companion for the duration of the summer camp. The volunteer accompanies the young person and shows care and appreciation for their gifts and talents. Our youngsters feel that they are loved and appreciated. Their whole experience is one of empowerment.

Their smiles and simplicity reflect the compassionate love of God for all people without distinction. Sr. Cecilia says, "Our call and challenge is to love them as they are and to act according to what is appropriate."

Over the years since it was opened the Community of Hope has lived up to its name. It has served more than 1,000 children and young adults who suffer from autism, cerebral palsy, Down's Syndrome, club foot, cleft palate, hearing impairment, as well as those with intellectual disabilities.

Thanks to the programs at the center, some have been able to find work in the local community. In the opinion of Sr. Sophia, who manages the livelihood skills training program, "With faith and trust in God, we are very grateful that we are able to continue to offer these services. Thank you, God, for choosing and giving us the privilege to love, cherish and journey with these youngsters. God is indeed good!" 

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The Columban Sisters in the Philippines provided this article.



# Shepherding Our Children

## A Tough Road

By Fr. Jerry Lohera

**B**ewilderment and compassion are my two dominant feelings when dealing with the realities of our children here in Mother Mary Parish in the southeastern part of Pakistan. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount best suited them but deep inside I have deep protestation about their dire situation's root cause which I don't think pleases God.

In May 2024, Pope Francis convened the children representing more than 100 countries for the first World Children's Day in Rome. The Pope emphasized our vital role in guiding our children in their faith journey, especially in the context of the world that they need to understand and encounter today. At the parish level, it is of great importance that there is a child-friendly environment that allows children to find joy and a sense of belonging in the church's sacramental and liturgical life as well as crafting activities that may foster their involvement in the community.

For the young Parkari Kohli community, journeying with and helping children with faith formation is very crucial because they live in a country that has a very strong influence of Islam and Hinduism in social relations and consciousness among others. Some of these influences are life-giving, like being family-oriented, but others are dehumanizing like religious discrimination among many other social issues. Due to poverty, many of our children have forgotten how to smile, and I feel sad to see this happen. To bring in some fun moments, with the parish team, we bring some coloring materials for the children based on Sunday's Gospel



Children at school



Enjoying playtime at school

reading in the villages that we visit. Here in Pakistan, color especially bright colors, are a creative expression of life, beauty and freedom. A child who holds a crayon in his or her hand for the first time would burst into excitement to do the coloring with the color he or she likes the most.

My childhood had similar challenging conditions which is why I can see myself in them. I must thank my father who taught me many valuable things including to dream big, to believe, to persevere and to have the ability to imagine despite

many challenges. Unfortunately for the children of our village, they are lacking that sort of influence at home. To shepherd them takes a long way, and it is a "road-tough and less traveled," yet it is full of opportunities and a room for creativity. Everything is possible when the entire community works and learns from each other to shepherd and guard our children with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the one who animates us. **CM**

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Columban Fr. Jerry Lohera lives and works in Pakistan.



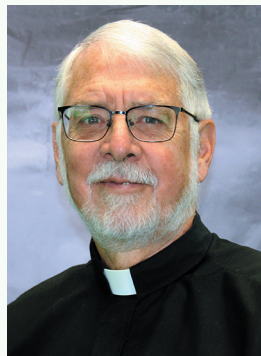
# A Great Blessing

**G**reetings friends of the missionaries of St. Columban. My name is Father Al Utzig. I've been appointed the new Director of the U.S. Region as of St. Columban's Day – November 23 last year.

All of us are very grateful for your continuing support and I would like to introduce myself to you. I am from Pittsburgh, PA. My education was in our local parish school by the Sisters of Charity, then four years in high school by the de la Salle Brothers. I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 1971 with a B.S. degree in Mechanical/Aerospace Engineering. I got a job as an engineer with Pittsburgh Corning Glass in a small town in northern Pennsylvania, where I worked until 1976. I learned to hunt and trap and hike in the mountains. And those were the early days of things like lay readers, Eucharistic ministers, parish councils, etc., in the Church. Getting involved in those ministries as well as doing my best to teach the Bible to high school sophomores helped me to finally make up my mind that my calling was to be a foreign missionary. It was not an easy choice. I had several girlfriends over those years.

After my first ("Spiritual") year, I went straight to theology study. In 1978 I was one of the first Columbans to go on the Overseas Training Program, where I joined two other young men, one Australian and one New Zealander, in Korea.

That was a very challenging time – the language, the culture. I was in the city of Kwangju in 1980 when there was a popular uprising against the military dictatorship and



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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Al Utzig

maybe 2,000 people were killed or disappeared. When I came back to the States to continue my theology studies, I had PTSD, but in those days, nobody understood that. I almost flunked out.

I was ordained a priest in 1983 and went back to Korea where I worked in parishes, was pastor of two, raised funds to build two new churches, worked with young Christian workers, helped in the formation of new Columban students, both Korean and Filipino, and in my last four years lived with a community of three

Columban Sisters and a lay missionary, doing organic farming in a small village. There was a traditional saying there that 'if you don't eat your own poop within three years you die' — the old ways. But now everyone was using chemicals and not recycling compost. We lived with the people, ate with the people, and worked with the people as day laborers on the crops of neighbors. I learned so much in those years and thank God for letting me have that opportunity.

Back in the States I worked helping form young men to become Columban fathers in Chicago, then as hospital chaplain in San Francisco, then in two parishes in Omaha, then in a parish in El Paso, and now, I have been pastor of a parish in Fontana, CA, in the San Bernardino Diocese. Over 90% of the people (over 5000 families) are Hispanic and there are many Filipinos too.

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***We lived with the people, ate with the people, and worked with the people as day laborers on the crops of neighbors. I learned so much in those years and thank God for letting me have that opportunity.***

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I've had to learn Spanish and many different customs to be "Church." This too has been a great blessing to me — different than my Korean experience and different than my Anglo-American experience. I've come to appreciate Our Lady of Guadalupe very much and all the many traditions that go with Christmas and Easter and all the church seasons. In the last 12 years we have raised over \$7 million to build a new church to replace the original adobe 125-seater built in 1939 and the steel warehouse built in 1999. It is almost complete now. When it has been blessed, I will be moving to Omaha to take up more completely my role as Regional Director for the next three years. Please pray for me and for all Columbans. Thank you.

Fr. Al



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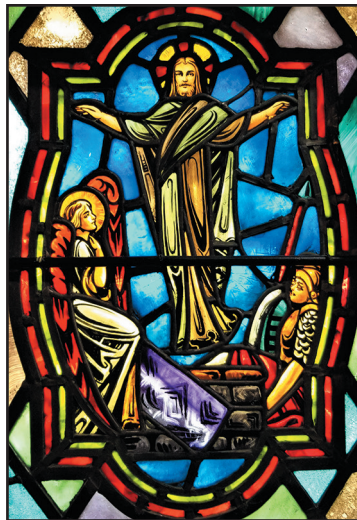
*Columban Mission* magazine is published eight times each year and tells the stories of our missionaries and the people they are called to serve. Columban missionaries live in solidarity with their people and, together, they move forward to improve their social, economic and spiritual lives, always with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

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– St. Luke 24:46-47

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