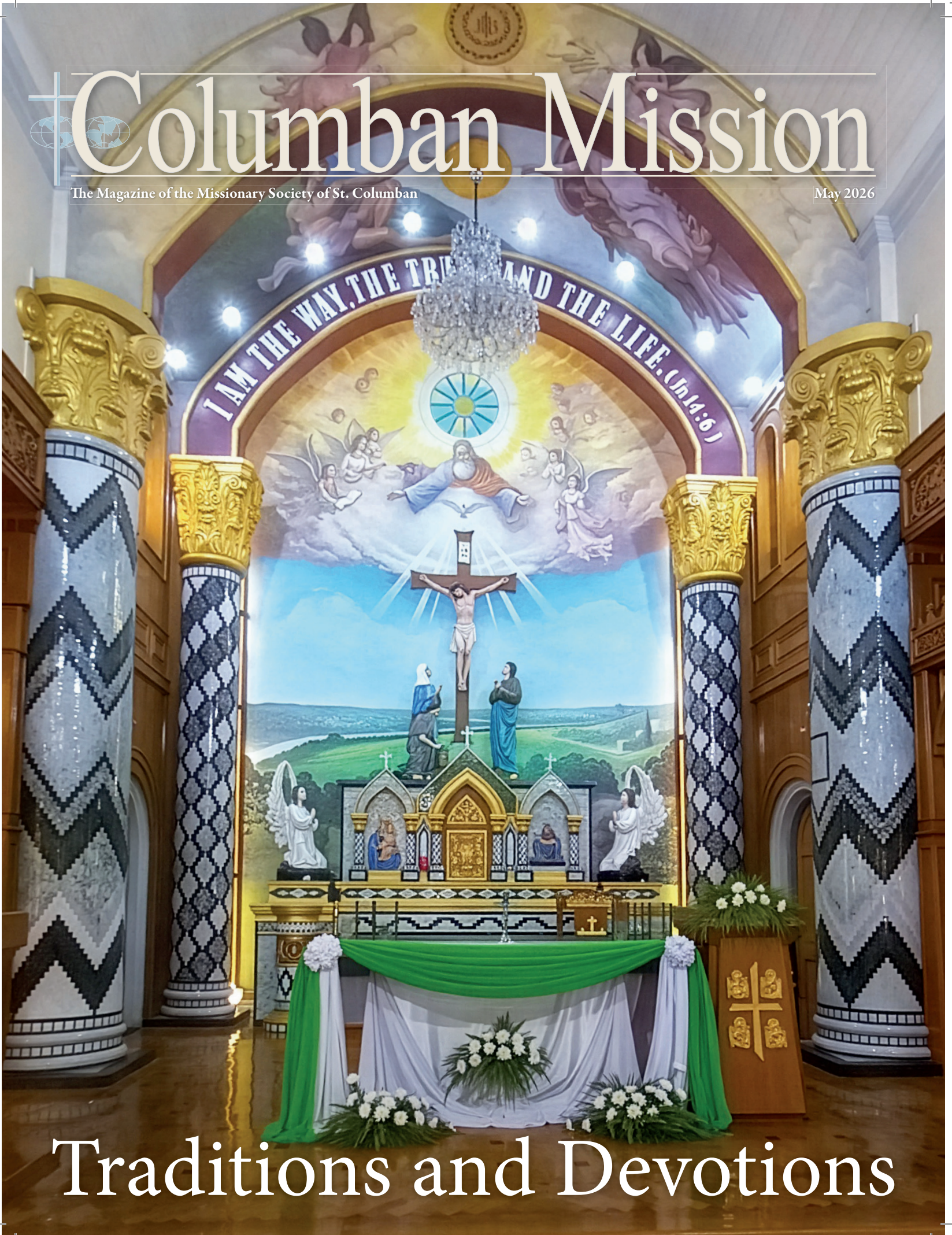


# Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

May 2026



## Traditions and Devotions

# C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Traditions and Devotions



## HEALING AND HELP FROM VEGETABLE PLANTING 12



## ST. COLUMBAN'S CATHEDRAL 22

- 4 **A COVENANT WITH GOD**  
Gift of Wonder
- 6 **A PLACE OF UNCERTAINTY**  
A Symbol of Resilience
- 8 **GIVING TENSION THE BRUSHOFF**  
A Relaxing Hobby
- 10 **LIVING AMONG MIGRANTS**  
A Journey of Hospitality and Grace
- 14 **A WELCOMING CHURCH**  
Healing and Hope
- 16 **ST. MARY'S CHURCH**  
Consecration
- 18 **THE CALLOUSED HANDS**  
Resilience and Love
- 20 **THE FORGIVENESS AND THE HEALING**  
Longing for Wholeness

### DEPARTMENTS

- 3 **IN SO MANY WORDS**
- 23 **FROM THE DIRECTOR**

Volume 110 - Number 3 - May 2026

## Columban Mission

PUBLISHED BY THE COLUMBAN FATHERS

**COLUMBAN MISSION** (Issn 0095-4438) is published eight times a year. A minimum donation of \$15 a year is required to receive a subscription. Send address and other contact information changes by calling our toll-free number, by sending the information to our mailing address or by emailing us at [MISSIONOFFICE@COLUMBAN.ORG](mailto:MISSIONOFFICE@COLUMBAN.ORG).

### MAILING ADDRESS:

Missionary Society of St. Columban  
1902 N. Calhoun St.  
St. Columbans, NE 68056-2000

**TOLL-FREE PHONE:** 877/299-1920

**WEBSITE:** <https://columban.org>

Copyright © 2026, The Columban Fathers (Legal Title)

### PUBLISHER

FR. ALBERT UTZIG  
[DIRECTORUSA@COLUMBAN.ORG](mailto:DIRECTORUSA@COLUMBAN.ORG)

### EDITOR

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

### EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

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

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

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

### GRAPHIC DESIGNER

KRISTIN ASHLEY

### EDITORIAL BOARD

DAN EMINGER  
KATE KENNY  
ERNIE MAY  
FR. ALBERT UTZIG

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.



# Living Streams

Faith traditions are living streams, handed down from generation to generation, shaping not only what people believe but also how they live, hope, and love. These traditions are more than rituals or doctrines preserved from the past; they are pathways that guide communities through the joys and sorrows of human life, offering meaning when answers are scarce and grounding when the world feels unsteady.

At their heart, faith traditions are about memory. They remember sacred stories—of creation and covenant, exile and return, death and resurrection—that remind believers they are part of something larger than themselves. These stories root individuals in a shared history and give them language to interpret their own experiences. In times of suffering, faith traditions recall that hardship is not new and that God has remained faithful across centuries of struggle. In times of joy, they teach gratitude, humility, and praise, recognizing grace at work in ordinary moments.

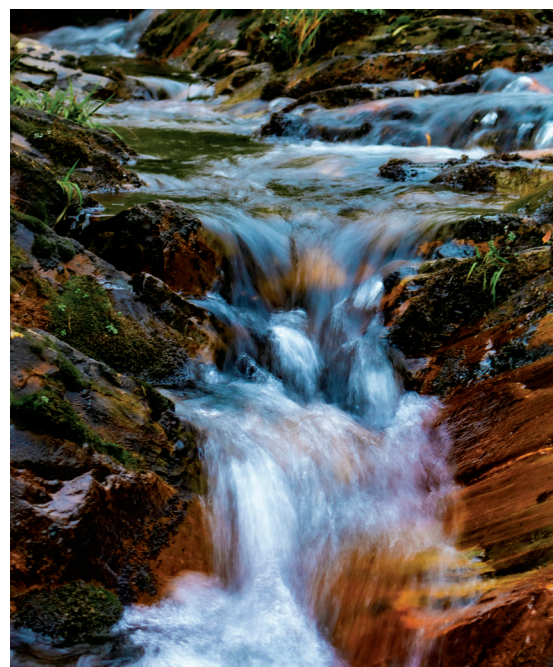
Faith traditions also shape identity. Through prayer, worship, symbols, and seasons, people learn who they are and whose they are. Practices repeated week after week and year after year form the heart in quiet ways. A candle lit in prayer, a psalm spoken aloud, a familiar blessing—all become touchstones that steady the soul. These traditions teach patience and perseverance, reminding us that faith is not a single moment of conviction but a lifelong journey of trust.

---

*Through prayer, worship, symbols, and seasons, people learn who they are and whose they are.*

---

At the same time, faith traditions are not static. They are living realities that must be continually received, interpreted, and embodied anew. Each generation is invited not only to inherit traditions but also to breathe life into them through acts of compassion, justice, and service. When faith traditions are lived authentically, they do not turn us inward but send us outward—to care for the poor, welcome the stranger, heal divisions, and witness to hope in concrete ways.



Faith traditions also create a community. They gather individuals into a group that prays together, mourns together, and rejoices together. In a world often marked by isolation, these shared practices remind us that we do not walk alone. A community formed by faith becomes a place of mutual support and accountability, where doubts can be voiced, questions explored, and faith strengthened through relationship.

Ultimately, faith traditions point beyond themselves. They are signposts directing hearts toward God, inviting deeper trust and surrender. When honored with humility and openness, they become channels of grace rather than barriers, helping believers encounter the divine mystery with reverence and awe. In holding fast to faith traditions while remaining attentive to the Spirit's ongoing work, we discover a faith that is both rooted and alive—capable of sustaining hope, inspiring love, and guiding lives toward God's enduring promise.

*Columban Missionaries*

# A Covenant with God

## Gift of Wonder

By Angelica Escarsa



**M**y encounter with patients during a visitation helped me reflect on my relationship with God as I look at my own journey as a person of faith and a Columban missionary. It prompted me

to consider the significance of having a relationship with God in our lives:

Who is God for me? What are my images of God? Do I love God? How do I communicate with God? How do I nurture my relationship with God?

Reflecting on these questions led me to think back to the very first moment of God's presence in my life, tracing it back to the genesis of my existence in the world.

In Jeremiah 1:5, it is written: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart."

This created an awareness that my relationship with God began from the moment of my conception. I might not have known God then, but God has been loving me always. The fact that I was given the gift of life, given also the opportunity to live in this world, is for me, a person of faith, evidence of this same generous, unconditional love of God. Through the gift of my baptism, I was brought into the Christian life and family when, as a baby, Fr. Sean Anthony Dunne, a Columban priest from Ireland, administered that special sacrament.

Through my parents, the first to make me aware of God's love and mercy, this relationship started to grow and become two-way. As I slowly grew in understanding that God was not the only one working for this relationship, I began to seek God more.

Growing up, my father, though not very religious, had me believe that God is up in heaven and could see everything. Therefore, I should always do good, otherwise God will not be happy with me. That is when I realized God is always there, even if I do not see Him.

In our house, we had different images of Jesus, like Christ the King, The Face of Jesus, The Eye, and the crucifix. When I asked my mother who they were, she would say God. In my innocent mind, I asked how come God has many different faces?

God is in everything that surrounds us, and that is the gift of wonder and awe in God's presence. This then became the very foundation of what I describe as my covenant with God. Once I understood, I realized God is



Angie (right) with Columban Fr. Sean Coyle (center), fellow lay missionary Sherryl Lou Capili, and Sherryl's brother and sister-in-law during a mission appeal at St. Charles Borromeo in Leixlip, Ireland



Angie with Frs. Joe McDonnell and Donie Hogan, celebrating their birthdays together

beyond imagining, that our naked eye cannot grasp and our mind cannot fathom the abundant love and mercy God has for us. Words and images will be too limited to ever imagine and describe the face of God. This is the great mystery of faith that keeps me humble and vulnerable before Him.

This led me to the very words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew when he asked Simon Peter the question, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt.16:13-20)

My understanding of God is fundamental to how I articulate my own relationship with Him. God for me is my creator, the giver of life, my destiny, my strength, my stronghold, my refuge, my savior, my friend, consoler, and protector.

This understanding of God has been influenced by the people around me. I experience God's presence through His people. My parents' understanding, for example, of God as the divine source of all life, helped me to see God as the beginning and the end of everything: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." (Rev 22:13)

This theology evolved, and so did my relationship with God, with the help of my religion teacher, who introduced me to reading the Bible. I

offer my thanks to Fr. Paddy Duggan, who was then our parish priest in Immaculate Conception in Barretto, where I grew up.

My faith continued to be nurtured during my five years of preparation in the Columban College Catechetical Center, founded by Columban Sister, Sr. Maura Dillon. This enabled me to become a Religious and Values Education teacher. Through this experience, I gained more opportunities to grasp the immense and wonderful plan of God in my life.

My missionary journey has certainly opened my relationship with God to become more intimate and personal. I joined the Columban lay mission program at the age of twenty-four, which gave me a new meaning and purpose in life. There were moments of searching and seeking God's assurance that I was truly following the right path. So, it became "Me and My God," and His grand scheme of plan for me. Those were the times when my friends and colleagues started settling down and starting families, getting new jobs, enjoying life with their loved ones and friends around them, while I was a thousand miles away from home. However, through the path I have followed, God has become my home

and my refuge, the One who is with me till the end of time.

However, God has also allowed me to realize that life on earth is only a glimpse of what it will be like with Him for all eternity in heaven. This awareness was brought about by the death of family members during my time as a missionary when I lived far from home. God then became my comfort and solace, especially in those times when grief was my only prayer.

Each step of the way, God has revealed Himself in different situations and unique circumstances. With great trust in His plan, I embrace the life He has asked me to live.

I found myself listening to people who have experienced challenges in life. Some have totally put all their trust in God despite the challenges they face in life. Others lost the faith but were seeking to find a way to open up, once again, their life to God.

With an inner confidence, I offer prayers for them, believing in my heart that God will always be with them just as God is with me every step of the way. ☩

---

Columban lay missionary Angelica Escarsa is from the Philippines. She lives and works in Ireland.

# A Place of Uncertainty

## A Symbol of Resilience

By Fr. Alvaro Martínez and Christina Coronado

Ciudad Juárez, located on the U.S.-Mexico border across from El Paso, Texas, has become one of the most significant transit points for migrants attempting to enter the United States. Between March 2019 and January 2025, thousands of people from Latin America and the Caribbean arrived fleeing violence, economic hardship, and political instability in their home countries.

For many, Juárez became both a temporary refuge and a place of uncertainty, where the dream of reaching the United States clashed with the harsh realities of border control and immigration policies.

The city continues to face serious humanitarian challenges, including overcrowded shelters, limited medical care, food shortages and an ongoing lack of resources to meet basic needs. Migrants often face exploitation, insecurity and emotional strain as they decide whether to remain in the city or return to their countries of origin.

After enduring long waits and complex legal processes under strict U.S. immigration rules, hundreds are now waiting for these bureaucratic procedures to be processed in Mexico. Local residents, community groups, and international organizations have stepped up to help. Churches, non-government organizations (NGOs), and volunteer networks provide food, temporary shelter, medical care, and legal assistance. However, the scale of the crisis means that even these efforts are not enough. Despite the difficulties, Ciudad Juárez has become a symbol of resilience and unity.

It is a place where migrants, residents and aid organizations come together in daily acts of compassion, all



struggling to survive and build a safer, more stable future.

Among the many groups working in Juárez are the Columban missionaries, who support local organizations in caring for migrants.

In 2019, seeing the growing number of families unable to cross into the United States, the Columban missionaries decided to establish the St. Columban Migrant Ministry, which launched a service guided by the four verbs proposed by Pope Francis: Welcome, Protect, Promote and Integrate.

In January 2025, with the new government in the US, many migrants chose to start a new life in Juárez after their plans to travel north were halted. While this provides a sense of stability, it also introduces significant challenges: securing suitable housing, accessing healthcare, enrolling children in school, and helping families adapt to a new environment and culture.

To meet one of the most urgent needs, the Columban missionaries, through their Ministry for Migrants, launched a program to sponsor 150

migrant children and enroll them in local schools. This ambitious effort involves more than just finding legal schools; it also requires preparing legal paperwork, providing uniforms, school supplies, books and meals for children. Their families also receive guidance and support to help them integrate into the community.

The Columban missionaries believe that education is key to protection and change. Keeping kids in school protects them from drug dealers, gangs, and street dangers. More importantly, it gives them hope: the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and build a better future.

When these children are educated, loved, and supported, they grow personally and bring light and strength to the entire community. In their smiles, the Columban missionaries see the reflection of God's love, a reminder that every act of kindness restores dignity and renews faith in humanity. **EM**

---

Columban Fr. Alvaro Martínez is the Director of the Mission Center, El Paso, Texas. Cristina Coronado is the Coordinator of Migrant Ministry, Juárez, México.



# 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.

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

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

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



# Giving Tension the Brushoff

A Relaxing Hobby

By Fr John Burger

**B**efore entering the seminary, I was interested in studying architecture. And I still enjoy looking at buildings. I think that the first step in doing a painting is learning to carefully look at the subject matter. During my first few years in the seminary, we had a darkroom, and I got into developing and printing black and white photos. I guess it trained my eye to analyze the composition of images and how they can be improved.

Although I have been messing around with paint off and on for at least 50 years, I still consider myself in the beginning artist category. I was introduced to oil painting by Sister Veronica Julie of the Notre Dame School of the Fine Arts in Milton, Massachusetts, back in my seminary days. Beyond her course, I have had little art instruction. I did take calligraphy lessons in Japan for a short time. Those lessons did help my handwriting in Japanese, but when it came to using a brush and ink, I

quickly became discouraged by my lack of progress.

Well, how can you expect progress when you do a painting or maybe two and then put the paints away for months or even years?

After one such hiatus, I returned to the United States for a home leave from my mission. One day my father remarked to me that he liked the work of certain woman who sold her work in the local shopping mall. Her work did not impress me except by its repetitiveness. So, I brashly told dad, “Oh I can do better than that.” He said “prove it.” I produced a small canvas of two people in a canoe with their shapes reflected in the water. My father hung what I called the “challenge painting” over his favorite chair till the day he died. Therefore, I considered it an artistic success.

It was a success in another way in that it got me painting again. It was at this time that I decided to switch from oils to acrylic paint. I liked the fact

that it dried so quickly and was easy to clean up. Frankly, I think acrylics suit my impatient personality. Because the paint I use dries so quickly, it means that my usual paintings are on the small side. As for subject matter, I usually do landscapes or cityscapes based on vacation photos. When I do landscapes, I usually include some person or building to indicate scale.

Painting has just been an avocation, but there have been a few times when it has been useful in my ministry. Being able to paint (a little) came in handy one Christmas when the parish’s disassembled stable was mistaken for scrap lumber by someone on an overzealous cleaning streak. The error was discovered a few days before Christmas. I happened to be housebound with a case of pneumonia, so I had the time to paint three simple panels and make a standing triptych, to replace the missing stable. It looked okay and saved the skin of the culprit.



Fr. Burger's friends by Chartres Cathedral



Chartres Cathedral, Fr. John Burger



The 1990s found me back in Japan and the parish where I was assigned was home to quite a few artists, some quite successful, including a professor of art at a university in Tokyo. Early in my time there, not realizing this, I let it be known that one of my hobbies was painting. The courteous Japanese took my attempts at messing with brushes much more seriously than my amateurish productions deserved. All the flattery was, I admit, quite encouraging.


Probably the most flattering thing that ever happened to me in this connection was when I presented a small painting of Chartres cathedral to the outgoing parish council president.

Imagine my surprise when he and his family traveled to France to stand in that spot!

I think my early interest in architecture shows in my choice of subject matter. I have painted a few churches, but few religious paintings. After the September 11 tragedy in New York, I painted a picture of the Blessed Mother weeping over the twin towers, as a way of working through my feelings. Years later I also painted Paris Notre Dame in flames.

During my time in Japan, I exhibited my work a few times in a local city hall. Also, every year the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art hosts a show called "the Independent"

a sort of "come all ye" for any artist of any level. You can imagine the range of creativity in a city as large as Tokyo. It was a thrill to see my own work on display for a few days, in a museum no less.

Columban Fr. Frank Carroll used to describe the Japanese pinball game "pachinko" as not really interesting, but just interesting enough the keep your mind off whatever you are fretting about. Strangely, I feel that way about painting. I can escape into thinking about whether this or that color looks right, and relax. 

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



# Living Among Migrants

## A Journey of Hospitality and Grace

By Lee Kyung Ja, Christina

I live in a neighborhood where migrants and asylum seekers dwell side by side. One section has already been vacated due to redevelopment, and all access routes have been sealed off. These changes weigh heavily on the hearts of our migrant neighbors, stirring anxiety about relocation and the burden of higher rent in an uncertain future.

In this unsettled place, I've been visiting my neighbors—migrants and asylum seekers—and slowly becoming part of their lives. People from various countries in Africa and Asia with different religions live here. While the area may seem quiet and ordinary,

---

*One day, I heard Jesus whisper: "Lower your expectations. Empty yourself. Only then will peace enter your heart." His words humbled me.*

---

stepping into their lives reveals a rich tapestry of cultures. Living among such diversity, learning from one another, and respecting different traditions is deeply meaningful. Yet, as a fragile human being, I also face challenges. Differences can bring discomfort, and understanding takes time.

I've rented a two-bedroom unit here to offer temporary shelter—up to six months—for asylum seekers in urgent need. I remember one Arab woman who lived with me. We shared all common spaces outside our rooms. Navigating our differences in lifestyle, food, and worldview wasn't always easy. Even grocery shopping required thoughtful consideration to respect her preferences. Our backgrounds were vastly different, and learning to understand each other took time, patience, and grace.

Yet through that shared experience, I witnessed the quiet beauty of hospitality—where love is expressed

not just in words, but in the willingness to make space for someone else's story.

She had fled her country after threats to her life for defying conservative Islamic norms. Rejected by her family, she arrived in Korea not by choice, but by circumstance. Three years had passed, and the only official documents she held were a passport and a deportation deferral notice stamped "not permitted to work."

Despite these limitations, she had to survive. She worked illegally in a factory until a back injury forced her to quit. Later, while washing dishes at a restaurant, she slipped and severely injured her shoulder. Unable to do physical labor, she struggled even more to find work. Still, she remained determined to live independently, searching tirelessly for any opportunity. On fortunate days, she secured a few hours of part-time work. She longed to leave Korea, but no country would accept her. Returning home was not an option; her life would be at risk.

Watching her struggle filled me with sorrow and helplessness. Sharing

---

*Living among such diversity, learning from one another, and respecting different traditions is deeply meaningful.*

---

space and daily life often led to tension. When promises were broken or responsibilities neglected, I felt disappointed and angry. One day, I heard Jesus whisper: "Lower your expectations. Empty yourself. Only then will peace enter your heart." His words humbled me. I saw my own limitations and brokenness. Yet I continued to pray for her happiness, hoping she would see God's love and care through me and find comfort in her journey.

As a missionary, I've received abundant blessings and love over the years. I'm deeply grateful for this life and remain committed to sharing the love I've received. I hope those I meet can escape loneliness and isolation. I want them to live free from prejudice and injustice. For that to happen, we

must look at them with the heart of Jesus—welcoming them as fellow members of our communities.

Pope Francis once said, "Migrants and refugees must be welcomed with love." To me, this means we must not remain passive observers. We must actively reach out and extend our hands. Love must be lived. Beyond discomfort and indifference, our willingness to carry our own crosses and offer hospitality to the poor, the powerless, and the marginalized becomes a beacon of hope—a light sent by the Lord to guide them toward new life.

The love and welcome we show to migrants can restore dignity, empower them to live, and allow them to experience the Kingdom of God. We must not discriminate, but embrace them as fellow human beings—our brothers, sisters, and neighbors—worthy of love and respect. This is how we live out Jesus' command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ❏

---

Columban lay missionary Lee Kyung Ja, Christina lives and works in south Korea.



Columban lay missionary Lee Kyung Ja, Christina, and friends

# Healing and Help from Vegetable Planting

## Nourishing Body and Soul

By Ana Flores

During a mission in the Narulang community of Barra in Misamis Oriental, Mindanao, I met many people, especially women, who face various problems and hardships. Many of them had difficult childhoods. Their parents couldn't afford to send them to school because of their poor economic situation. A lot of them were already working from a young age. They worked as helpers, dishwashers in karinderias (small street restaurants or eateries in the Philippines), babysitters, and in other low-paying, physically demanding jobs.

Often, they were treated harshly by their employers and suffered many abuses. For many, the work conditions were heartbreakingly difficult. They couldn't eat until their work was finished. That meant that if they completed their workload by nighttime, they were only then allowed to eat. Sometimes,

---

*For many, the work conditions were heartbreakingly difficult. They couldn't eat until their work was finished. That meant that if they completed their workload by nighttime, they were only then allowed to eat.*

---

they worked all day without rest. Usually, they had to get up very early in the morning for work and go to bed late at night. The worst part is that when their employers beat them, they couldn't do anything, even if they wanted to run away, because many were just children and helpless in their situation.

Furthermore, the salaries the women received were very low. Many

married men who work earn a small wage that is not enough to support their families. Because of this, their wives also want to help, but they find themselves caught in a dilemma because they cannot leave their small children and household chores such as cooking, cleaning, caring for the children, and taking or sending them to school. These women also understand that their motherly care is vital for their children's growth, and they wish for their children to have better lives than they did.

To respond to the needs of this community, we started a livelihood program called *Kabiusan sa mga Lumopoyo sa Narulang* (Solidarity with the Residents of Narulang Livelihood Program). This program involves growing and selling various kinds of vegetables. Mothers can't travel far for work, but they can do this income-generating activity at



Ana during a garden visit with Jenny



Ate Hanelita plants vegetables and sells them to her neighbors

home. Initially, we provided seeds for seedlings to germinate, which were then transplanted to suitable areas for growth. We conducted numerous capacity-building seminars and supplied additional tools to achieve better harvests. Beneficiaries valued this livelihood initiative, recognizing its positive impact on their families and themselves.

The following feedback includes some accounts from the women involved. One woman mentioned that her first task each morning, upon waking early, is to check on her garden and her growing vegetables, which brings her joy for the entire day. Another shared that seeing her vegetables grow makes her feel blessed because, as she spends more time connecting with her plants, she has realized this has helped her heal the wounds of her childhood as an abused child laborer. Simultaneously, it has

---

*One woman mentioned that her first task each morning, upon waking early, is to check on her garden and her growing vegetables, which brings her joy for the entire day.*


---

provided her with a peaceful respite and relief from worrying about her family issues.

More than just gardening, this livelihood program boosted the women's confidence because it allowed them to interact with others. Occasionally, they approach local authorities in their municipality to seek support for their livelihood projects. Initially, they found it very challenging, but through their group's regular meetings where they talk and

share with each other, they gained the confidence they needed.

Furthermore, this livelihood program helped them earn small amounts of money, providing extra income to support their families and reducing reliance on their husbands' low salaries. These women are also happy mothers because their children can attend school and eat healthy food.

I was truly grateful to work with the struggling community of Narulang and felt privileged to share in their adventures, challenges and transformation. If we can help even one person and improve that person's quality of life, it is the greatest gift anyone can give and receive. For me, this has been a blessing from God, and I thank Him for the missionary experience I have had among them. 

---

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

# A Welcoming Church

## Healing and Hope

By Fr. Barry Cairns

**I**n the “Kingdom” at 94, I am a senior citizen. Sometimes I have an experience like this: I see something that triggers images of an event or of a person from long ago. Do other “seniors” have such experiences?

For example, just last week I saw a disabled child in a wheelchair. From the depths of my consciousness, a scene from forty years ago rose to the surface. I saw children playing in the church yard. There were five disabled children in wheelchairs with smiling faces. It was a Saturday afternoon after the children’s “Meet Jesus” class. This class was for children of parishioners but was also open to anyone who wished to come.

But first some background. At that time, Bishop Stephen Hamano was at the helm of the Yokohama diocese. Our bishop’s constant theme was: “Let us be an open church, a welcoming church, a missionary church.” He used those three words.

At times our bishop gave us practical advice. For example, he told us: “Most of our church halls are not used on weekdays. Let it be known that they are available free of charge for those who wish to use them.”

So, on Saturdays our hall for the “Meet Jesus” children’s class was open to all. The hall was also used (at different times) by a day nursery, by choirs, by AA groups, and once by a Buddhist monk for a funeral of a local resident.

But back to the surfaced memory! I saw five disabled children being gently carried from a big car to the church—children waiting in their wheelchairs, with large smiles on their faces.




The man responsible for the child transport was Yamada-san. At a sharing meeting of the church men’s group, he told us: “As you see, I have a big car with very generous horsepower. Speed used to be like a hobby for me. The toll road to Nagoya was my speedway. But after my wife died so peacefully in the church’s embrace, I re-considered my way of living. Now I get far more enjoyment and satisfaction by going around the houses to collect disabled children for the Saturday school.

It does my heart good to see these children come from a rather lonely life to enjoy the company and fun with the children at the church. Their mothers also get a rest.”

That is the memory that came from the depths.

But as it happened, this was followed by another memory. One

of those coming to our Saturday school was a young girl from the neighborhood. Her father was known as a Yakuza gang member (due to his visible tattoos). He wrote us a letter saying: “Thank you for the warm welcome that you give my daughter at your church. At her school she is teased and bullied. But with your children she feels welcome and experiences genuine friendship. She always returns home happy. I thank you for this healing effect.”

This kind of welcoming church, a church that walks together, is now called “synodality.” I find that concrete examples are a more effective explanation than theological shorthand. 

Columban Fr. Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.



# 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.

# St. Mary's Church

## Consecration

By Fr. Al Utzig

**I**t had been a long time coming. After about thirteen years of active fund-raising, planning, prayer, and hope, the new church of St. Mary's in Fontana, California, was consecrated on January 1, 2026, by Bishop Alberto Rojas, bishop of the San Bernardino diocese. Around 3000 people were there—1200 inside the new building, many more in the old church/warehouse building and in the plaza. Hundreds and hundreds of members did all kinds of jobs getting ready, coordinating all the details, and feeding everyone with pozole and menudo and beans and rice after the three-hour Mass. It had been raining for days, but the rains stopped and all were dry. God is so good.

I was the pastor at St. Mary's for thirteen years and worked with our people getting to this point. Fr. Eulices Godinez had taken over as pastor six months before the dedication, and he

had the difficult and thankless task of overseeing all the last-minute details. In preparation, a building committee and I had done a seminar at the diocese on how churches function to combine space with liturgies—Masses, Sacraments, meetings, social gatherings, etc. We had worked with the architect for over a year on the plans, which were based on a standard model used by other churches in the diocese. San Bernardino is one of the few growing dioceses in the United States.

The people of the parish are mostly Hispanic and Filipino. We wanted a bell tower, and Our Lady of Guadalupe had to be prominent. As construction moved along, we had to remove an ancient walnut tree that had been growing there for over 100 years with no maintenance at all, no water, intense summer sun and heat, and it kept producing thousands of nuts that the crows loved. The trunk, over four

feet in diameter, would make a great altar. The branches, not very straight but so strong, would make a beautiful cross. Then another tree on the lot had to be removed, a Brazilian Pepper tree. Two feet in diameter with three branches extending upwards. Wouldn't that make a majestic tabernacle! And so, we used what God had given us, created by God and fashioned by human hands. As we proceeded, the theme of the "Tree of Life" evolved in my mind.

In Genesis chapter two, God puts two trees in the middle of the Garden of Eden. One gives the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil—original sin. The other is the Tree of Life. Too often, we get tied up in the first tree and original sin, and sin in general

We are always trying to escape from sin. Our energy goes into fighting sin. We lose sight of the Tree of Life and the life that trees give



The cross



Construction



Fr. Al with the tree




Preparing the tree



The tabernacle

us. I am a fan of Pope Francis and his encyclical *Laudato Si*. Life is the greatest gift that we have from God. Not just human life, but the life of everything — all the animals, plants, bacteria and fungi, air and water, soil, everything. We are all here because God said, “Let it be.” That is, God breathed His Spirit into all that is. We are all the concrete expression of God’s Spirit. And these days we hear over and over how important trees are in the process of taking our carbon dioxide and returning to us oxygen. Trees are instruments of life, trees of life, a gift of God. And so,

we incorporated trees centrally into the new church. The altar is the tree where the sacrifice of Jesus is renewed to give us life. The cross is the tree where He suffered and died to give us life. The tabernacle is the tree where Jesus, the life of the world, is kept in the Eucharist for those who cannot join us in the Mass. For good measure, instead of a fountain or statue in the new plaza in front of the church, we planted a Camphor tree, medicinal, for shade on the hot summer days, where people can rest and pray or talk and be refreshed. It is another Tree of Life.

We kept the gold and silver and marble to a minimum. The church is close to the natural world that God has given us to live in, that we may have life to the full. May the faith of all our parishioners grow in simplicity and humility and generosity. May we welcome all who seek comfort in difficulties, rest in distress, and peace in a world made ugly by greed, “me first,” and desire to control everything. May we appreciate the Tree of Life and live freely in harmony with all of Creation. 

---

Columban Fr. Al Utzig is the regional director in the United States.



# The Calloused Hands

Resilience and Love

By Reins Mosqueda

When I was younger, people often noticed my hands. Some would remark that they were smooth, unmarked, even beautiful. Others assumed that perhaps I did not help with household chores, or that I came from a wealthy family where work was unnecessary. But those assumptions were far from the truth. I grew up in a poor farming family, and daily chores and farm labor shaped my hands. The soil, the tools, the endless rhythm of planting and harvesting—all of these left their quiet imprint. My hands carried stories that were not visible at first glance, stories of hidden labor and endurance.

As I grew older, I began to understand that hands are more than physical features. They are living testimonies of the lives we live and the sacrifices we make. My own hands, though once mistaken for signs of

---

*The Church teaches that work is not only a way to earn a living but also a participation in God's creation.*

---

privilege, were in fact marked by unseen work. Later, as a high school teacher, I held pen and chalk day after day, guiding students through lessons. Even in the classroom, my hands bore witness to both discipline and care. They reminded me that beauty does not come from ease, but from endurance. Through these experiences, I learned to see hands not merely as ornaments but as symbols of resilience, sacrifice, and love.

This understanding deepened when I entered migrant ministry at the Hope Workers Center in Taiwan. Part

of my work is to accompany migrant workers in their faith journeys, and one of the most humbling moments is serving alongside them at the altar. Migrant ministry is not only about offering programs or services—it is about walking with people in their struggles and joys, listening to their stories, and affirming their dignity. It is about creating spaces where faith and community can sustain those who are emotionally and physically far from home.

I will never forget the first time I placed the Body of Christ into the hands of a migrant worker. I was stunned. Before me were calloused hands—rough, worn, marked by years of labor. And yet, upon them rested Jesus Himself. The sight touched me profoundly. Those callouses were not only signs of hardship; they were living proof of hard work, sacrifice, and

resilience. But what moved me even more was not simply their willingness, but their deep desire to receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. After long hours in factories, households, and hospitals, after nights with little rest, they still came forward with faith and gratitude. Their hands, hardened by toil, opened with reverence. Their bodies, weary from labor, stood as witnesses of devotion. Their faith was stronger than fatigue, their longing for Christ greater than exhaustion. In their eyes and in their hands, I saw a hunger for God that no hardship could diminish.

In their perseverance, I saw the living echo of Christ's words: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) The Eucharist was not only their refuge—it was their joy, their strength, their thanksgiving. Even when the world demanded everything from them, they still offered the little time and energy they had to God, because their hearts longed for Him above all.

---

*"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)*


---

The Church teaches that work is not only a way to earn a living but also a participation in God's creation. St. John Paul II, in *Laborem Exercens*, reminds us that labor is a vocation, a way of sharing in the Creator's ongoing work. For migrant workers, this truth shines brightly: their labor sustains their families, communities and countries, and their faith sustains their spirit. To see them come forward, tired yet joyful, is to witness a profound testimony—that gratitude and devotion are stronger than fatigue, and that holiness can be found in the most ordinary gestures of daily life.

Sometimes people with calloused hands feel shy to show them or to be held by others, because they appear rough or unattractive. I, too, once misunderstood them in this way. But

now I see that these hands, though worn, carry hidden beauty. They are not marks of shame, but of dignity—living witnesses of labor, sacrifice, and love.

The calloused hands I once misunderstood now appear to me as sacred. They are living witnesses of human struggle and divine grace, meeting in the Eucharist. They remind us to honor the unseen workers whose hands sustain our communities, and to recognize in them the hidden beauty of perseverance and faith.

As I reflect on my own journey, I see that my hands—once misunderstood—carry the same story. They connect me to the workers I serve, to the farmers who raised me, and to the countless laborers whose hands build, carry, and nurture life. In their callouses, I see resilience. In their callouses, I see love. In their callouses, I see Christ. 

---

Columban lay missionary Reins Mosqueda is from the Philippines. She lives and works in Taiwan.



# The Forgiveness and The Healing

## Longing for Wholeness

By Fr. Taemooon Kwon

For the past six years, I have overseen the Year of Spiritual Formation for the Columban seminarians in Manila, Philippines. During the winter break of 2023, together with the students, I visited the PREDA Center in Olongapo, northern Philippines. PREDA stands for People's Recovery, Empowerment and Development Assistance.

This center carries out various ministries. One of its ministries is running a shelter for boys and girls under twenty who have suffered physical violence or sexual abuse. In many cases, the perpetrators are their own fathers, relatives, or people from their neighborhood. Fr. Shay Cullen, a Columban missionary, first founded this center in 1974 to protect and heal such children, and it continues to function effectively to this day.

The center operates separate shelters for boys and girls. We first visited the shelter for girls, where about forty children were being cared for and protected.

---

*When Jesus said, "Love your enemies," and taught us to do good to those who hate, curse, or mistreat us, He was, in a sense, inviting us to recognize that even perpetrators may once have been victims.*

---

After giving us a thirty-minute introduction about the shelter, Fr. Cullen guided us to the emotional therapy room on the second floor. When we entered, I saw that the room was about 33 square meters in size, with thick mattresses covering the floor. The walls and ceiling were lined with sound-absorbing materials, designed to keep all sounds from escaping. It felt as though no matter how much one shouted inside, no one outside could hear.

Fr. Cullen explained that once a week, with the help of professional

counselors, the children are encouraged to express openly their feelings about the sexual and physical abuse they have suffered. During these sessions, the children sometimes scream, cry, pull their hair, or hit the walls with their fists or feet.

After releasing their anger and pain in such an active way, they gradually begin to talk about what happened to them and start sharing their traumatic experiences little by little.

Of course, accompanying them through that process is extremely painful and difficult to watch, but Fr. Cullen said that it is the first and most essential step toward true healing—and that is why he chooses to stay and be present in those moments.

He also said that for these children to fully lay down the immense pain and trauma they have endured, it may take an entire lifetime.

After hearing his explanation, I walked slowly along the walls of the therapy room and closed my eyes. Then, in my mind, I could almost hear the cries of the children, see their faces twisted in anguish, pounding the walls and the floor with their fists. The images struck my heart vividly, and tears welled up in my eyes. An overwhelming wave of anger and sorrow surged within me.

Unable to stay inside any longer, I stepped outside. There, in the courtyard, I saw the girls dancing joyfully to some music.

They looked just like any other children you might see anywhere—laughing, clapping, teasing one another when someone made a mistake. Watching them, my heart grew heavy and conflicted. It was hard



Columban Fr. Shay Cullen celebrates Mass at the Girls' Home.

to imagine that these same smiling, lovely children, when they entered the therapy room, would release such deep wounds, fears, and anger.

After visiting both the boys' and girls' shelters, we gathered for a time of reflection and prayer before going to bed. But that night, I could not sleep. My heart felt heavy, and my mind kept returning to what I had seen in the emotional therapy room—the children's cries, the pain they released, the suffering they had endured.

As I stayed with those thoughts, I began to see not only the wounded children but also their families, relatives, and acquaintances connected to them. I realized that many of these perpetrators were themselves also victims—people who had once suffered similar abuse as children from their own parents or others.

Then I was struck by the horror of it: a cycle of evil perpetuated through generations, passed down to the most vulnerable—young girls and boys who bear the consequences of unhealed wounds.

When Jesus said, "Love your enemies," and taught us to do good to those who hate, curse, or mistreat us, He was, in a sense, inviting us to recognize that even perpetrators may once have been victims. A victim whose wounds are never healed can later become a perpetrator.

In this sense, when Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful," it was not only a call to compassion but also a warning about the continuity of sin—and an invitation to break that destructive cycle.

Of course, the horrific acts committed by the abusers against these children must never be hidden or ignored. On the contrary, the wounds of the victims must be continually voiced, and we must all weep together with them. Society must never demand forgiveness from these children who have endured such tremendous suffering.



Columban Fr. Taemoon Kwon (left), Fr. Shay Cullen, Columban students and Columban Sr. Minah Seo (right)

---

*After releasing their anger and pain in such an active way, they gradually begin to talk about what happened to them and start sharing their traumatic experiences little by little.*

---

For this reason, I believe that the cries and screams of the children in the therapy room are actually the first courageous and sacred step toward breaking that chain of evil passed down through generations.

To listen to those cries without turning away, to stay with them until the end, and to help bring their pain to light in the community—I realized how deeply valuable such acts are.

The Church is not meant for the powerful or the privileged. It is for the weak, the wounded, and the poor.

We must create a Church where their cries and their struggles are heard ever more loudly and more widely. Only then will the destructive continuity of evil lose its power.

Some people may feel uncomfortable exposing the dark corners of society, thinking that it only makes things worse. But truth-seeking

must go hand in hand with justice and mercy. These three together—truth, justice, and mercy—are the key to building true peace. Justice or mercy without truth only leads to false peace.

In reality, truth does not provoke revenge but instead leads to reconciliation and forgiveness. Therefore, true forgiveness does not mean forgetting.

Of course, when we confront our wounds—the truth of our pain—it can bring greater suffering and conflict, just as the children in the therapy room cry out wildly when they face their trauma.

But healing requires that we first recognize ourselves as wounded and from that awareness arises a deep longing for wholeness.

That longing is born only when we look directly at our pain and allow ourselves to grieve it. We must be able to cry out, "I am hurt." Or "I am in pain." Silence and avoidance do not help.

Therefore, we must acknowledge that conflict is an inevitable part of true forgiveness, and we must endure it.

Only when we face that conflict fully can we take the first step toward genuine healing. **CM**

---

Columban Fr. Taemoon Kwon lives and works in South Korea.



## Solace and Comfort

by Columban Missionaries in Myanmar

The foundation stone for St. Columban's Cathedral in Myitkyina Diocese in Kachin State in Myanmar was laid in 1955. For 75 years it has been the spiritual home of the Catholic community in Myitkyina Diocese. In 2020, due to covid restrictions, there were no public Masses in the cathedral for six months. During that time, the administrator of the Cathedral, Fr. John La Raw, was walking around the altar of the empty church one day and noticed how the wooden flooring around the altar, covered in red carpet, was unstable. It had lasted 70 years, however it was now becoming dangerous. Fr. La Raw began to dream of a renovated sanctuary of the Cathedral. He is a visual artist and a film maker. He studied film making in Korea and one of his productions "The Confession" won the best short film prize at the Mirabile Dictu International Catholic Film Festival held in the Vatican in 2016.

Fr. La Raw envisioned a sanctuary space that reflected the movement of life from birth to death to resurrection.

The Kachin State where the cathedral is located is famous for its jade, so he wanted to incorporate jade into the sanctuary design and so the columns around the altar are covered in local jade.

He decided to expand the altar containing the tabernacle. He researched that in the original construction of the cathedral the Columbans had used milk to build the altar. Fr. La Raw decided that he should do the same. The engineers said it would be impossible to get that much milk, so a compromise was reached of 50% purified water and 50% milk. While the renovation was taking place Fr. La Raw suffered a stroke that for a period left him incapacitated. However, he was determined to continue and finish the project. From his hospital bed he continued to give instructions about the vision he had for the painting of the sanctuary.

A Buddhist artist from Yangon came and lived in Myitkyina for six months to complete the painting. The paint had to be imported from

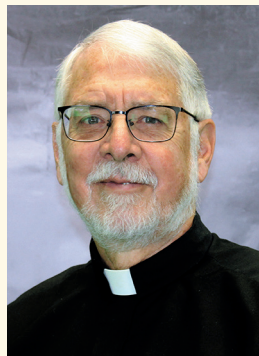
Japan and Germany because local paint would deteriorate within five years. When I first saw the renovated sanctuary, I marveled at its beauty and thought how happy the early Columbans who worked here must feel as they look down from their perch in heaven.

Fr. La Raw made a good recovery from his stroke, and he continues as administrator of the Cathedral. He has plans to renovate the interior of the rest of the Cathedral. He believes that during the very difficult situation most people experience here, the beauty of the sanctuary of St. Columban's Cathedral can offer solace and comfort to people. When I asked him how he had financed the renovation. He said it was difficult but his Facebook videos elicited a great response from Kachin people living in the United States and from local people in Myitkyina. He also received help from some individual Columbans. "People were happy to donate, they love the Cathedral and they love the Columbans" he said. 

# Simplicity and Enough

Greetings once again to all who are reading this magazine. As I reflect, what comes to mind is the picture of an ancient couple that I visited in their home in a run-down area of Mokpo in Korea in the early 1980's when I was a pastor there. Their house was an old wood and mud construction with a straw roof at a time when concrete buildings were taking over. I had a picture of them standing there looking at me, the grandmother in an old fox fur coat (where did she get that?!), the grandfather in traditional white Korean linen baggy pants and jacket. I had sat with them talking for a while and was leaving. They were thanking me for visiting them. I don't think either of them could read or write. Their simplicity was profound. Many of us would be quick to call them "poor." They certainly did not have most of the things we think we need — electricity, running water, refrigerator, TV. They had a clay pot or two of buried kimchi in the yard, a place to make a fire to boil water, and part of a roof over their heads. In Luke's Gospel Jesus says: "Blessed are you poor, the Kingdom of God is yours." (Lk 7:20) There is often a connection between being poor and being simple in a profound way.

Another ancient grandmother comes to mind. In that same parish I met her in the local clinic recovering from being hit by a car. She had bruises all over and was complaining about how the medicines, pills, shots, etc. she was getting weren't helping at all. She just moaned that if she could only get some dogs in there to come and lick her



---

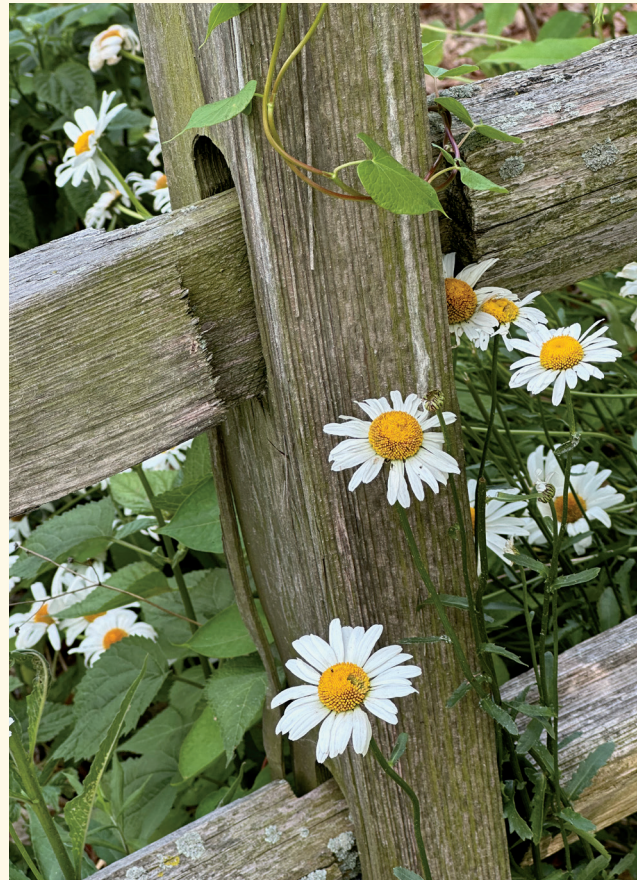
## FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Al Utzig

---

wounds she would get better fast. I doubt she was aware of the story of Lazarus in front of the rich man's house who had dogs licking his sores. (Lk 16:20-24) But here she was wishing she had those dogs. At the time, I saw her as a poor woman. But now I'm inclined to see her more as a simple soul.

This simplicity is a gift of lacking a lot of "stuff." Because these people were living on the edge of life and society, they were able to find a peace and contentment that so many of us who have a lot of stuff can't seem



to find. The ways of their parents were enough. Simple food, having some space around, dogs to lick their wounds were enough. I think these folks are also much more in touch with their own mortality. Death is part of life and not so scary. It makes me think of Job in the Old Testament: "Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked I return. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21) Simple acceptance.

It's hard to say how much I have grown from these experiences, but they certainly are part of my journey as a missionary and I treasure them dearly. The words "simplicity" and "enough" are often in my head now. Two very important words for us all.

God bless all who walk with us on our journey as Columbans, yesterday and today. May our experience of Spring that we are entering into this time of year, ground us in the simplicity of life when we think about it.

Fr. Al

**COLUMBAN FATHERS**  
**1902 N. CALHOUN ST.**  
**ST. COLUMBANS, NE 68056-2000**

NON PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
COLUMBAN  
FATHERS

### **Transform the Lives of Others...Enrich the World...Give Hope**

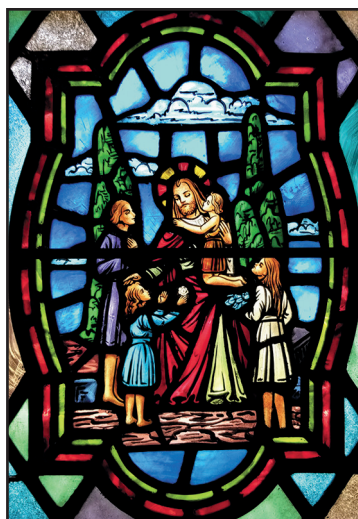
*Columban Mission* magazine is published eight times each year and tells the stories of our missionaries and the people they are called to serve. Columban missionaries live in solidarity with their people and, together, they move forward to improve their social, economic and spiritual lives, always with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

For a \$15 donation or more, you or a friend or loved one can share in our baptismal call to mission and the Columban Fathers' mission work around the world through *Columban Mission* magazine.

To begin receiving your *Columban Mission* magazine or to provide a gift to a loved one, simply visit our website at [www.columban.org](http://www.columban.org), call our toll-free number 877/299-1920 or write to us at:



**Missionary Society  
of St. Columban**  
1902 N. Calhoun St.  
St. Columbans, NE  
68056-2000



*“Do not prevent them, for the  
kingdom of heaven belongs  
to such as these.”*

– ST. MATTHEW 19:14

To whom does the kingdom belong? It belongs to the children, indeed, but also the weak, the poor, and those on the edge of society are those who possess it. He sends us to bring the good news to them and to be good news for them.

### **Answer the Call: Become a Missionary Priest**

Do you feel called to serve, to spread the Gospel and to bring the light of Christ to the ends of the earth? The missionary priesthood offers a life dedicated to service, faith, and love. It is a vocation that crosses borders, cultures, and languages, offering a unique opportunity to make a profound impact on the lives of others. If you feel the stirrings of God's call in your heart, we invite you to explore the missionary priesthood.

**Fr. Arturo Aguilar**  
National Vocation Director  
Columban Fathers | St. Columbans, NE 68056  
Toll-free: 877/299-1920 | Email: [vocations@columban.org](mailto:vocations@columban.org)  
Website: [www.columban.org](http://www.columban.org)

Japan + Korea + Peru + Hong Kong + Philippines + Pakistan + Chile + Fiji + Taiwan + North America