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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.

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Reflection on Crucifixion

If I could stand before the crucifixion of Jesus on Calvary what would I feel or think? What would I do or say? What would you do or say? The connotation of the word “crucifixion” in the Old Testament was terrible and dreadful. This type of execution was reserved by the Romans for those who were found guilty of sedition against the state.

Public criminals, traitors and rebels were also meted out this same type of punishment. It was the most ignominious of deaths. It stripped the human person of his dignity and of all that he was entitled to. The book of Deuteronomy, chapter 21 says, “If a man is found guilty of a capital offence you must put him to death by hanging him on a tree.” Elsewhere it says, “Cursed be anyone who hangs on a tree.”

Jesus hung on a tree – two beams of wood, one vertical and one horizontal. The soldiers even opened His heart with a sword lest any vestige of life be left in His emaciated body. But even then, after all He had suffered, He whispered, “Come back to Me with all your heart.”

For a moment let us look at the crucifix. This is perhaps one of the greatest acts of faith we can ever make. It is the deepest contemplative prayer in which we can ever lose ourselves. We are looking at the Son of God who freely became human like us and who suffered intensely for me and you. He knows our needs and sufferings. When we look into His sad and weary eyes, we hear Him say, “Was there ever any suffering like Mine?” His arms are wide open inviting us to “Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will refresh you.”

Let us make the effort to return to Him. He knows us better than we know ourselves. What a great sense of security and belonging we can have as we quiet ourselves and look into His face. His sad eyes are full of compassion and mercy imploring us to accept His tremendous love. We don’t have to say or do anything. He knows our needs.

Let us allow our worries and anxieties, our sorrows and sufferings to be absorbed into His. Then the everlasting peace will flow into our hearts and souls.

Columban Sr. Abbie O’Sullivan provided this reflection.
In 2021, the Philippine Church celebrated half a millennium, 500 years, of Christianity. According to 2015 statistics, the population of the Philippines is more than 100 million of whom 80 percent are Catholic. The Philippines, after Brazil and Mexico, has one of largest Catholic populations in the world.

The official celebration of the anniversary began on April 21, 2021. On March 14, 2021, Pope Francis celebrated Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome to commemorate this big event for the Philippine Church and for Filipino people scattered all over the world.

On March 31, 1521, the first Mass and planting of the Cross took place in Cebu City, my birthplace, 500 years ago. The seed of faith was sown in our fertile land, it took root, bore fruit, and up to the present day, Filipino people freely and joyfully share the faith they embraced wherever they are in the world.

But I could not say that it was an easy sowing. As our history attests, there were struggles. Our faith has been tested to the core and yet by the grace and love of God, which was there from the beginning, that covenant was sealed with the Filipino people.

As I look back I can see that we as a nation have so many things for which to be grateful. The arrival of the missionaries and religious congregations shaped and deepened our faith. Their pioneering spirit was
The arrival of the missionaries and religious congregations shaped and deepened our faith. Their pioneering spirit was the beacon of faith, and they freely shared the mission of Jesus as they lived heroic expressions of this faith and ministered to all in the society.

inspired an awareness of responding to social issues as they accompanied the people in their darkest moments in our history during World War II and the restoration of our democracy. Their lived expressions of faith and love had a strong influence on our culture, our hospitality, and gave us a resilient spirit which encourages us as we trust in the One whom we believe never fails us.

Another important aspect of the development of the Philippine Church was that the missionaries developed the local Church and the clergy and founded religious congregations. Now wherever you go in any continent you can expect to meet Filipino missionaries spreading the good news of the Gospel.

As a missionary myself, a Columban Sister, I am conscious of the gift of faith I received and I am freely sharing this gift with others – especially with the Christian community here in Pakistan, where I have been ministering recently. Like the first missionaries, I have also experienced the generosity, hospitality and friendship of my countrymen and women, wherever I am on mission and I can see how they share and keep the faith alive in the local church wherever they are.

We Filipinos are a people of faith and hope. We place our trust in a God who is always present in us and in all things even in the multiple crises that our country continues to face. And so, we come to this time of celebration to pray and to give thanks for all those people who have gone before us, the missionaries, Christian lay leaders and especially our great grandparents, who passed on the faith from one generation to the next.

As we face the future, conscious of our responsibility to pass on the faith gifted to us 500 years ago, and recently recommissioned by Pope Francis, urging us to persevere in the work of evangelization, I join my Filipino brothers and sisters, as we thank God and utter the chorus of the theme song of our 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines!

Sr. Anne Carbon is a Columban missionary from Cagayan de Oro in the Philippines and a psychiatric nurse by profession. In the past she worked with children traumatized by terrorism in Peru. More recently she was missioned in Pakistan until the Covid-19 pandemic. She is now working in the Philippines.

the beacon of faith, and they freely shared the mission of Jesus as they lived heroic expressions of this faith and ministered to all in the society. They introduced different kind of devotions: *Flores de Mayo* (flowers of May), the *Santo Nino de Cebu* (the Philippines oldest Catholic icon), Black Nazarene, and veneration of our Virgin Mother, to name just a few.

They built churches and opened dedicated services in the areas of education and health care. They
Synodality
Communion, Participation and Mission
By Jao Resari

In early October 2021, Pope Francis formally opened the synod process at the Vatican with the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission,” that calls for full participation of members of the Church and gives voice to people, especially those in the margins of our society in critical discussions on issues that impact the life and mission of the Church. With the changes made with the whole process of this synod, Pope Francis invites us to seriously reflect on what the path of synodality looks like for us in our own communities. Following is my personal reflection on synodality among fellow Columban missionaries.

I’d like to begin by sharing my background and a bit of my personal history to give you a context for my personal reflection on synodality.

I joined the Columban Lay Missionaries (CLM) in 2005. My first mission assignment was in Taiwan, and my ministry was in the field of HIV and AIDS. I journeyed for six years with people living with and affected by this illness, who were residing in shelters run by a local non-profit organization. Afterwards, I worked in the HIV and AIDS education and outreach ministry in the diocese, aimed at engaging the local Church in responding to the realities of HIV and AIDS. Along the way, I also served in leadership ministry in our mission unit and in the Columban lay mission program.

My encounters with people of different backgrounds, cultures and faiths, have deepened my understanding of what St. Paul meant when he described the Christian community as “one body with many members, so it is with Christ. We are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.” These words have greatly influenced how I live and work as a missionary. My experiences on mission have truly been a blessing, because, until I met the Columbans, I
had not fully understood my baptismal call to live out God’s mission as a follower of Christ.

Even though I was raised a Catholic, which has imbued my way of life with Christian values, traditions and practices, I grew up treating the Church as a place where I can go to get my spiritual needs met, a place where I can expect people of authority, mostly priests, to provide certain services. At a young age, I also learned not to ask questions about the Bible or about religious practices or traditions. I grew up feeling it was my place to just receive what was offered by the Church, to fulfill my obligations, and not to question or challenge matters related to the Church. These were some of the things ingrained in me that I unconsciously accepted in living out my Catholic faith.

In saying this, I also recognize that many of my faith experiences were necessary for my spiritual growth as a child and on into my youth. But later, as I grew into adulthood, the comfort of the familiar and the convenient role of a passive recipient member of the Church stagnated my spiritual growth and limited my participation in the life of the Church.

I believe the Holy Spirit was guiding me in my journey growing up. And, I am grateful because God led me to discover the Columban missionaries. Cross-cultural mission has allowed me to grow in my faith and enabled me to own my identity as a member of the Christian community, as well as to understand that the Church is much more than a place to get spiritual services or replenishment for the laity.

With the Pope’s decision to move towards a synodal renewal of the Church, the message is clear that “the whole People of God is an agent of the proclamation of the Gospel... every baptized person is called to be a protagonist of mission since we are all missionary disciples.”

We need to create conditions that enable people to recognize and respond to their baptismal call and allow them to own their role as “protagonists” – the principal and active participants in mission. We need to commit to facilitating and guiding people in their journey until individuals are able to truly find their voice in the life and mission of the Church.

When I arrived in Taiwan, I recognized how structures in our mission unit invite members, lay and ordained, to live out the values that reinforce and inform the life of the Columbans, that is, a full participation that fosters partnership and shared responsibility and accountability among ourselves. I realized that I had to make a choice to let go of my past conditioning that influenced my dynamics with the ordained and my view of my role as a lay woman in our community. It was not easy, but I gradually understood that my opinions and my contributions, limited as they were, would be received and respected by other members.

Over the years, the encouragement from fellow missionaries allowed us to have the confidence and courage to contribute in discussions, take initiatives and accept responsibilities. Of course, with our diverse cultures, personalities, and personal histories, it is to be expected that we have
experienced resistance, tension and conflict. And, although we would rather avoid all these, I believe that they are part of our reality, and overcoming them is a necessary part of our growth individually and as a community.

What I learned from our way of working together naturally became tools in my ministry, guiding me in how to work with others who come from different backgrounds. I had to open myself up to the opinions and realities of others, which in turn allowed me to re-imagine ways of doing things; and opened up new opportunities to learn from the wisdom and experience of others so that we can discover new ways together to develop this ministry.

With God’s grace and faithfulness, environments or conditions such as I have experienced can bring about an awakening in a member of the community, leading to a deeper understanding of one’s calling and a sense of ownership of our shared responsibilities in the community.

If we see ourselves as facilitators for others, we can bring people together, open opportunities to learn from one another and be enriched by our encounters of different cultures and experiences. This can bring about new possibilities for mission. We need to be creatively and faithfully responsive to the changes brought forth by our journey together, especially when these changes lead us closer to people in the peripheries amidst these challenging and uncertain times.

Synodality also calls us to address clericalism and exclusion in the Church. From what I have witnessed and learned in my ministry about confronting stigma and discrimination, behavioral and attitudinal change in how we view and relate with one another is just as critical as finding a cure that would end HIV and the realities brought about by this illness.

The same sort of thing is true for the Church. It is vital that we honestly examine negative or false narratives, religious and cultural misconceptions or taboos, and any other structural or ideological components of the Church that perpetuate clericalism or justify acts of exclusion.

Only when we are aware of these attitudes and behaviors, and take steps to counteract them, can we ensure that we are not blocked from responding to, and relating with, people around us. Then, we can be catalysts of change for inclusion and diversity, bring healing in the Church, and truly move forward in the spirit of communion with one another and with God.

It was my encounters and friendships with people who have been rejected, isolated and excluded that taught me the meaning of witnessing to the truth that every person has innate value and dignity, that all people are equally and fully loved by God. This has become the measuring stick for my behavior and attitudes. It guides me in my relationships and challenges me to grow as a Christian.

May the Holy Spirit guide us in our ongoing commitment to welcome others to share in God’s mission as disciples of Christ.

Columban lay missionary Jao Resari lives and works in Taiwan.
LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

1% of Your Estate Continues the Mission Work

One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed. Proverbs 19:17

Good intentions are important, especially when it comes to giving. And a planned gift—a gift you designate to start after your lifetime—can have long-term impact. By designating just 1% of your estate as a gift to the Columban Fathers, you insure that the work you have supported during your lifetime will continue.

Columban lay missionary Noh Hyein, better known as Anna (pronounced En-na), a teacher by profession, lives and works in the Philippines. After getting to know the women in her parish, and realizing how desperately poor they were, Anna, with the help of Columban benefactors, launched a candle making livelihood project called “Light the Life.” The women make candles and earn income for their families. The program also helps in the holistic development of the women, making them value their own self-worth. The women in the program make candles that light the homes of others, but they are lighting their own paths as well.

Contact us to learn about the many different ways you can give to the Missionary Society of St. Columban.
Irish missionaries have a long history of leaving their footprints in many countries worldwide. When I returned to Ireland some years ago, I responded to the promptings of the Spirit to reach out to the Chinese community in Dublin. I had worked as a missionary with the Chinese in Hong Kong for over 40 years, and so I was familiar with their culture, language and customs.

Most of them were students but some were restaurant workers and others, casual workers in various places and of course, some were illegal migrants. My first call to mission that time was an invitation to visit and befriend the Chinese illegal immigrants in Dublin’s Mountjoy Prison. This was a very special mission and a much-needed ministry entailing regular visits.

At the time, there were seven young priests from China studying in the national seminary in Maynooth, sponsored by the Columban and Jesuit Fathers. These priests used to celebrate a Mandarin Mass twice a month in Myra House on Francis Street in inner-city Dublin with a small group of Chinese lay people and a few Legion of Mary members in attendance. For me, this was very symbolic. Myra House was the home of the Legion of Mary. It was here that the Legion was founded in September 1921 by Frank Duff.

Frank Duff had a great love and appreciation of China. The Irish Columban Missionary, Fr. Aedan McGrath, spread the Legion of Mary over the vast country of China in the mid-twentieth century. Many young Chinese legionaries gave their lives for the Legion because they refused to sign a document saying the Legion was a “subversive organization.” So, when I attended the Chinese Mass, I imagined Frank Duff smiling down on this fledgling Chinese community in gratitude for an unexpected blessing for Myra House and the Legion.

At this stage, my dream of setting up an outreach to the Chinese community became very real, and I discussed it with the Chinese group. They were very excited and saw it as a great need and offered to help me in whatever way they could. I approached the Archdiocese of Dublin for permission and support. The Vicar General, Monsignor Lorcan O’Brien, was very interested, supportive and willing to help in any way he could. A plan of action was approved by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, with the remit that I find a Chinese chaplain from among the group of Chinese priests completing their studies in Maynooth. Fr. Anthony Xiao offered his services and obtained the necessary permission from his bishop in China. He was sponsored by the Archdiocese of Dublin, becoming the first Chinese chaplain to the Chinese community in the city. Our first base was Corpus Christi Church, Drumcondra.

I became the liaison person between the Diocese and the Chinese community. We set up a small team of Chinese and Irish volunteers under Fr. Anthony’s leadership to help us get our project off the ground, keeping evangelization as the main focus of our mission. At this time too, Sr. Lucia So, a Chinese Columban Sister from Hong Kong, was assigned to Dublin to help this young community. Fr. Anthony, Sr. Lucia and Anita, a committed laywoman from Hong Kong and long-time resident in Ireland, formed the first pastoral council. Their mandate, evangelization, was high on the agenda and was very evident in all of their outreach work.

The bi-monthly Masses continued in Corpus Christi Church and soon the community began to grow. A catechumen class was organized and received an amazing response. We had an average of twenty young Chinese adults baptized every year at the Easter Vigil Mass in Dublin’s Pro-Cathedral. Archbishop Martin was delighted with this blessing of new life in the diocese. It never ceased to amaze me how many young Chinese adults were eager to join our catechumen class. I asked one of them why she was interested in becoming a Catholic here in Ireland. She told me, “Sister, here we are free to follow Jesus.”

It never ceased to amaze me how many young Chinese adults were eager to join our catechumen class. I asked one of them why she was interested in becoming a Catholic here in Ireland. She told me, “Sister, here we are free to follow Jesus.”
The Diocese graciously responded to our request and arranged for us to move our chaplaincy to St. Andrew’s Church in Westland Row. This offer was way beyond my expectations. Apart from the lovely church in a very convenient central location, there is lots of extra space for spiritual and social gatherings as well as comfortable accommodation for Fr. Anthony.

Fr. Anthony is a hard-working and dedicated chaplain. Our group has quite a number of young children as we have had lots of marriages in recent years. The community is now well settled and catechumen classes and faith-sharing gatherings continue as well as aftercare for the newly baptized. We have a committed Chinese Pastoral Council and a Chinese choir. So, we are well integrated into St. Andrew’s Parish and the Archdiocese of Dublin.

I will be eternally grateful to God for this special mission to the Chinese here in Ireland. It seems like my Columban missionary call has come full circle, and my faith has been truly enriched through this meaningful outreach to a great group of people here in Dublin.

Columban Sr. Mary Greaney is from Galway, Ireland. She worked in Hong Kong as a nurse for 40 years. She also worked with prisoners and was very active in the Legion of Mary. Since retiring to Ireland she has been working with the Chinese Community in Dublin as well as visiting Chinese people in prison.
Reflections of an Aging Catechist

A New Way

By Fr. Michael Hoban

During my years here in Chile, I have been always been interested in catechetics. The Chilean Church was among the first local churches in Latin America to promote family catechetics. Family Catechetical programs are designed to help parents prepare their children for the reception of the Eucharist. Parents meet in small groups where they share about their lives and grow in their own faith. They are the primary educators of the faith for their children. In the various parishes where I worked, I tried to work closely with our adult catechists, meeting with them regularly, providing formation and promoting the reading of the Scriptures. I also accepted the responsibility for several groups of parents and met with them every week. But, my work was primarily with adults! In the Family Catechetical program, the catechists of the children normally are the youth of the parish, and are known as Animators of the Faith or Educators of Children in the Faith. That would all change when I was assigned to our Columban parish in the north of Chile!

The parish of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús is located in northern Chile, in the middle of the Atacama Desert, the driest desert in the world. Our municipality is Alto Hospicio which is the neighboring municipality to the city of Iquique. This is mining territory, as well as a center of commerce and of transport of goods to Bolivia. Columban missionaries have been working in the diocese of Iquique for more than forty years, and the three existing parishes in Alto Hospicio were all developed by the Columban missionaries. Our policy has always been to develop new parishes and then hand them over to the diocese.
At present, we are responsible for the parish of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús. Our parish is unique in many ways. It is an area which is still very much in development. There is plenty of undeveloped land in the desert! While it is true that the government and private enterprise are building a lot of new housing, the number of squatter settlements is steadily increasing. There are fourteen squatter settlements in our parish. When families arrive to live in a settlement, they will put up a temporary building made of plywood or other light building materials. They don’t have to worry too much about the roof because it never rains here. Gradually, they will make improvements, adding rooms and building solid walls made out of concrete building blocks. Unfortunately, it may take years before basic services like paved streets, running water, sewage and garbage disposal arrive. In the meantime, the local government sends trucks with water, and electricity is provided in a reasonable amount of time. When a proper home is constructed, they can spend several years before they obtain legal recognition for their house.

The majority of people moving into the squatter settlements are immigrants who come from various countries of South America: Perú, Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela. Recently, there has been a huge influx of Venezuelans. One of the biggest and oldest squatter settlements is located three blocks from the parish house. It is called “Toma Santa María.” Toma is the word used here for land which is occupied illegally. The majority of families in Toma Santa Maria come from Perú, Bolivia and Colombia. The Colombians are Afro-Colombians.

Because of the pandemic, schools initiated online learning. The diocese of Iquique adapted its catechetical program to the circumstances. Our parish followed suit and began to prepare children for First Communion through virtual classes. Unfortunately, the children of the “toma” did not have regular access to internet. Senora Leda Cortes is Chilean and lives in the Toma Santa María. For many years, she worked in child care and kindergartens. When the pandemic restrictions were eased, she began meeting with a small group of children to tutor them. They met in a community center run by the Jesuit charity “Hogar de Cristo.” The parish had used the community center for a soup kitchen until the pandemic interrupted this important service. Her classes always began with prayer, and

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**She soon discovered that many of the children were not baptized, and none had been prepared to receive the Eucharist. She started to look for a catechist! She made me an offer I couldn’t refuse!**

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First Communion Group
The pictures always had something to do with the particular theme of the class. I added short texts from the Gospels. I also introduced some puzzles, mazes and maps, all based on the Bible or the Sacraments. One of the parish catechists, Jorge Mendoza, provided me with a box full of dozens of coloring pencils. Jorge and his wife, Monica, prepare couples for marriage and parents for baptism. Instead of talking I would spend a lot of time sharpening pencils! As the children were drawing, I could talk about the Nativity, the flight into Egypt, the miracle of the loaves and fishes, etc. The children took the coloring of the pictures very seriously. We bought copybooks for the children in which we pasted their drawings. Senora Leda always finished her tutoring classes with something to eat for the children, and I inherited that responsibility. I bought lots of cookies and chocolate drinks! Class always finished with prayers. Senora Leda had taught them well.

Jorge Mendoza and his wife were an invaluable support. They were in charge of the soup kitchen and knew most of the parents of the children. The children called them “Tio Jorge” (Uncle Jorge) or “Tia Monica” (Aunt Monica). If a child stopped coming to class, Jorge would visit the family to find out what was happening. When I could not attend a class, Jorge would replace me. After a couple of months in the community center, we were able to move to a meeting room of the chapel.

Our next step was to invite the children to participate in the Friday evening celebration of Mass. I have to admit, I was more than a little wary of this move! Would these restless children sit still for forty minutes? The answer was Yes!

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of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús. Jorge came up with the bright idea of allowing the children to play soccer for twenty minutes on the dirt patio. That way they came into class with less physical energy.

Our next step was to invite the children to participate in the Friday evening celebration of Mass. I have to admit, I was more than a little wary of this move! Would these restless children sit still for forty minutes? The answer was Yes! They made it clear that they wanted to participate. Fortunately, I had brought special children’s missals from Santiago with the prayers of the Mass as well as one of the special Eucharistic Prayer for children. With the missalette in hand, the children quickly learned the responses. One bold move deserves another so I invited them to act as altar servers. Once again, I was surprised that most of them wanted to be altar servers. They started showing up early for Mass and offering to help. At the end of every Mass, I invited the faithful to give them a round of applause!

There is nothing like a brief spell in the spotlight to stimulate conversion!

As the time grew close for their first reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, we began to meet with the parents. In one meeting, Jorge suggested that the children be dressed in white tunics which the chapel could provide. This idea met with strong resistance, primarily of the parents of the girls in the group. They wanted their daughters to wear a communion dress. The boys could put on the white tunic but the girls had to wear a communion dress. My years of dealing with parents of First Communion children had taught me not to argue with the parents. For poor parents, wearing the communion dress means that “my child matters.”

The First Communions were celebrated on December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. As you can see from the attached photos, the children came dressed in their finest! It was joyful and moving celebration, a sign that in the celebration of the Eucharist all are welcome and we are all equal, daughters and sons of our loving Father and sisters and brothers of Christ; all welcome at the table of the Lord.

Even though I might be an aging catechist, these immigrant children taught me a new way of preaching the Good News to the littles ones and for that I thank them. I’ll be back!

Columban Fr. Michael Hoban lives and works in Chile.
I have been working with the youth at Our Mother of Divine Mercy Village (the Philippines) for some years now. The last few years have been beyond compare. I remember kicking off 2020 with the youth in a gathering to consolidate our intentions and identify activities for the whole year. We invited Bibing Mordeno, the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)-Mindanao Animator to facilitate team building exercises and processing, before getting into the business of the planning the year. Never could we have imagined that all our plans would only be on paper.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has totally changed the course of our activities. This has actually changed everyone’s lives. It was on March 15, 2020, that our priest shared the situation and informed us of the corresponding adjustments that people would have to make in the months to follow. He said we could no longer have our group meetings. It was followed by the ongoing travel restrictions imposed by the government fearing local transmission. And if it were not for social media that provided virtual connections, everything would be in total chaos.

Through virtual connections, I listened to various stories of fear and anxiety from the youth. Most common among them were parents or family members losing their jobs and having no money to buy even the most basic of needs, which is food. As almost everyone lives in the same house, daily expenses have increased but not a penny extra was coming into their houses. Every family’s situation of poverty became even more dire.

Sharing their stories with friends in Cagayan de Oro provided me the opportunity to at least facilitate modest relief interventions. Some friends distributed sacks of bananas, which, to my surprise, were embraced by the youth who even volunteered to cook the bananas for snacks and deliver them house-to-house. Every time I received donations such as rice and vegetables, it was the young people who facilitated repacking and delivery especially to those families who are in dire need in the village.

Reflecting on all this, these young people really have understood their roles not as the future but the now of God, young people with the passion of love, as Pope Francis shared in his message during the International Youth Day in Panama. The formation program has planted in these young souls the love for their neighbors, which is now put into action during this time of global crisis.

While excited for the summer camp, which is regularly sponsored by a priest friend of mine, they spent their time devoted to helping the poorest of the poor families in the village. They acted as front-line workers during the novenas in the chapel reminding everyone to wear their face masks. They even made Mama Mary and Papa Joseph wear masks to depict the reality of Christmas!

Despite the challenges of accessing the internet for their online classes and having no personal computers at home, they continued providing inspiration not only to the young children but also to the adults in the village who were continually are amazed at their passion for community service. They even produced a video clip of them singing songs of hope – inviting other youth to realize that there is a brighter side of life.

All these acts of service by these young people continue to gladden my heart.

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

With a Gift from Your Retirement Account

They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing
I also was eager to do. Galatians 2:10

Good intentions are important, especially when it comes to giving. And a planned gift—a gift you designate to start after your lifetime—can have long-term impact. If you are looking for an easy way to support the Missionary Society of St. Columban, but can’t part with assets today, consider designating us as the beneficiary of your retirement plan assets. Retirement plan assets make a tax-wise gift to the Society. As a nonprofit organization, we are tax-exempt and eligible to receive the full amount and bypass any federal taxes.

Your gifts helped Columban Fr. Michael Hoban run a summer program for children living in one of Santiago, Chile’s poorest areas. With your assistance, the Columban missionaries provided recreation, education and food for over 150 children during the summer.

Contact us to learn about the many different ways you can give to the Missionary Society of St. Columban.
New Deacons in Manila

Another Step on the Journey

By Fr. Jim Mulrooney
Two boys from the farm in the southern echelons of the Philippines knelt before Bishop Honesto Ongioco in the bright and airy chapel of the Columban Student House in Manila to be ordained deacons on June 27, 2021.

After nine years of study, prayer and guidance, Jerry Lohera and Elbert Balbastro took their first major step towards priesthood and the living of a dream that had taken seed on the quite different paths their lives had taken since leaving school.

Both Jerry and Elbert describe the circumstances of their upbringing as poor, but tempered by the loving atmosphere of a family within which they learned the values of service to others. Jerry remembers that when he was in grade two, he told his classmates he was going to be a priest when he grew up. “I did not understand what that meant at the time,” he says, “but they all remembered it and often talked about it.” Blessed with the opportunity to study after high school, Jerry went into the sale and provision of medical equipment to hospitals and clinics; but the little quip he had uttered in his childhood never strayed from his mind.

Elbert followed a different path carving out a career in computer science. He readily admits his dream was to become rich, and he took the plunge that some millions of his country people have taken seeking a better future in a foreign land.

He went to Seoul, South Korea, plying the considerable computer skill he had built up at home for a purpose of little interest to him other than his salary. However, life was to change. Living alone in a foreign land sent him searching for a taste of home. There are several Church-sponsored centers for migrant workers in Seoul that provide a place of relaxation where they can speak their own language with their own country people and receive advice about the various problems they encounter.

He stumbled across one of these centers in his search for company and was struck at the sight of priests and Sisters freely giving their time and energy to serve the workers that came seeking some solace. Their attitude was so different from his own. He has a vivid memory of realizing they were not doing it for money, but simply out of compassion for people that had need of their service.

It was in these surroundings that he first met the Columbans, and the seeds of a religious vocation were sown. Their witness began to dispel his own dream of wealth and the realisation that things other than money could bring self-fulfillment sowed the seeds of a desire to use his own talent in the service of others. The seed began to germinate within his imagination.

But seeds take time to poke their heads above the earth, and riches still beckoned. He returned home and was able to achieve part ownership in an American company. He was on the way, but the Korean experience kept nagging, and in 2012 he tossed the business in and succumbed to another call, joining the Columban Formation Program.

Meanwhile, Jerry was prospering in his work, albeit on a more subdued platform, but he too was beginning to dream of using his talent differently and his little quip about being a priest of so many years previously returned in a more serious way. He knew the parish where he had grown up had been staffed by Columban priests in the past, as his parents occasionally spoke about them, so as his search became more serious, he took his enquiries in their direction.

Years spent as students in Manila saw the seeds sown in the past nurtured, then flourish into a bloom that allowed a friendship to grow between the two. In 2017, they left together for Pakistan and two of the most challenging years of their formation, tasting life in a foreign country.

Studies of the Urdu language, the dry and dusty environs so different from the lush farmland of their childhood or the hustle and glitter of Seoul or Manila required so much adjustment and patient learning.

Different customs of hospitality, ways of going to church, celebrating marriage and mourning death provided much to absorb, appreciate and come to enjoy. It was a time of persistence, but with each day bringing a little advance, their feeling of belonging strengthened.

The two are now preparing for ordination to the priesthood with the hope that the COVID 19 pandemic will allow them to receive the sacrament in their home parishes. Jerry looks forward to celebrating with his parents, along with five sisters and a brother, as well as his classmates from grade two. Elbert prays his family can be with him and that he can take the opportunity to thank the community that has supported him so faithfully in his long journey.

Columban Fr Jim Mulroney resides in Essendon, Australia.
It has been slightly over one year since I was assigned to Taiwan as a lay missionary by the Missionary Society of St. Columban. I remember the first time I began life as a missionary about two years ago. At that time, I had to spend a lot of time thinking, discerning and praying before I decided to walk away from the old life and to begin the unfamiliar new life. Now looking back, the past one year I had spent in Taiwan was not easy. However, I have finally begun to adjust to the life in Taiwan.

My new life in Taiwan began without having any knowledge of either Taiwan or of the missionary life! The biggest and the first challenge for my life in Taiwan was the language problem. It is not an English-speaking country and therefore, communication in English was almost impossible. Although I learned Chinese characters during elementary and secondary schools, the same Chinese characters in Taiwan were totally different from what I had learned in terms of both the pronunciation and the meaning. It was even more frustrating when I was unable to communicate with the people and to express my thoughts or views.

The second difficult challenge was the weather. The unfamiliar heat and the cold made me easily exhausted, both physically and mentally. As almost everything was strange and I was experiencing everything for the first time, I was always unconsciously tense and because of the tension, I have become more sensitive than ever before. The third challenge that I had to overcome was building relationships with the people from different nationalities, backgrounds and languages.

Taiwan is a special place for me. Two years before I was officially assigned to Taiwan and when I was interested in missionary work, I was given an opportunity to experience the missionary life by a religious order and the very place was Taiwan. However, just a few hours after arrival, I received urgent and tragic news from home that my grandmother passed way. So, I had no choice but to return to Korea after spending just one day in Taiwan. After that incident, I forgot all about Taiwan. When I was assigned to Taiwan this time, I thought that perhaps God gave me an advance notice before.

While I was having difficulties in adjusting to the life in Taiwan, I thought God is the only source I could rely on. So, every morning, I went to the daily Mass thinking that hearing Mass is one of the best ways for me to adjust to life in Taiwan although I was unable to understand what was said in the Mass. Still, my mind was not at rest but instead it became more anxious and tired. Then, all of a sudden, while I was praying after Mass, I heard a voice telling me, “I am..."
Catholic faith and learning from my parents’ life of faith—could have been the basic reasons and God’s will for my being groomed as a missionary. My parents’ life of prayers, trusting in God, and believing in God’s will have become the foundation and strength of my faith.

Against this background, there are two priests in our family, and everybody has been willing to work for the Catholic mission. I believe that everything has been prepared by God for us. For this, I am really grateful and happy.

My favorite Bible verse is “And behold, I am with you always until the end of the age.” (Mt 28, 20) God is always with us, but it is not easy for us to recognize that truth. Nevertheless, I would gladly like to become an instrument of my Lord by ceaselessly praying to Holy Spirit, feeling the presence of God, believing that God is with me whenever and wherever, and recognizing God’s preparation for me.

Columban lay missionary Teresa Sihyeon Bae lives and works in Taiwan.
The morning after Pentecost, as I opened the curtains of my bedroom window, the bright red flowers in the garden next door grabbed my attention. In some mysterious way, they seemed like tongues of fire. As I stood gazing, I asked myself why I hadn’t noticed them previously. Perhaps, it was because my mind had become fixated on the large, grey construction site that lay just beyond them. Later that morning, one of my Columban companions commented that those same flowers looked so radiant, while that evening another of my companions set out to capture their beauty with his camera. It was then that it dawned on me that the natural world was also celebrating Pentecost in response to our prayer, “Come Holy Spirit and renew the face of the earth.”

During the weeks that followed Pentecost, as I walked through the nearby hills, my eyes were drawn repeatedly to other varieties of red flowers. For the Chinese people, the color red is associated with good fortune and happiness, and the display of red lanterns creates a joyful atmosphere during festivals. In a similar way, those red flowers on the hillsides seemed to hang like lanterns among the trees, proclaiming through their unassuming beauty their festive joy in the Holy Spirit. Moreover, as I stood to observe them, I sensed their silent but insistent invitation to me to share in their delight.

On one occasion, as I looked closely at one of those flowering red lanterns that overhung my path in the forest, I noticed that the petals had expanded to form pods. Upon closer examination, I saw that some of those pods had broken open, revealing neatly arranged seeds inside. As I stood marveling at the craftsmanship, I realized that the pod held seven seeds. Seven! Yes, here was another sign of the Holy Spirit at work in creation, infusing it with wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and reverence of God. In that moment, I sensed that this simple red pod was in some mysterious way witnessing to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Such a moment of awareness of the presence of God in the surrounding world cannot be manufactured; rather, it is a gift that takes one by surprise. Moreover, only poets are courageous enough to attempt to convey in words such glimpses of the mystical world. In his poem, God’s Grandeur, Gerard Manley Hopkins seeks to capture the Pentecostal dimension of everything with the opening proclamation, The world is charged with the grandeur of God, and in the concluding explanatory verse, Because the Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and with ab! bright wings.

Columban Fr. Timothy Mulroy lives and works in Hong Kong.
At the age of 21, I first felt the call to the priesthood. I was bewildered by this seemingly other worldly pull. There was no vision, no voice but just a feeling. It certainly didn’t come from me since I never entertained the thought of being a priest during my early years. So, how could this be? I fought against it for a few years, but eventually I concluded that it was from God. Yet, who was this faceless being that called me to His service? I began a search to know this God. In my prayers, I asked for some type of revelation, a sign, to reveal Himself. Maybe a concrete voice will talk to me. Maybe a vision will appear. Alas, no such thing happened. Thus, for me, the mystery of the Holy Spirit was the known face of God.

Some years later in my spiritual year of formation as a seminarian, I participated in the Ignatian 30-day retreat. I had to practice contemplative imagination prayer which is meeting God through a story, specifically the Gospel. In this process, I was given a Gospel passage by the spiritual director and would spend the day contemplating over that passage. In another words, I had to imagine myself within the story, walking with Jesus and the disciples. I had to imagine, with my senses, the sights and sounds of being there. I had to contemplate on the appearance of Jesus, what He said, how He said it, etc. It took some time to adapt to this way of praying because, before, my prayers were more of me “talking” to God. Contemplative imagination was me “listening” to God, receiving from Him in what I experienced. Thus, I came to know better Jesus.

As a priest, missioning in Chile, I came to know Jesus through the people I ministered to. The alcoholic man who overcame nineteen years of addiction. The poor pregnant woman who was filled with joy for being a cradle of life. A young teenager in a wheelchair suffering from spina bifida who desired to be an altar server, helping the priests celebrate Mass. Their courage and faith to overcome insurmountable odds with hope revealed to me the face of Jesus who liberated people from their suffering by giving joy and love.

Throughout the years, I have come to awareness that our relationship with God, specifically Jesus, is never static. It is continually evolving. At different stages of our lives, we experience God differently. At times God may seem to be distant or unknown. At other times, closer and more intimate. One thing I have learned in my many years of experience, God never stops revealing Himself to us. It can be through prayer, feelings, an experience, people, or nature.

One thing I have learned in my many years of experience, God never stops revealing Himself to us. It can be through prayer, feelings, an experience, people, or nature. It is a matter for us to take notice. As Fr. Richard Rohr states, “We cannot attain the presence of God because we’re already in the presence of God. What’s absent is awareness.” How have you known God?
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“I once heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am, send me!”

– Isaiah 6:8

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