

# Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

June/July 2021



## Family Life

# C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme –Family Life

Volume 105 – Number 4 – June/July 2021

## 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).

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The Missionary Society of St. Columban was founded in 1918 to proclaim and witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Society seeks to establish the Catholic Church where the Gospel has not been preached, help local churches evangelize their laity, promote dialogue with other faiths, and foster among all baptized people an awareness of their missionary responsibility.



# *In So Many Words*

By Sr. Abbie O'Sullivan

## Beams of Love

*“And we are put on this earth a little space that we might learn to bear the beams of love.” – William Blake*

As human beings we are irradiated and nourished by love. We long for the exposure to the “beams of love” yet we fear what they might demand of us when we come within their transforming power. Deep within the heart of each of us is a yearning and a need for the God of love.

St. Augustine expressed this very well when he wrote, “You have made us for yourself O God and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” So, this longing for the “beams of love” continually surface within us. The deepest prayer at its core is a perpetual surrender to the God of love.

God is existence itself, and He makes all things exist. Every creature and every created thing are a “flaming up” of God. This is a Christian world view - a continuous ongoing process which is perceived by us as the forward movement of everything in time. Through this “flaming up” of God we co-create with Him through love which comes from within us and cooperates with His plan.

It is impossible to love God without loving others too, as self-seeking ends in the reduction of self. When we pray, we make room in our hearts for God and for others. God’s Word is the truth and love of God communicated into our human condition. So, the Word of God must be engraved in our hearts which involves meditating and ruminating on it and as the Psalmist says, “murmuring it day and night.”

The Spirit breathes where It wills and invigorates and encourages us to respond to the needs of others. Prayer is a personal stance towards life rather than an activity. The place where God dwells in us is also the place of prayer.

This prayer is our heart’s treasure. St. Benedict in his Rule insists on the importance of a humble listening attitude. He wrote “Listen carefully to the Master’s instructions and attend to them with the ear of your heart. Welcome it and put it into practice.”

The essence of Christian prayer is the experience of coming into full union with the energy that created the universe. That energy is love, and it is the wellspring that gives each of us the creative power to be the person we are called to be, rooted and grounded in love.

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*Deep within the heart of each of us  
is a yearning and a need for the God  
of love.*

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*Sr. Abbie O’Sullivan is a Columban Sister who has worked in the Philippines, Hong Kong, Bosnia and Ireland as a teacher and a school Counsellor. She is now Congregational Archivist for the Columban Sisters in Magheramore, Ireland and Assistant Editor of the Irish Far East.*

# Creativity and Artistry

Sindh Province, Pakistan

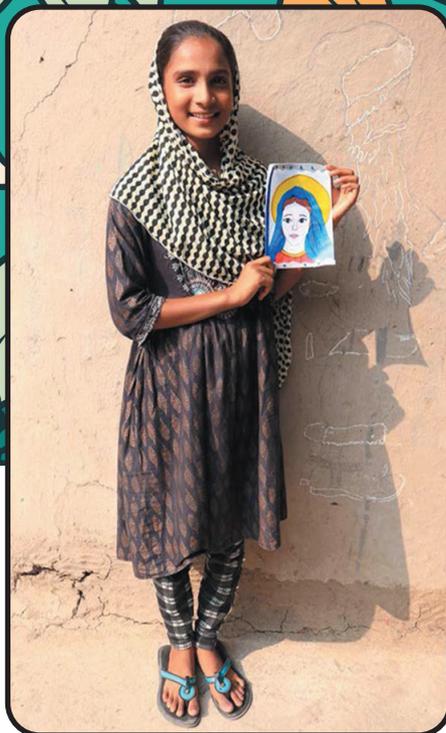
By Hazel Angwani



With difficulty while speaking in Urdu, I was able to manage to ask this young lady if I could take her picture along with her artwork of Mother Mary. She gladly said yes and gave a beautiful smile as I clicked away.

Her name is Alishba. She is a Parkari Kholi, the biggest tribal group that we minister here in Badin parish (Pakistan) including the Punjabi and Sindhi Bheel communities. I met her when we visited her village along with Columban Fr. Tony Cavanaugh and a local catechist to give food packages for some of the flood victims.

On many occasions when we go to the villages for Mass and visitations, I usually find myself talking with the women. I was chatting with her cousin when Alishba joined in our



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*I witness a lot of creativity and artistry as I walk with the women and children in the villages in the parish.*

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conversation. While we were talking, her cousin mentioned that she is talented in drawing.

In preparations for Christmas, Alishba had made a sketch of Santa Claus and the reindeer on the wall

of their house. She also showed me her drawing of Mama Mary. I could not help but ask her for a picture holding it. When I took her picture, I purposely made her stand on the side of the wall where she drew Santa.

I witness a lot of creativity and artistry as I walk with the women and children in the villages in the parish. There could a lot of possibilities for young girls like Alishba with that kind of talent who could help their families out of poverty. Unfortunately, given many factors, there is only so much they can do. What I can do best is continue to walk with them. Before we left, I encouraged her to continue what she is doing. 

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Columban lay missionary Hazel Angwani lives and works in Pakistan.



# 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.



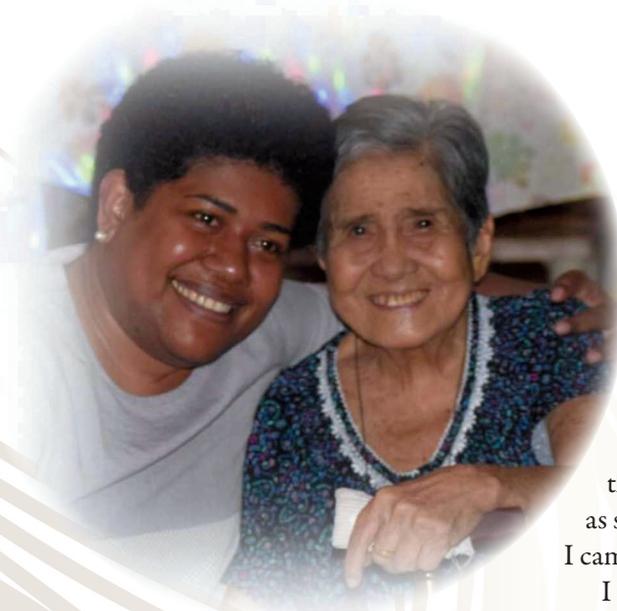
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# A Woman of Faith

## Love and Care

By Lanieta Tamatawale



Lanieta and Nanay

In 2003 I met a wonderful lady named Andring Naliponquit whom I fondly refer to as “Nanay” (mother). She was 74 years old when I first met her 18 years ago, an exceedingly kind woman who welcomed me with open arms and open heart into her family. In February 2021, she celebrated her 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday!

Nanay Andring is the mother to seven children, four boys and three girls. When her youngest child was just a year old, her husband passed away suddenly leaving her to raise her children all by herself. Nanay Andring is a woman of faith and passionately believes that God has helped her raise her seven children. She worked several jobs, selling vegetables, fruits, washing clothes for neighbors and other decent and honest jobs just to earn money to feed her children and send them to school. Her older children also helped by working while studying as a means of helping Nanay to take care of their younger siblings and put food on the table. The little food they have is always shared equally among each other as a family.

Nanay has kept her faith in God, never missed Sunday Mass, taking her children to Mass and teaching them about the faith.

Her children are so grateful to her for all the sacrifices she made to keep them alive and sending them to school until they went to college. Her older son became the breadwinner helping Nanay taking care of the younger ones and finish school. This older son settled down in his mid-30s once the youngest one had finished his studies and got a job.

At present, six of her children are married and have their own families, all living near to Nanay. One daughter is not married and still lives with Nanay.

From 2003 – 2006 I lived with Nanay Andring’s family. I was very blessed, because they made me feel like I belonged to the family. Nanay would scold me as she would her own child whenever I came home late at night.

I remember the first time I came home late and found that the door was locked. It was midnight, we had finished a youth meeting and were just hanging out afterwards. Some of the youths accompanied me home. When I found the door locked, I walked around to the window and called the name of her daughter who lived with Nanay. To my surprise Nanay answered my call. “What time is it? Where were you?” She interrogated me as a parent would their own children if they came home late without letting them know where they were. At this point I knew that I belonged to the family because she scolded me, but for me, it was okay. I felt that she cared about me, and I appreciated her worrying about me being in a foreign land and taking me under her care.

Because I was staying with Nanay Andring’s family, I became fluent



Nanay with her grandchildren



Nanay with her children

with the Visayan language and learned more about the Filipino culture. I used to spend every birthday celebration, fiesta, Christmas, and New Year with all the family members. Nanay would never speak to me in English, only in *Binisaya* so that I could learn faster.

Everywhere I went in Mindanao, whether on a vocation campaign, or being assigned to Ozamis on my second term, people were always surprised to discover that I was so fluent in the language. Even when I was assigned in other Region/Mission Units I could still remember and maintain my fluency in the Visayan language. Some people are surprised that after almost ten

years being away from Mindanao, I still haven't forgotten the language. It's because of the love and care of Nanay Andring, my greatest teacher. She made me feel like her own child, and always claimed that I am her imported daughter.

Furthermore, her faith in God in raising seven children inspires me a lot. She is greatly loved by her children and grandchildren. Sometimes, I felt ashamed living with Nanay because she would attend morning Mass every day at 6:00 am while I would only attend Mass. She challenged my faith. I am deeply grateful and blessed having met this amazing and wonderful woman. I am glad to have a second family. Now

that I am reassigned to Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao, Philippines, it's nice to have a family to go to every once in a while, and enjoy the company of God's people.

During my free time, or on special occasions, I always look forward to spending time with Nanay and her family. It is nice to have a home, where I feel at home and welcome. A special gratitude to Nanay Andring and the Naliponguit family for adopting me as part of their family. To God be the glory! 

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Originally from Fiji, Columban lay missionary Lanietta Tamatawale lives and works in the Philippines.

# We Invite You to the “Love Hour”

## Facilitating Communication

By Kevin Sheerin



I was raised in a Catholic family, and even though I had a deep desire to work as a volunteer in the church, due to my work commitment I did not have the time to do so. While I had a secure life I felt there was something missing which left me with an empty feeling. I was asking myself what I really wanted to do with my life and began to think that I really wanted to go on mission in South America. I was praying about this and attended a meeting for people interested in becoming lay missionaries. I heard about the charism of the Columban Society. They had a preference for the poor, and regarded working for

justice, peace and preservation of the environment as essential parts of mission since they believed that the church exists for the sake of the world. I found this approach to mission to be very attractive.

Before going on mission I had to consider quitting my job. My family and friends could not understand me doing this, and I was a bit uncertain and even felt like abandoning the idea of becoming a lay missionary.

Then, I found a piece of scripture that gave me strength. It was in the Gospel according to Matthew: “Whoever leaves home, brothers and sisters, father and mother children

and homeland in my name will be rewarded ten times and inherit eternal life.” These words became more realistic for me when I was appointed to Chile and began living as a missionary there. My faith became stronger as I lived with poor and sick people there and as I became used to their way of thinking and the use of their time. They always sought God even though they were living in difficult circumstances. Thanks to the poor and sick I began to feel that God was always with us and constantly taking care of us.

Right now I am in Hong Kong, the headquarters of the Columban Mission Society. I am a member of the lay mission coordinating team working with the Son Seon-Young from South Korea and Vida Hequilan from the Philippines. Our task is to study and update our lay mission policies as well

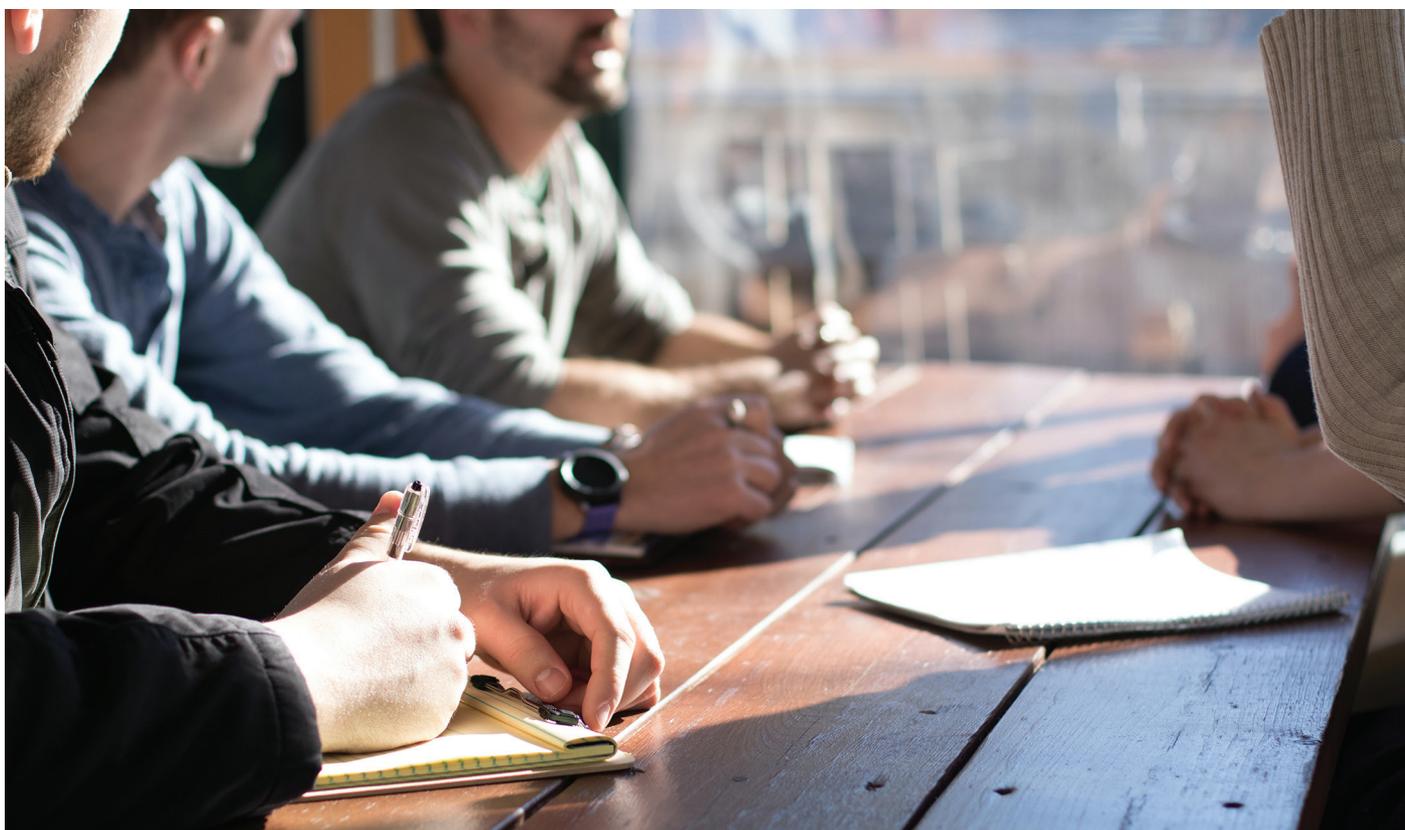
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*I was asking myself what I really wanted to do with my life and began to think that I really wanted to go on mission in South America.*

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as support all the lay missionaries in the different parts of the world.

Apart from that mission work, I personally helped South American individuals that were in prison in Hong Kong for drug and other offenses. Some of those who found themselves here may not have even informed their families where they were going until they got arrested in Hong Kong. They did not know either English or Chinese and letters from their homes can take a long time to arrive. In addition to visiting them, I facilitated the communication between them and their families. They sent me letters that I sent to their



families by WhatsApp (a social media application). Their loved ones then sent me their responses by WhatsApp which I delivered to the prisoners.

On the Sunday night radio program called the “Love Hour” that is broadcast via Facebook Live, families can send real-time messages which we read out on air. They also send voice messages that are played during the program. I am happy to be able to help these people as a direct result of my mission experience in Chile.

Last winter I had the privilege of visiting Korea as a member of the leadership team. I found Korea to be even more beautiful than I had imagined. I received a great welcome wherever I went and experienced the friendliness of the Korean people. I visited both Kwangju and Jeju while I was in Korea. I was moved by how the Catholic Church was attempting to change things and witnessed the way the Catholics were selflessly working to bring about a more just society.

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*The Columban Society had a preference for the poor, and regarded working for justice, peace and preservation of the environment as essential parts of mission since they believed that the church exists for the sake of the world.*

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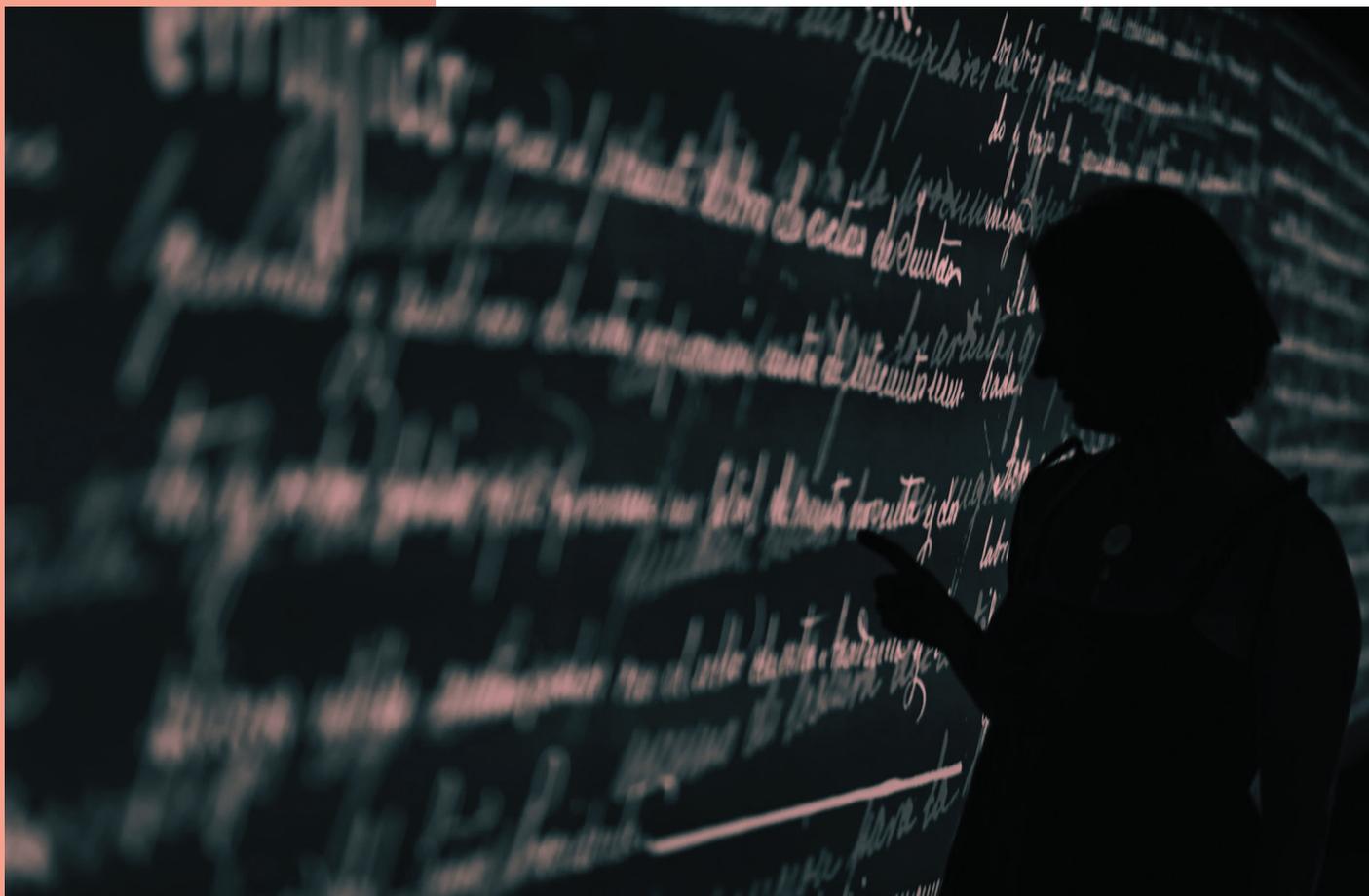
When I was in Chile I was involved in peace and justice work and often heard about the Korean Churches involvement in this ministry. Visiting the actual places and spending time with the people involved in this ministry brought it all to life for me. As a result I want to integrate what I experienced and felt deeply about in Korea into our lay mission program.

Currently Ireland is experiencing a shortage of priests, and some young people are fearful of mission work. Missionaries from the countries that Irish missionaries worked in before are now working in Ireland. I think this too is a beautiful development.

We are witnessing a paradigm shift in mission. It is not easy to invite people to mission and encourage them to go on mission. Nowadays young people are so busy trying to find jobs that they do not have the time to dream about going on mission. We are trying every possible means to invite young people to become missionaries. I hope young Koreans will become aware of their lay vocation and that they will play a decisive role in spreading the good news. 

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Kevin Sheerin is a lay missionary with the Columban Lay Mission Society. He served as a lay missionary in Chile for six years from 2011 until 2018. He is now working in Hong Kong having been elected to the Columban Lay Missionaries Central Leadership Team.



# Learning a New Language

## From Confusion to Clarity

By Sohn Son-young [Katerina]

Since I became a lay missionary back in 2000, I learned and began to use English and Tagalog when I was working in the Philippines. I later learned Spanish for my ministry in Peru. When I was assigned to Myanmar (formerly Burma) in June 2015, I had to learn Burmese.

Friends say that I am blessed because apart from speaking my native Korean, I can also speak four different languages. But honestly speaking these four different languages has often left me totally confused. When someone asks me a question in English to which

I should answer “yes” unknown to myself I answer in Spanish with the word “si.” Directly before coming to Myanmar I was missioned in Peru where the language is Spanish. When I am suddenly surprised I say in Tagalog, “Oh, Jesus and Mary” as Philippine people always do. In Myanmar I was living with Columba and Linette with whom I had previously worked in the Philippines, and so we communicated in Tagalog.

When I reflect on my experience of learning several languages I notice that people use different processes to learn a

new language. While some people learn a language quickly and with relative ease, others take a longer time and more effort to learn it. I belong to the latter category. So after arriving in Myanmar I decided that I would not attempt to learn Burmese in a hurry. I attempted to adopt a positive attitude and to try to enjoy learning this new language.

Burmese was a really new language for me. Burmese has its own innate alphabet, which to me is a very difficult nasal sound, and I needed to familiarize myself with four different tones, etc. While the whole world has the Arabic numerals 1,2,3,4 in common, the Burmese have their own distinctive numerals. I was embarrassed as at first when going to the language school I mistook the bus numbers. When one first glances at Burmese numerals they all look much the same, and it took me a long time before I was able to distinguish one from another.

I used to spend a long time carefully writing the Burmese letters after each day's language lessons. I wrote each letter several times in my notebook. I

did exactly what I first did at the age of six when I was learning my native language. I thank God for giving me the time to do this as I feel happy as I recall the good memories I have of going through that process years ago. I joke with my friends about how I have fallen in love with the Burmese letters.

The beautiful patterns of Burmese letters began to make sense to me, and I gradually began to be able to read. As I became more familiar with Burmese I found that I could write it a little bit faster. Of course I was a long way away from being able to speak it like the Burmese people. This led me to the realization of how clever the Burmese people were that they could master such a difficult language.

As I studied a new language I often thought of our Korean grandmothers and grandfathers when I watched Korean drama programs. Being so poor when they were young they could not receive an education, but in their twilight years they devoted themselves to the study of their native language.

I was greatly impressed as I watched their smiling faces as they carefully

wrote each letter even though their finger-tips were shaking. The first word our senior citizens used to write was "thank you." We can say that it was the first letter they wrote to their families who had given them the courage to learn the language at that late stage of their lives and had waited patiently for the day when they could finally write simple letters of gratitude.

As my ability to speak Burmese was gradually improving I decided that when the day came that I was finally capable of writing a full letter in Burmese I would have to celebrate with a letter sending party with my friends in Myanmar.

Learning a new language is a happy experience for missionaries. I ask that you please remember our missionaries that are coming face to face with what is for them a strange language and culture in their new mission assignments. Please pray for them. 

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Originally from South Korea, Columban lay missionary Sohn Son-young [Katerina] lives and works in Hong Kong.





# Back to the Roots

## Life as a Farmer During the Pandemic

By Fr. John Hegerty

**W**hen Covid-19 appeared on the scene, Columban missionaries all over the world had to react to the emergency. We all had to ask ourselves, “How can I carry on serving the people of God in these strange new time?” For Australian Columban Fr. John Hegerty, on mission in South America, it was a case – literally – of going back to the roots. He responded to the pandemic by combining his current role as, “Father,” to his original one as a “farmer.”

Born in 1941 in Redesdale, central Victoria, Australia, Fr. John grew up on his parents’ 1,700 acre sheep and cattle and rotational cropping holding called Summer Hill. “From the word go he worked all the jobs around the place,” Fr. John recalls. He worked on the property right up to joining the Columbans at age 23. “I never had a city job. I went into the seminary as a ‘hayseed.’ I was the ‘boy from the bush,’ a real ‘country hick!’”

During his holidays from the seminary in Sydney, he returned

home and helped Dad and Mum with whatever was needed. He even managed to host fellow seminarians for a week or so. This was cheap labor for the family farm! One thing that still makes him laugh is how some of these big, burly footballers and surfers wilted under the pressure of sheep work. When crouching to remove wool from areas where flies might stick their backs, some fellows packed up. When pruning the hooves to avoid foot rot from the long lush of spring, their hands became swollen. Maybe Fr. John couldn’t keep up on the long runs in the bush nor on the football field, but he was in front on the farm.

After ordination he was posted to Peru, where he’s been for most of the last fifty years. By 2020 he reckoned he’d filled just about every missionary role imaginable. Then, Covid came knocking.

He was in semi-retirement in our Center House in Lima, a fairly pleasant spot set amidst a kind of oasis (Lima lies in the world’s driest desert) and surrounded by schools and a university



(all of which got closed down for the duration of the crisis). Peru was hit very hard by the pandemic and the economic collapse which followed. The Columban missionaries were in lock-down for months, leaving them with two challenges – how to keep themselves sane and the people cared for, given the new restrictions.

“We had this Irish Columban, Fr. Tom Hanley, who works in Chile but who’d been left stranded up here by the lock-down,” Fr. John explains. “Now, Fr. Tom had had a lot of experience on the land back in Ireland, so he suggested he’d use his time digging up and planting part of our grounds. Not only would it keep him occupied, but it’d also make us partially self-sufficient. He sowed vegetables, corn, herbs and (being Irish) even some potatoes. Well, they all grew like mad.” The experiment was a great success.

As restrictions eased, the Irishman was able to return to Chile, leaving the new post of farmer vacant. Fr. John suddenly felt those old green fingers twitching again. Fond memories of life back on the farm in Australia came flooding back, so he filled the vacancy.

“Not that I was alone,” he remarks. Full-time local gardener Gaspar returned to lend his expert advice.

Also coming to help were two young Columban seminarians from Fiji, Atonio Saula and Iowane Naio. “This was the perfect match,” says Fr. John. “Not only were they two strong backs from a farming background in Fiji, but they were also working in a poor parish where there were a number of comedores.” Comedores are essentially subsidized canteens. The Columban missionaries set up a series of them at this time to help feed families who’d lost their sources of income due to the pandemic. Each comedor caters for up to a hundred of the needy for each midday meal.

A regular routine has now emerged. Fr. John and Gaspar look after the day-to-day running of the mini-farm. As required, Atonio and Iowane come in and prepare new beds, adding manure, doing regular watering, and harvesting the produce. Some of the produce is kept for the Columban houses, but the majority goes to one or more of the comedores. It is planned to continue this system even after the coronavirus emergency ends for, as Fr. John points out, the effects of this virus on the poor will last for years.

Fr. John insists this has resulted in the best of all worlds. The poor are

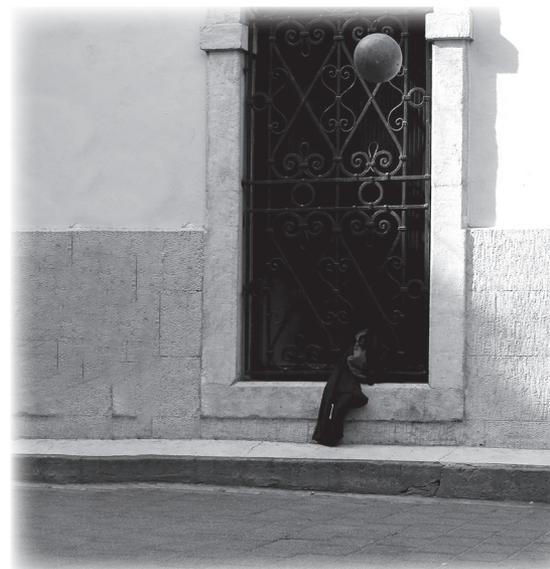
helped, Columban running costs are defrayed, and “it is great therapy for me. I love it. I go out working every afternoon after lunch. Much healthier than a long ‘siesta.’ It’s doing me good.”

A LOT of good – for Fr. John, for the Columbans missionaries, and for Peru. It really has been worthwhile, going back to the roots. **CM**

Columban Fr. John Boles, with suggestions from Fr. John Hegerty, wrote this article. Juan Diego Torres, Communications Officer, Columban Missionaries, Peru, provided the photographs.

### Back to Nature

“Every cloud has a silver lining,” they say, and this has certainly been the case with Mother Nature, which has often flourished during the various coronavirus lock-downs. The Columban Center House in Lima occupies part of a desert oasis surrounded by a campus of educational establishments, all of which remained closed during 2020. This combination of greenery with an unaccustomed peace and quiet resulted in an explosion of tropical bird life. This article features pictures of some of our feathered friends which now are nesting in or around our property.



# Step Out in Faith

## Walk in Love

By Sohn Son-young [Katerina]

**A**s lay missionaries, when we are sent to another country for mission, the first thing we do is to learn their language. Since I joined the Columban lay missionaries in 2000, I have been learning various languages such as English, Tagalog (Philippines), Spanish (Peru) and Burmese (Myanmar) for my mission work in those countries.

When I was assigned to Hong Kong in 2018 as part of the Central Leadership Team (CLT), I hadn't had the opportunity to learn Cantonese, the local language since the focus of our responsibility is in the leadership team. Apart from the CLT's responsibility, I am doing prison ministry as my part time ministry. I visit the inmates who only speak English or Spanish. Not speaking the local language, there are limitations in building relationships with the people.

I often see a cleaning lady resting alone at the corner of the street as I make my way to the office, so I greeted her one day. Then she started to talk to

me a lot with very friendly gestures. I tried to let her know that I could not speak any Cantonese, but she kept on talking to me until she finally realized that I didn't understand any of her words.

One of my joyful experiences in my previous mission countries is sitting beside people, especially the elderly, and listening to their stories which is not possible to do in my current mission. Connecting with people where I am living is what I miss most here in Hong Kong.

With God's grace, I slowly got to know some Filipino volunteers who also do prison visitation on their free day from work. Through them, I got to know a local person, Jessica, and her "Walk in Love" group which mostly comprises of Filipino migrants who have the same interest in sharing God's love, serving people who are in need and also encouraging each other to live their faith in God. Although they sacrifice their free day to serve others, they always make themselves be

available pleasantly. They say that it is their mission.

Since this pandemic started, Jessica has organized food distribution to the elderly on two occasions. We were given a list of elderly people from the Caritas Center and then visited them with packages of rice, pickles, and facial masks. Some Buddhist volunteers joined us in this distribution. We divided the small group of 4-5 people and visited different sectors. Jessica, being the only local person in our group, led us from house to house.

Most elderly people we visited live alone in a small studio-type room. When we rang the house, they opened the door with big smiles on their faces. We couldn't communicate with them as we cannot speak Cantonese, but we could see how happy they were to see us. I think it is not only because of what we brought them, but also because they were remembered by someone like us. Despite our language limitation, we could connect to each



other and this made us feel blissful and motivated to continue doing this kind service.

On October 1 during the mid-autumn festival, we visited the homeless (street sleepers) at Tung Chau Street Park. Some Filipino volunteers joined and offered their day-off for this event. There was a new volunteer. He is a Hong Kong resident and told me that he got to know about this event through Jessica's Facebook page. With the support from the benefactors, Jessica prepared lunch boxes that included a can of cola, pickles, moon cake and cookies.

When we went around to a small area where homeless people were laying down to hand the lunch boxes, I found that the volunteers already knew some of them, as they used to visit them occasionally. They were concerned about those who they had not seen there for a while and hoped that they had left the place for good. Some needed medicine for their poor health and some approached us to show us the wounds on their bodies. Jessica conversed with them, took note of their names and additional information and gave some medicine which she had already prepared. Although we all felt tired and hungry after the distribution in hot weather,

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*Despite our language limitation, we could connect to each other and this made us feel blissful and motivated to continue doing this kind service.*

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the volunteers were still excited to talk about the next mission plan.

Besides the charity service, they never forget the importance of prayers. They upload some religious video clips, inspiring stories of Saints and helpful information related to Catholic faith into our WhatsApp group chat. They have such a strong devotion to Mother Mary, that each volunteer will pray the rosary one day of the week and afterwards, share their prayer intentions into the WhatsApp group chat, "Dear all, I offered my Rosary for the Global Healing and world peace. Help us to see the world thru God's visions, without dividing lines...; Hello friends, I just offered my Rosary prayer to Our Blessed Mother for the following intentions... Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, pray for us!; For the sick and poor, for the church of Hong Kong, for Peace of the world...Pray for us," which we respond "Amen."

Some of the members in this WhatsApp group live outside of Hong Kong and some don't speak English but only Chinese. So some reflections or sharing are written in Chinese which some of us cannot understand. Nevertheless, it doesn't discourage them from continuing to share their faith and encourage each other as sisters and brothers in Christ.

By accompanying them in their various activities, I feel my life is more connected to the people in Hong Kong. Beyond religion, nationality, our statures, our ability or limitation, we can be interconnected through our humanity which allows us to care for one another. These Filipino friends of mine, with their solid faith in God and their joyful and generous contribution to God's mission work despite their hard life as migrant workers in a foreign land, have inspired me so much while at the same time challenged me to live my faith wherever I am and to continue my journey with our Lord.

I thank God for allowing these people to be part of my life in Hong Kong! God bless those who walk in love together! 

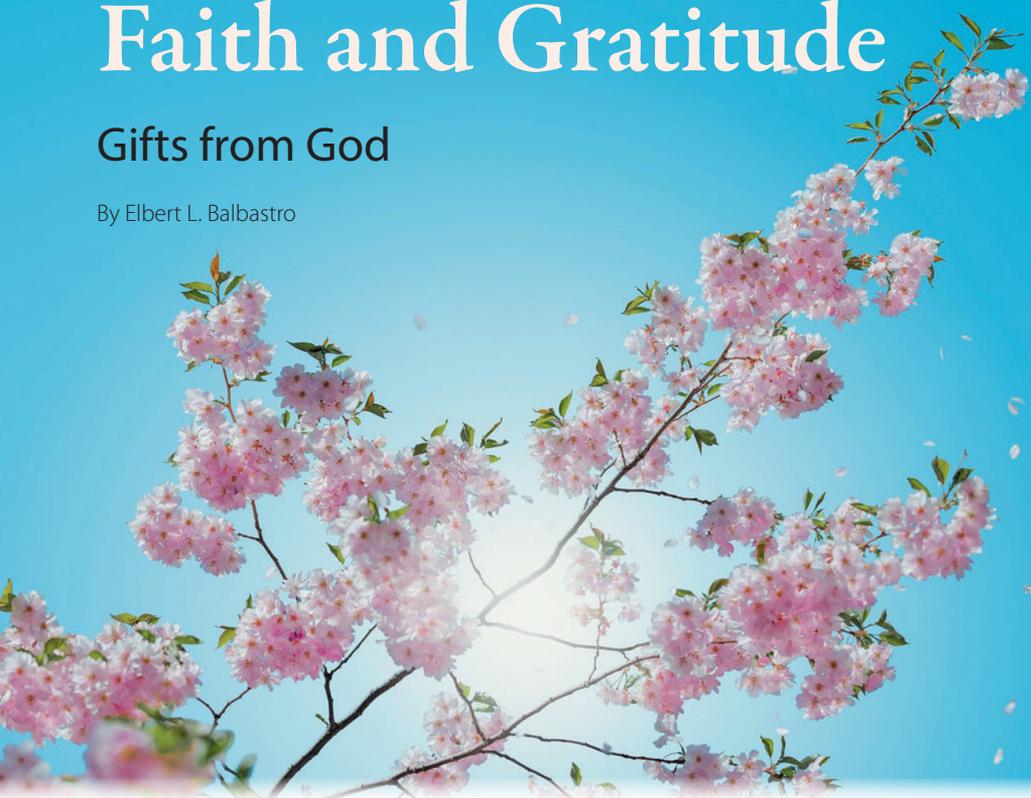
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Columban lay missionary Sohn Son-young [Katerina] lives and works in Hong Kong.

# Faith and Gratitude

## Gifts from God

By Elbert L. Balbastro



Most of the fond memories that I have growing up were my involvement in Church activities. Reminiscing, I recalled that throughout the whole month of May, my playmates and I gathered flowers and petals on the street for our Flores De Mayo. During the Holy Week, we had a procession on Good Friday to bury the statue of Jesus in the coffin alongside the statue of the saints. On the very morning of Easter Sunday, we would re-enact the meeting of Jesus and Mary, and we called it “Salubong.” Christmas in the Philippines is the longest and happiest celebration we have since it starts in September. I remembered as a child we sang Christmas carols in every house in my village and help out in making a parol (an ornamental lantern displayed during Christmas). Furthermore, as an Illongo (one of the Hiligaynon people of the Philippines), every 4<sup>th</sup> week of January we celebrate the Dinagyang festival to honor Senior St. Nino. In this time we commemorate the goodness and graces that God through

Jesus Christ bestowed on us. There is also a street dancing and people shouted “Viva Senior St. Nino.” Lastly, as a child up until my youth, we had an evening prayer we called “Barrangay sang Virgen” where we placed the statue of our Blessed Mother from one house then we prayed the rosary together with the family. The next day we transferred the statue to the neighboring house and performed the same activities. All these fascinating and joyful expressions of faith that I experienced stayed with me and became an integral part of my faith in God as a Christian.

As we mark 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines, I couldn't help but express my gratitude to God for the gift of faith that I have. Without the missionaries that came into my country, I don't know if my life would be the same. I am grateful to them, because I am harvesting now the fruits of their labor. I am also thankful for their sacrifices of coming to an unfamiliar place risking their lives crossing the Pacific oceans. Their

faith in God is worth emulating. Also, by introducing to us the devotion to Mary, Jesus as well as to the Catholic faith, I am able to appreciate the beauty of life and to be hopeful, trustful, and faithful especially during the turbulent times of life. Storms, earthquakes, volcano eruptions, Covid 19 virus, and other natural calamities come to the Philippines, but we Filipinos have the resilience and always have the hope to continue living happily because of our strong bond to God.

Looking back at my vocation, I choose to join a missionary society as my sign of gratitude and to honor the works, hardship, commitment, and dedication of those missionaries who came to the Philippines. It is my way of expressing my sincerest appreciation for their contribution to the Philippine Church.

It is fitting to give thanks to God, to the missionaries, and the lay faithful for sustaining the faith up until now. Without the gift of faith, what are we grateful or celebrating for? Because of the gift of faith, we have the reason to celebrate and be thankful. The faith of the Filipinos is a grace from God that we want to share to others and also a constant reminder for us that God is always present in our midst no matter what happens. 

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Columban seminarian Elbert Balbastro is studying in the Philippines.



# Meet “Grandmother Nishi”

## Revelation of Gratitude

By Fr. Barry Cairns

I would like to introduce Mrs. Hanako Nishi. This holy lady had a profound influence on my approach to the crucifixion of Jesus. This influence was born 60 years ago in the remote fishing village of Sakitsu on the far southern island of Amakusa, Japan. That influence is still alive for me today.

Mrs. Nishi, or “Grandmother Nishi,” as she was called by all in the village, was a war widow. Her husband and two sons lost their lives in the Japanese navy. Grandmother Nishi was alone and desperately poor. But in each Sunday’s Mass offertory basket she would place ten one-yen aluminum coins wrapped in tissue paper. She was so like the Gospel widow that Jesus praised. She too trusted and gave her widow’s mite.

One evening at dusk, during Lent I went over to the church, kneeling in the back pew. Grandmother Nishi was praying

the Stations of the Cross. She was deaf and prayed in audible whispers which I could hear clearly. She came to the Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the Cross. She looked up at the picture in a long silence. Then giving a solemn low bow, said from a voice that obviously came from her heart:

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*Grandmother Nishi was  
the instrument for the  
gift of insight.*

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“Jesu yo! Arigato gozaimasu” (My Jesus! I thank you). Her prayer was so simple, so genuine. To say a simple “thank you” as a prayer to Jesus was a revelation moment for me. That simple word of gratitude, said today, spans 2,000 years, and we are standing at the foot of the Cross itself. The Crucifixion becomes a live scene.

As a cradle Christian I was so used to the Crucifixion. It was so familiar! Grandmother Nishi was the instrument for the gift of insight. Insight is seeing the familiar as strange. A vague generality becomes a living particular.

Jesus gave up His life for us. “Greater love there is not, if one gives up his life for a friend.” (John 15:13) Because of Christ’s death on the Cross, the gates of Heaven are open and waiting for us. We became God’s friends. As a friend Jesus is right beside us when we meet suffering.

We have been generously gifted through the Crucifixion of Jesus. Surely active and concrete gratitude is called for! “Jesu yo! Arigato gozaimasu.” Thank you too, Grandmother Nishi. ☩

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Columban Fr. Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.



Participants and staff of Intercultural course, December 1991

# To Develop Communion

## Building a Bridge

By Fr. Frank Hoare

### **An Intercultural Challenge in a Parish**

The crisis was looming. Fr. Hans (Swiss) and Fr. Rudy (Filippino) reacted differently when people came to ask about a marriage or the baptism of a child. Fr. Hans, the parish priest, was much stricter about applying the law, so most people went to Fr. Rudy with their requests. Friction and disagreement arose between the priests. These two good men tried to find a solution.

They divided the parish geographically between them. They also agreed to assess individual cases and, where warranted, each would send some individuals to the other priest. Fr. Hans would send to Fr. Rudy

people who were doing their best but, because of circumstances, weren't able to fulfil the rigors of Church law. Fr. Rudy would send people, who were simply looking for the easy way out, to Fr. Hans to be challenged with the principles.

This arrangement didn't just avoid a conflict situation. It actually provided an enrichment in diversity. They accepted the need for individualist culture that values principles and law. But they also saw the importance of communal culture that prioritizes human relationships. That allowed them to integrate different values and interests in pastoring the parish. Evangelization was well served.

### **The Intercultural Challenge in Fiji**

Fiji has two major ethnic groups with very different cultures. Politicians have stoked ethnic tensions which boiled over in four military coups from 1987 to 2006. Things have improved since, but the indigenous Fijians, or I Taukei, and ethnic Indians, or Indo-Fijians, still live separate social lives. They are largely uninterested in each other's history and culture. Stereotypes and prejudice can still result in discrimination and hostility.

The Catholic Church can act as a bridge. Other Christian Churches have separate ethnic worship, but Catholics of all ethnicity belong to the same parish and worship together



Labasa Methodist mandali group in Naleba 2010



Formation group 2019

in the same church. Catholics have Mass in English, in Fijian and in Hindi languages and sometimes the three languages are heard in the same Mass. Parishioners of different ethnicities belong to the same parish sectors. These sectors lead the Sunday liturgy in turn and collect money together for the parish bazaar.

Columbans have promoted intercultural dialogue among all ethnic communities but especially between the ethnic Fijian and ethnic Indian communities. They have organized courses for leaders, weekend workshops for parishes, and handbooks of intercultural exercises for schools. Columbans pioneered supervised immersion experiences for I Taukei (indigenous Fijians) with Indo-Fijian families during their seminary pastoral year. The goal was having diocesan priests who are with people of a different culture.

### **The Intercultural Challenge for Columbans**

The Columban Missionaries, though originally European, are now a multicultural Society. They preach an inclusive message of salvation to the people to whom they are sent, so they themselves must live as an intentional, intercultural community. They must witness among themselves what they preach to others.

But all of us have blocks to genuine communion. Ethnocentrism means we believe that our way is best, and our culture is superior to other cultures. Stereotypes are the rigid black and white beliefs we have about others. Prejudices are the unchanging negative attitudes we have towards outsiders. These are natural group defences, but we have to give them up in a pluralist world if we are to live together in peace and with justice.

Columbans missionaries like others struggle to get rid of these obstacles. At an international meeting some Columbans asked a priest of the same nationality why the Columbans from another country, where that priest had previously worked, behaved in a certain way. His answer was, “Why don’t you ask them that question?”

We need to learn to dialogue openly and respectfully with each other about our differences. We must understand and appreciate the values of the cultures of fellow members. Then we can witness to an inclusive message of salvation.

People who accept intercultural diversity change for the better. Opening to difference broadens our minds. It makes us more aware of our own cultural values and attitudes. It is exciting to discover, by empathic listening and sharing, a deep bond with people of a different culture. The

enlightenment brings new perspectives to bear on situations as Frs. Hans and Rudy found.

### **A Tool for Dialogue**

I recently prepared a shorter Columban Intercultural Handbook to help Columban groups to ask questions respectfully in a safe space, to be open to questions themselves, and to develop an ability to dialogue with others.

It has exercises to uncover personal, family and cultural meanings. Other exercises facilitate mutual dialogue about behavior. Some topics evoke experiences and feelings for sharing. There are check lists with which leadership teams can examine community structures and processes. Examination of practical aspects of life like food, control of TV, levels of noise, etc., are also grist for the mill. The handbook ends with dialogue on prayer and scripture.

The shorter *Columban Intercultural Handbook* will hopefully help to prepare Columbans to witness to the Kingdom of God. As a wise saying has it: When do we know that dawn has come? When we see in our neighbor the face of a brother or sister. Until then it is still dark. 

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Columban Fr. Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.

# Swallows Beware

## In Search of Safe Surroundings

By Fr. Bobby Gilmore

*The first of the swallows  
Says winter is done  
That spring and then  
Summer has finally come.  
-Hullabaloo 22*



Since the middle of April, I have been watching out for the arrival of a particular kind of migrant, this time a winged one, a swallow. After a few days of peering out from locked-down house arrest caused by the arrival of a wingless invisible, without body, soul or passport, I spied a real one flying the usual, zig-zag, rapid flight path gobbling up the early spring bugs. Yes, a swallow has arrived. They have been arriving here in the warming atmosphere long before humans arrived. Like humans, in their genes, there is a desire for a better life to settle, build a temporary home, bring their young into the world and nourish them in a safe surrounding.

As I observe the flight pattern my imagination goes back to its take-off point in South Africa following a flight



path through west Africa, passing over the Sahel and the arid Sahara dropping into a variety of oasis for refreshment. The Mediterranean a cooling break before avoiding the danger of nets on the European coastline. The humans below making a similar journey take similar risks in the desert and at sea. At borders, they confront hostility avoiding traffickers, smugglers and barbed wire fencing. Swallows have an advantage they do not recognize borders.

Swallows leave as the weather cools into winter for the long trip to Ireland. Like seasonal migrants who leave home to follow the planting and harvesting seasons as a way of life, swallows take a risk and follow the seasons to generate and nurture new life. Migration both for bird and human is a journey of hope, expectation and return to tell the story. Neither human nor winged migrant are always welcome by indigenous populations. However, both bring their skills, crafts, music energy and hope.

As I watch from my window in the late afternoon, two swallows, having done their foraging and nest-building come to rest observing social distance on the roof beside two crows. The crows alerted by their presence look at the new arrivals as if surprised at having their rest disturbed. Then they look at each other as if exhibiting an irk that has to be tolerated. Human migrants also experience similar distancing and hostility on arrival too. CM



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Columban Fr Bobby Gilmore lives and works in Ireland.



# LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

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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.

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# Communicating the Gospel

## Culture of Encounter

By Luda Egbalic



*“A church that sees itself as missionary through and through – always going out, reaching out to the margins [is a church that] lives and breathes a “culture of encounter” in order to communicate the gospel.”*

– Pope Francis

I have been sincerely trying to live out those words of Pope Francis. I would say my mission in Korea has been really inspiring, life-giving, self-transforming and truly challenging. I always claim that I am an introverted person who becomes an extrovert when I am on my mission. I cannot simply hide in my comfort zone just because of the language; I need to encounter people of different nationalities and listen to their beautiful, sad or happy, life stories whether in Korean, English,

Tagalog or Cebuano. I am so humbled by the trust they had given me and am forever grateful.

I facilitated an English Bible sharing group with a few parishioners in the parish. We would read the Gospel in English, and during the sharing, they could speak their own language. On one occasion after the sharing, a woman came up to me and said “Thank you Luda, you give me hope for my husband. I will never cease praying that eventually, he too will worship God with me during the Eucharistic celebration.” I was moved by her deep desire for her husband to know God, and I pray that God may strengthen her and for her to continue to be inspired by our Bible sharing to live out her faith.

Recently, I was assigned to St. Andrew Kim Taegon parish, Uljeungbu diocese. With the support of our parish priest, Fr. Joseph Jang, and the parishioners I am peacefully and joyfully serving God’s people. During weekends I spend my time at Paju EXODUS Migrant Center relating to the migrants and our multicultural families. It has always been a blessing for me to be with them. Every person I meet inspires me, especially on how to live-out that “culture of encounter” faithfully.

One day, I was asked to meet with a migrant couple who came to Korea for work. The wife was pregnant with their second child and, due to their difficult family circumstances, was considering terminating her pregnancy. That situation brought me back to my own, very personal, experience when my mother, due to financial instability, had also considered aborting me. Thankfully she changed her mind and was very happy when she delivered me. Sharing my very own experience and faith in God with them, I was able to help them reflect very carefully on their decision and other options available to them, and look beyond their current difficulties and see God’s greater plan. Just months ago, they gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Praise God!

Mission is a constant challenge. But God’s words, “When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; for he was a good man, full of the Holy spirit and of Faith.” comforts me and empowers my zeal to communicate the Gospel to God’s people. My heart has felt how much God appreciates my simple acts of love and to Him, I am forever grateful. AMEN. ✠

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Originally from the Philippines, Columban lay missionary Luda Egbalic lives and works in South Korea.

# Community of Believers

This month's issue of Columban Mission is put together loosely around the theme of family life. Judging by the letters and prayer requests that come into our mission office, one issue that is worrying many people is that some family members, usually the young, are not attending Mass regularly.

My first memory of attending Mass is not a happy one. I think I was about four years old, and I just could not settle down and be quiet. My parents probably thought they had dressed me in an appropriate way for church. I am sure they thought I looked spiffy or adorable or both in a little brown and cream houndstooth woolen suit. What they did not realize was that the wool cloth was scratchy and kept me in a state of irritation that I was trying to overcome in the worst way by wriggling. And that only made matters worse.

Sometimes when I am traveling on a Sunday, I enjoy slipping into a pew and simply attending a parish Mass. It can be good for us clergy to experience the liturgy from the consumer's side of the altar rail. Once in a while the drama in the pew in front of me is distracting. For example, I will be distracted by a teen who, although s/he is attending Mass, is using all the body language s/he can muster to proclaim, "I am here but I do not want to be."

Resistance on the subject of church attendance is likely to produce exactly a duel-of-wills type of reaction from parents who feel their authority being questioned. "I don't want to go to Mass" is likely to produce



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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. John Burger

a "Get ready, you are going" response. And that might lead to the parent winning a series of battles but losing the war.

The complaint that Mass is boring is not going to be argued away on the basis of its entertainment value. But that is not the important thing about Mass.

Perhaps a better starting point for parents whose teens and adult children have stopped going to church would be to share their own deeply personal experiences of what participating in the Mass has meant to them. **Faith in God and His Son Jesus is not meant to be kept to**



**oneself, but shared with others. This is true especially in the context of our nearest and dearest.**

What is shared need not be something theologically profound, but it does need to be honest. Perhaps one or both parents might share about times when they really felt close to God or that God felt near to them while in church. On the other hand, they could talk about how attending church week after week simply gives them a chance to slow down and clear their heads. Honest sharing is a way to fulfill the command found in 1 Peter 3. "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence..."

Hopefully, parents and grandparents can help their children appreciate these experiences or those of others

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*Faith in God and His Son Jesus is not meant to be kept to oneself, but shared with others.*

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known to them that helped them bond with God and with the community of believers.

**After all, we are all searching for God who never gives up on us. I would encourage parents to share their own searching for God story and how the gift of faith has made a difference in their lives.**

And, oh yes, don't make the little children wear scratchy wool!

*Fr. John*

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*"I praise you, Father,  
Lord of heaven and earth,  
because you have hidden these  
things from the wise and the  
learned, and revealed them  
to the little children."*

— MATTHEW 11:25

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to be unlikely choices. He may  
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