

Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

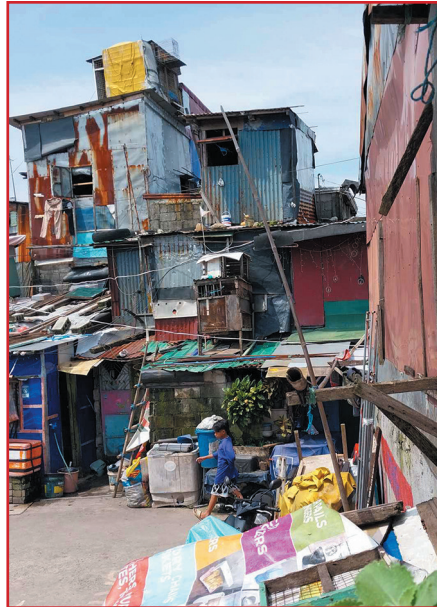
June/July 2024



Evangelization

C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Evangelization



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

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



In So Many Words

By Fr. Bobby Gilmore

Mission Today

“A Christian world and a world yet to be evangelized. That situation no longer exists. The people who have not yet heard the gospel no longer live in non-western countries. They are everywhere especially in huge urban areas. In large cities new paradigms are needed. We are not in Christian times.” (Pope Francis)

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI speaks specifically of the evangelizing mission of migrants. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, and their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good.

Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness, these Christians stir irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live this way? Why or whom inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the good news and a very powerful and effective one. Here, we have an initial act of evangelization.

Pope Paul VI introduced a new era of mission linked to the energy of the time, urbanization, and local and international migration. As in the past, mission went with human movement. Pope Paul recognized the emergence of a new human energy: migration.

It is the same today. Coming from today’s undeveloped, incoherent world and seeing skylines of the rich world, they are saying what immigrants said to themselves in the past: if I can make it here, I can make it anywhere. Immigrants are the energy band in today’s world. They energize economies at home with their remittances and away with their energy and ingenuity. Their arrival energizes local Christian communities, mosques and temples. They are the new force of evangelization, the new messengers to the new *ad gentes* (Europe/West).

Mission today is related to issues, building bridges, solidarity, and resolving tensions. Mission today is beyond geography. Migration is the human heart on a journey of hope. Hope is the dynamic force in a pandemic-ridden world.

Authentic mission must be asking: who are the excluded? Who is denied contributive justice? The severest poverty is that of not being wanted. Mission now is about encounter, welcome and witness expressed in a wide range of new informal participatory ministries challenging dehumanizing secular liberalism in which the market is God, profit is sanctifying grace, heaven is homeowner occupied, to be poor is to be damned, excluded.

“The Church is called to remind everyone that for God, no one is a foreigner or excluded. It is called to awaken consciences dormant in indifference to the reality of migrants.” (Pope Francis)

Columban Fr. Bobby Gilmore lives and works in Ireland.

Mission today is beyond geography. Migration is the human heart on a journey of hope. Hope is the dynamic force in a pandemic-ridden world.



Centennial Celebration

A Significant Milestone

By Sr. Anne Carbon

Celebrating 100 years of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban is one of the most significant milestones for me since I joined the Congregation 27 years ago. Reflecting on what our centennial means for us as a Congregation, my thoughts were immediately directed to our Founders: Columban Fr. John Blowick and Mother Mary Patrick Maloney. I am certain that when both shared their dreams of founding a congregation, they had no idea of how their dreams would evolve — the little seed of faith branching out to different mission countries, welcoming committed missionaries from these countries, and ministering to and sharing life with peoples of different faiths and cultures in the far corners of the world.

For all of us who are privileged to be part of this centennial celebration, we are truly grateful to our Founders and especially to our loving God

for gracing us with wonderful and profound experiences of love. Our journey as missionaries is full of extraordinary stories recounting many prophetic stances, the embracing of uncertainties, unknowns and self-sacrifices undertaken in a spirit of trust that God would show the way forward.


I have no doubt that the Church has been enriched by our presence as missionaries. In return we have been blessed by the love and generosity of many people who welcomed us into their lives. We have been privileged to share the joys and pains of many people, and enriched by their presence.

We are forever in debt to our mission partners and selfless benefactors who are the hidden missionaries behind all our activities. Only God knows the myriad of ways that people have helped us by their prayers, fundraising activities, promoting and reading Columban magazines and countless other creative

ways of raising mission awareness and financial support.

Thanks to you, our partners in mission, and to my own experiences, I have come to know God deep in my heart in a way that words cannot express. I trust that God will continue to carry us through the years ahead even in the midst of our fragility and smallness as a Congregation. “Fear not little flock; By this shall all know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” Fr. John Blowick

With a grateful heart, I believe that this is a time in the history of our Congregation to pause while being open to the urgent needs of our world and of our planet today. As we honor the past and our humble beginnings, we are inspired to embrace the future with courage and hope. “What we are is God’s work. He has created us in Christ Jesus for the good works he has prepared that we should devote ourselves to them.” (Eph. 2:10)

I pray that we will continue to trust in God’s fidelity to us and to the world by expressing our appreciation of the sacredness of all life, by living in a way that reflects God’s love and care for all. May we continue to be blessed with courageous young women who, like our first Sisters, will try to respond to Christ’s invitation to be bearers of God’s love and hope in the midst of a world, that is broken and fragile and searching for meaning. “Walking together, with Christ and in the Spirit constitutes the essence of religious life...a sign of communion and participation marked by mission.” (Pope Francis, 5 May 2023) 



The first group of Columban Sisters to go on mission to China, photographed on-board the Bremen in 1926. The photo shows Sr. Philomena Woods, Sr. Theophane Fortune, Sr. Finbarr Collins, Sr. Agnes Griffin, Sr. Lelia Creedon and Co-founder Mother Mary Patrick Moloney. The Columban Fathers in the image are Fr. C. Donnelly, Co-founder Fr. J. Blowick, Fr. J. Hogan, Fr. A. Ferguson, Fr. M. Fallon, Fr. J. Loftus and Fr. J. Linehan.

Sr. Anne Carbon is the Congregational Leader of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban.



Mother Mary Finbarr Collins
(1885-1977)



The First Superior General and her Council in
1924: F. Collins, J. McKey and B. Walsh,
F.X. Mapleback and T. Brannigan.



Co-founder of the Missionary
Sisters of St. Columban, Mother
Patrick Moloney and Superior
General, Mother Finbarr Collins.

The Columban Sisters' Centenary

Mother Mary Finbarr Collins Profile

By Oscar Bryan

Oscar Bryan recalls the life and contribution of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban's first Superior General, Mother Mary Finbarr Collins.

A natural starting point in our reflection on the early pioneers of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban is the first Superior General, Mother Mary Finbarr Collins. Born in Kilinga, Cork, Ireland, in 1885, Nora Collins was one of ten children in a dairy-farming household. Growing up, Nora craved opportunities that were not readily available on the family farm. Crossing the Atlantic in 1907, she trained to be a nurse in New Hampshire. By 1915, Nora had decided to make her way back to Cork, hoping to apply her new-found vocation closer to home. Her tenure at Mercy Hospital, Cork coincided with the onset of the Irish War of Independence.


After reading reports about the Maynooth Mission in China, Nora entered into correspondence with Columban Fr. John Blowick, expressing her desire to contribute to overseas mission work. After making the short-list of candidates for the

new Congregation, Nora arrived in Cahiracon in 1922, and made her First Profession on September 29, 1924. Granted the religious name Mary Finbarr, she ranked among the more senior members of the first group of professed Sisters.

Owing to her unique life experience, Mother M. Finbarr was appointed to serve as the inaugural Superior General. The task before her was a daunting one — preparing a new Congregation for the uncertainties of a life-altering voyage to China. Taking these first bold steps out into the unknown, it was November 1926 before the Sisters arrived at their new headquarters in Hanyang. Although the Sisters enjoyed much local support, they were frequently in the crossfire of local conflict. Despite these challenges, Mother M. Finbarr volunteered her nursing skills, and organized the Congregation in preparation for the rigorous demands of this new cultural context.

Her responsibilities as Superior General made an early return to Ireland inevitable. Within a few short months, she was back in Cahiracon,

overseeing the recruitment and expansion of the Congregation. When her mandate as leader concluded in 1930, Mother M. Finbarr became director of the infirmary at the Columban Fathers' seminary in Dalgan Park. She invested almost forty years going about her duties in Dalgan, touching the lives of those she served with subtle grace.

When her body could no longer keep up with the responsibilities of overseeing the infirmary, she was offered the opportunity to relocate to Magheramore in 1968. As an experienced voice of encouragement, Mother M. Finbarr often acted as a mentor to the younger Sisters in the convent. Her death on January 19, 1977, was a poignant moment for the Congregation as she was the last remaining direct link to its foundation. Her selfless devotion, and vision in connecting the Congregation's inception to the modern age, inspired many of those who followed. 

Oscar Bryan is the Archivist of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban.

Full Steam Ahead

The Columban Sisters Centennial 2024

By Sr. Ann Gray



The first 10 postulants of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban in 1922 (back row): N. Collins, B. McSwiney, V. Lees, Fr. P. Blowick; (middle row) K. Brennan, P. McDonnell, B. Walshe, E. McKey, E. Dalton; (front row) Fr. Harris, F. Moloney, T. McCollum, Fr. O'Connell.

Columban Sr. Ann Gray recalls the foundation of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban 100 years ago this year and the vision of co-founders, Columban Fr. John Blowick and Lady Frances Moloney, for the congregation.

In these days of 2024, Columban Sisters throughout the world find our thoughts and our hearts turning back one hundred years towards our first Sisters. The Missionary Sisters of St. Columban came into being because two people in particular, Columban Fr. John Blowick and Lady Frances Moloney (later Mother Mary Patrick Moloney), shared a vision for a new missionary congregation, and a group of women took a huge risk and answered the call to step into this unknown journey with them.

In December 1917, in his address to the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland in the Mansion House in Dublin, Fr.

John Blowick first spoke officially of including women Religious in the new mission venture of the Columban Fathers in China. He foresaw great difficulties with regard to nurses and doctors for the mission because of the attitudes prevalent in China at the time. He realized that the doctors would have to be women doctors and that because of the demands of the missionary apostolate, they would have to be Religious. This would require a new Congregation of nuns whose vow would be the medical care of the sick and whose members would be properly qualified in medicine, surgery and midwifery.

Over the subsequent three years, Fr. Blowick's initial idea of a missionary sisterhood underwent many changes until he envisaged a missionary congregation of Sisters who would be engaged not only in

the medical apostolate, but also in any apostolate which would be of service in China. To prepare for this, Fr. Blowick invited the Irish Sisters of Charity to send a small group of Sisters to train the early postulants and novices. They were deeply committed to keeping the missionary nature of the new Congregation to the fore and what would be required for mission. The Irish Sisters of Charity are a part of our history and our heritage, and we never forget our debt of gratitude to them.

In February 1922, the first group of postulants came together in Cahiracon, Co. Clare, to a house prepared for them by the Columban Fathers. In those early days, the women drawn to Cahiracon came from Ireland and Australia and from a wide variety of life and work experiences including teaching, nursing, secretarial work and farming, as well as from city and country life. Some also had had exposure to the Independence movement in Ireland at the time. What united all of them was deep faith and a concern for the poor.

In the years that followed, the Sisters would find themselves dealing with victims of floods, epidemics, hunger and war. The fledgling Congregation continued to attract other like-minded women who, as foundation members, set an example and inspiration for those of us who would follow them.

Since St. Brigid's, our first house in Cahiracon, was also within walking distance of the Columban Fathers seminary, St. Senan's College, the priests were available to the Sisters for daily Mass as well as for religious instruction and preparation for mission in China. Lectures, informal conversations and stories of life in the far away land of China gave the postulants and novices a sense of high adventure and dedication to a great cause.



Fr. John Blowick, co-founder of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban and co-founder of the Missionary Society of St. Columban.



The first novices doing some field work.



St. Brigid's, Cahiracon




Co-founder of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban Lady Frances Moloney.

Fr. Blowick, for his part, challenged these women to be real missionary religious and not “toy nuns.” He did not want them to be overly pious or too demanding of themselves, and he was against their becoming a community like a “string of sausages” where each one looked the same and acted in the same manner. Above all, he encouraged and inspired them to develop a spirit of charity as the special sign of Jesus’s disciples because, “By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In September of this year, the Columban Sisters will be remembering in a special way our initial group of Sisters who professed their First Vows on the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel in 1924. Surely wonder and

trepidation filled the hearts of those young women as they heard Bishop Fogarty remind them that the lot of the missionary was: “to live in exile, to endure manifold labors and privations, to suffer much distress and tribulation of spirit, to encounter, it may be, the perils of persecution, to sacrifice, even life itself.” At the same time, they must also have been deeply inspired by the conviction of Fr. Blowick: “The work is God’s work not yours or mine. We happen to be the instruments – God is behind the whole thing and He will see it through.”

In the early days of the Congregation, a Columban Father noted that “the beginnings were hard, full of challenges. They – the Sisters – were characterized by a spirit of adventure. There was no knowing

what was coming; they faced a total unknown. They began in real poverty, but they had great faith and were always good-humored.” In our very different world of today, we Columban Sisters strive to keep alive that spirit of adventure, faith and good humor as we face the unknown and respond to the continuing call of mission. We not only look back in remembrance, we also celebrate and give thanks for the support of so many people and the faithfulness of God’s eternal love towards us as a Congregation throughout these past 100 years. 

Sr. Ann Gray is from Scotland. She was a lay missionary in Sierra Leone before she entered the Columban Sisters. She has served on mission in Hong Kong and China. She is now based in Magheramore and is Assistant Editor of the *Far East* magazine.



Risking All for Christ

The Spark of Life

By Sarah MacDonald

As the Columban Sisters celebrate their centennial year, Sarah Mac Donald speaks to Congregational Leader Sr. Anne Carbon about her life as a missionary and the challenges ahead.

“To be a Columban you need to be a risk-taker,” Sr. Anne Carbon states matter-of-factly. Twenty-seven years after she made her First Profession, she is now at the helm of the Columban Sisters, having been elected

Congregational Leader in Knock in May 2023.

Originally from Cebu in the Southern Philippines, Sr. Anne trained as a nurse prior to entering the congregation. “When I chose to become a missionary, I didn’t know what it entailed but I knew that there was a lot of giving of myself in order to go to the periphery and the unknown.”

It was while working as a nurse in Manila for the Columban Fathers that Anne Carbon found herself reading and being inspired by the stories of mission in the *Far East* magazine. The late Fr. Charlie Meagher was providing pastoral support to Anne and suggested she contact the Columban Sisters.

“I went to see the Columban Sisters, and I was really struck because they were not wearing a habit like all the other Sisters I knew. I’ve never regretted joining the Columbans because I feel my independent nature really matches the charism of the congregation. I have grown in my relationship with God, and I feel enriched by the people of different cultures that I have encountered.”

After profession, Sr. Anne initially went to Britain where she secured her UK nursing registration. Her next step was mission in Peru. “In Lima, the Sisters’ mission was very good; everything was covered — education, catechetics, health.” Anne went to Lima’s largest mental health hospital and began to volunteer there.

Years of conflict in Peru had seen tens of thousands killed or disappeared. Ayacucho in the mountains, which is ten hours from Lima by bus, is one of the places which suffered greatly at the hands of the far-left guerrilla group, Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path). “There was a lot of post-traumatic stress among the people. Some were living on the streets. At an assembly of the Columban Sisters I told them that I would really like to open up a mission in Ayacucho. There was a lot of chronic mental ill

health, notably schizophrenia, and Ayacucho had no psychiatrist.”

Sr. Anne visited families where some men and women were tied down to the bed because the family didn’t know what to do with them. “I was really touched by what I saw. I knew something had to be done! I applied for some money from the Congregation, and I connected with the medical staff back at the hospital in Lima where I had volunteered.”

From very small beginnings Sr. Anne started a mental health clinic in Ayacucho. Initially she approached those on the streets and offered them the chance to bathe and provided them with some food and medication from the back of a car. In time the clinic rented a space and expanded with the assistance of nurses and doctors from Lima. A nurse from Co. Kerry, Ireland, Angela Keane developed the special needs program in the clinic. Then a group of doctors from Yale University in the U.S. came aboard. They provided two psychiatrists while Mísean Cara in Ireland provided a grant to fund the training of five nurses in mental healthcare and the cost of building the clinic.

After eight years, having successfully built and opened the clinic, Sr. Anne realized she had become more of an administrator and fundraiser than a hands-on health worker. It was time to pass the project to someone else. “As a missionary, you don’t undertake a ministry for life. You start it with a view to handing it over. So, I began to dialogue with different groups to find the right one who could keep it running. The Brothers of Charity had the same ethos.” Sr. Anne’s one request to the Brothers of Charity was to “make sure to love the poor patients” and make them “a priority.”

After handing over the clinic in Peru in December 2010, Sr. Anne was elected to the Columban Sisters’ leadership team and was based in Magheramore, Co. Wicklow,



Sr. Anne on a home visitation with the sick in Pakistan.



Sr. Anne Carbon, Congregational Leader of the Columban Sisters, with an icon of St. Columban in the background.


Ireland, for six years. In 2017, having completed her term of office, she took a sabbatical at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. The tensions between Israelis and the Palestinians underscored the need for inter-religious dialogue, while meeting the Bedouins gave her a sense of being called to mission in Pakistan.

After setting up a nursing home for elderly Columban Sisters in the Philippines, she went to Pakistan in 2019. She spent four happy years

there and had just started a health program for Pakistan’s marginalized Christian community, who “are really abandoned,” when she was elected Congregational Leader in May 2023.

As the Columban Sisters mark their centennial, there is much gratitude and a number of challenges ahead. The most obvious of these relates to personnel. Like every other congregation, the Columban Sisters have seen a decline in vocations.

For now, mission work continues in Ireland, Britain, the United States, Philippines, Korea, Myanmar, China and Pakistan. But most of the younger Sisters are Asian, and they are needed in their own countries for leadership, administration and formation. “We are really very stretched,” explains Sr. Anne.

As the congregation celebrates its 100th anniversary, she believes that even though there is recognition of the “fragility of the congregation” there is still hope for the future. “We are acknowledging the current reality but there is also a spark of life, and we have to harness that energy.” 

Sarah Mac Donald is Editor of the *Far East* magazine.

Caring for Caregivers

Rights and Welfare

By Joan Yap

I've been working as a shelter supervisor for many years. I have met a lot of caregivers who came to our center for assistance and shelter. I have the chance to get to know them through our one-on-one meetings.

Caregiver workers are vulnerable to abuse because here in Taiwan they are not yet part of the international labor standard law. They don't have regular days to rest, and they work for 24 hours taking care of the old people and receive low wages.

We have time for personal sharing during our monthly meetings. From their personal sharing, I am touched by their stories of how unselfishly they care for old people who have dementia, Alzheimer's, or other illnesses. They absorb all the negative feelings, including pain and anger,


yet sometimes lacking the language becomes an advantage for them because it lessens the stress in that they cannot understand those hurtful words.

There is also the emotional challenge of being separated from their own families. It is a constant struggle for them. They long to be with their families and yet feel guilty for not being there to care for them while they take care of others. Moreover, the distance can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings, making the emotional burden they carry even heavier. They sometimes feel tired and need time to recharge.

Once, I asked a group of caregivers about their dreams and aspirations. Many expressed a desire to improve the lives of their families and loved ones. However, they also wished for basic things like having a regular day off, a better salary, and respectful employers. These might seem like simple dreams, but achieving them requires sacrifices. They are willing to make these sacrifices for the chance to provide something better for their loved ones.

Caregivers really work hard to help others, but sometimes we forget that they too need help. It is innate in them to take care of other people so it is important to understand that they should also get the same care and kindness in return. Taking care of our own self is not just good, but it is also important so that we can help others better. We want the people here in Taiwan to respect their rights. Having a day off is not a luxury; it is something they need.

The Hope Worker Center is organizing and facilitating activities for the caregivers. It has been challenging because they do not have regular days off or their available time does not coincide with others. However, we continue to conduct our monthly gatherings, online rosary sessions every Friday, and offering Mandarin classes. These efforts are our way of honoring their importance and providing an opportunity to educate them about their rights.

This year, we will come together to support them in the Big Rally to advocate for caregivers' rights and welfare. Some caregivers may be unable to attend because they have to work. It is our duty to stand alongside them, so that their contributions are recognized, and their voices are heard to safeguard their health and well-being as care givers. 



Columban lay missionary Joan Yap lives and works in Taiwan.



Help Future Generations with a Donation Today

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



By Fr. John Boles

Columban seminarians are helping to bring true hope to one of Manila’s most notorious slums.

“This’ll be a real eye-opener,” Lydio told me, and he wasn’t joking. Lydio Mangao Jr. is one of our Filipino seminarians. I was on a visit to our missions in the Philippine capital of Manila, and Lydio had invited me to accompany him on one of his regular visits to the slum area of Parola.

I’ve seen a lot of slums in my time, and I’d seen a lot of slums in the Philippines, but nothing, absolutely nothing, had prepared me for what met me in Parola.

In the local language, “*parola*” translates as “lighthouse” or “beacon.” Metaphorically, it means “beacon of hope,” a cruel irony when you see the place. It occupies a patch of swampland, squeezed between the docks which line Manila Bay. For years it has been a magnet for homeless squatters, and now some 75,000 people are crammed into an area measuring no more than ten acres. They live piled on top of one another — literally on top of one another, for, with space at a premium, the only way

to accommodate more residents is to build upwards. Many of the multi-story shacks perch precariously on flimsy stilts, affording some protection from the twice-daily tidal flooding.

Parola is sited close to the mouth of the River Pasig, which winds its way through metro Manila before dumping the detritus of 15 million people into Manila Bay. Much of this rubbish gets washed up into Parola itself. Believe it or not, for many of the local inhabitants, this is a blessing in disguise. They can scratch a living by foraging amongst the garbage for articles which can be collected and sold at a pittance for recycling.

People also try to make ends meet by hustling around the port for casual jobs, and by working in town as street-sellers, road sweepers, tricycle drivers or market vendors. A favorite “cottage industry” is the peeling of garlic on behalf of city restaurants. “A family can peel a sack of garlic a day,” Lydio told me. A sack of peeled garlic sells at about \$2.

Inevitably, Parola has become a hotbed of petty crime, especially drug related. Many of the menfolk sport gang membership marks in the form of tattoos, often applied in Manila

City Jail, located conveniently close to Parola just on the landward side of the settlement.

During the tenure of hard-line President Rodrigo Duterte, plain-clothes police were given free rein to patrol areas such as Parola and “take out” suspected drug dealers. Operating with complete immunity, these death squads were not to be too discriminating in their choice of victims, and each morning bodies of young men were found scattered around the edges of the neighborhood.

The present government has discontinued this policy. Nevertheless, Lydio told me how the squatters are still understandably nervous about the presence of strangers. “When you’re roaming around they could mistake you for ‘intelligence officers.’ Once, I had a rolled-up umbrella, and the people from the parish said I had to open it to show it wasn’t a gun in disguise”. He described another consequence of the ever-present atmosphere of violence. “Parents are very protective of their children, they don’t always like them even going from one part of the settlement to another. I remember how a father sent his son



Alley scene in Parola



Columban student Matang Moeniba from Kiribati helping a family peel garlic for sale.



Another view of Parola

to a neighboring sector just to buy vegetable oil, and the boy got badly beaten up.”

The Catholic Church is a rare point of refuge in the midst of this mayhem. Lydio and his fellow Columban seminarians come here on their free days to help with the parish youth ministry. “We try to promote interpersonal activities”, explained Lydio. “We get the kids talking, we pray with them, we visit their families and try and team up with their parents. The aim is to accompany the youngsters, build up their self-esteem, boost their knowledge of God, give them a sense of community. It’s incredible to see what they can do when they get a bit of confidence. Some are really talented. They can sing, they can dance...”


The students help the parish in other ways as well. One role which caught my attention was that of blessing the dead. Death is a frequent occurrence here, but regular funerals

are rare, so a simple blessing on the part of a parish worker usually suffices.

For Lydio, Columban mission is in his blood. He is from the island of Negros and is the son of Lydio Mangao Senior, who was a catechist in the 1970’s with legendary Columban human rights activist Fr. Brian Gore. Lydio Sr. and Fr. Brian were famously imprisoned by dictator Ferdinand Marcos as part of the “Negros Nine,” a case which reverberated around the world and helped speed the collapse of the dictatorship. In a strange twist of fate, Marcos’s son Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos is the CURRENT president of the Philippines, albeit — at least — democratically elected.

“This Columban heritage inspired me, especially all the emphasis on non-violence. Fr. Brian helped me with my college degree course in psychology. My dad carried on working as a parish justice and peace ‘animator’ until he retired.”

Now aged 29, Lydio Jr. feels it is beholden on him to carry the baton, to continue the family tradition. The satisfaction he gets from pastoral service in Parola reaffirms his decision. “At the end of last semester, we’d been praying the Scriptures and a girl came up and said, ‘older brother, thanks for coming, now I know that prayer is friendship with God’. This made me think that maybe we are doing something right, bringing a little hope here.”

Normally, to speak of “hope” in Parola, the so-called “Beacon of Hope,” would sound like a sick joke. But not the way Lydio tells it, it doesn’t. 

Lydio Mangao Jr. is a Columban theology student from the Philippines. He lives in our House of Studies in Manila and attends the Loyola School of Theology.

Columban Fr. John Boles formerly served as a missionary in Peru and is now Columban Regional Director in Britain.



Chanda Is Walking

Profound Interactions

By Fr. Louie Ybanez



Recently a new parish has been created, and I was asked to minister to almost 300 families in thirteen villages spread around interior Sindh near the districts of Umerkot and Mirpurkhas, Pakistan. This used to be part of Khipro Parish, but because of its considerable distance from the parish center, the area has been on the margins for pastoral visits from the parish team. There are even some families that have not been met by a priest for the last ten years or more and have returned to their Hindu roots. I am currently doing pastoral visits to these families with the hope of doing some catechesis.

Inevitable in most of our visits aside from meeting the Christian families are the usual acquaintances with Hindu neighbors. In one village in Dura Naru where there are only five families, most of the ones who are present in the Mass

are Hindu children and some women. The Christians live among hundreds of Hindus. Those nearby attend the Mass, and they are very much receptive of the stories when the Gospel is read. They have no understanding of our Christian faith, but their faces lit up when they hear stories from the Gospel being told by the pastoral worker using the picture bible, a bible which consists mostly of illustrations of particular events in the bible.

A certain experience that I found remarkable is when one Christian woman approached me and asked to pray for a girl named Chanda. When I saw her she was unlike any other child. She was unstoppably crawling on the ground and looks like she is enjoying it. She looked very happy and healthy which is noticeable if you look at the other children around. Her face radiates positive energy.

A certain experience that I found remarkable is when one Christian woman approached me and asked to pray for a girl named Chanda. When I saw her she was unlike any other child.



Then her mother hurriedly grabbed and picked her up as she was about to fall into a ditch. She then told me that Chanda is three years old and is not able to walk. I looked at her and I knew right then and there that she was differently abled. She has what is commonly known as Down syndrome. The Christian woman asked me if I could pray for her so that she could walk. Without any hesitation, I gently placed my hand on her head as I utter a silent prayer for the girl as her mother intently watched.

A few weeks after, I went back to the same village, and the Christian woman greeted me and was very enthused in telling me that Chanda is able to stand and walk on her own. I was surprised by this news. I told them to call the child as I want to see it myself. She was brought by her mother, and she put her on the ground. I saw her walking in bare feet. She walked so fast that she had to be stopped in order for her not to tumble down into the ditch. I was so happy with what I witnessed, a sense of bliss from deep within me. The mother thanked me for my prayers.

I understood that the mother does not really know about Chanda's condition. I asked if the child is able to talk. She said she could


A few weeks after, I went back to the same village, and the Christian woman greeted me and was very enthused in telling me that Chanda is able to stand and walk on her own.

make sounds, but they haven't heard her speak words. I knew that conditions such as Chanda's need special attention and care. I tried to explain what she has but I don't speak their language so it was difficult. Nonetheless, I was happy that she is able to walk. From then on they are one of the familiar faces among the Hindu neighbors, and they come to see me every visit I make in that village.

They must have believed that it is through my prayer that Chanda is

able to walk. I chuckled at the idea. In my mind, it was sheer coincidence that I was there to pray for the child at the time when she was beginning to develop the skill to walk. Or maybe it was made possible by prayer, I believe in the power of prayer. I know in myself that I intently prayed as I laid my hands on her.

One thing is certain though; it is in these profound interactions that we make real connections. It makes mission and the ministry of going to the villages fulfilling because we are able to touch people's lives, not only from our own people but people of other faith through conversations and sharing of our inner-most beliefs and practices

I've always likened the visit to the villages to the massive irrigation system that makes farming possible in a region that is arid like Sindh. It is like the water that intently seeks and gives life to the Christian faith among the Parkari people, a simple gesture that is so significant for people who are deeply burdened. But it goes both ways, I am enormously enriched too having met them during our journey to the villages. 

Columban Fr. Louie Ybanez lives and works in Pakistan.

What's in a name?

A Rich Cultural Heritage

By Michael Javier

When we make new acquaintances, our name is certainly the next big thing to be shared after an exchange of warm greetings. Some would even go as far as telling us the meaning of their names. That's when our curiosity about the importance of naming a child in a particular culture is aroused.


For some, the name given to a child is planned by their parents or someone close to them even before the baby is born, a name that somehow indicates the gender of the baby. Some will take the name of a famous celebrity, or a popular sports player, while others will pick a Biblical name for their baby. In some cultures, the name given to a baby upon birth and registered as such on their birth certificate will also become their baptismal name.

When I arrived here in the Kachin State, they asked me if I already had a Kachin name. I wondered if it was necessary for me to have one.

In the Kachin State of Myanmar, they have their own way of giving names to their children. They do not name them after famous people.

The ordinal birth of the child takes precedence, i.e. first child, second child, etc. Besides that, a second name that somehow means “good” or “lucky” is added, with the belief and hope that this will help the child become a better person someday.

A ritual called “Ja Htawng Htu” (meaning, pounding of ginger) is traditionally done for the naming of a newly-born child. Usually, they prepare wild ginger (not an ordinary one), salt, and dried fish or meat. Putting them all together into a small mortar, they then pound them. While pounding, the catechist would mention the name of the child, as given by the parents, and would say his/her prayers and wishes for the child and for the family. They usually invite some friends to witness the ritual. For the Catholics, the child will be given a baptismal name or a Christian name upon baptism.

When I arrived here in the Kachin State, they asked me if I already had a Kachin name. I wondered if it was necessary for me to have one. However, I learned that they like to adopt a foreigner as a member of their own family by giving him or her a Kachin name. They usually do the “Ja Htawng Htu” as a way of welcoming a stranger in order to make him or her feel at home with the foster family. With an open heart, we did the ritual, and I was welcomed as a new member of the Sabaw household. It was an honor to be named and called “Sabaw Tang San”: Sabaw being the last name of the family, Tang meaning the fifth son, and San meaning pure or clean. The Kachins have such a rich cultural heritage. 



Michael and friends

Columban lay missionary Michael Javier lives and works in Myanmar.



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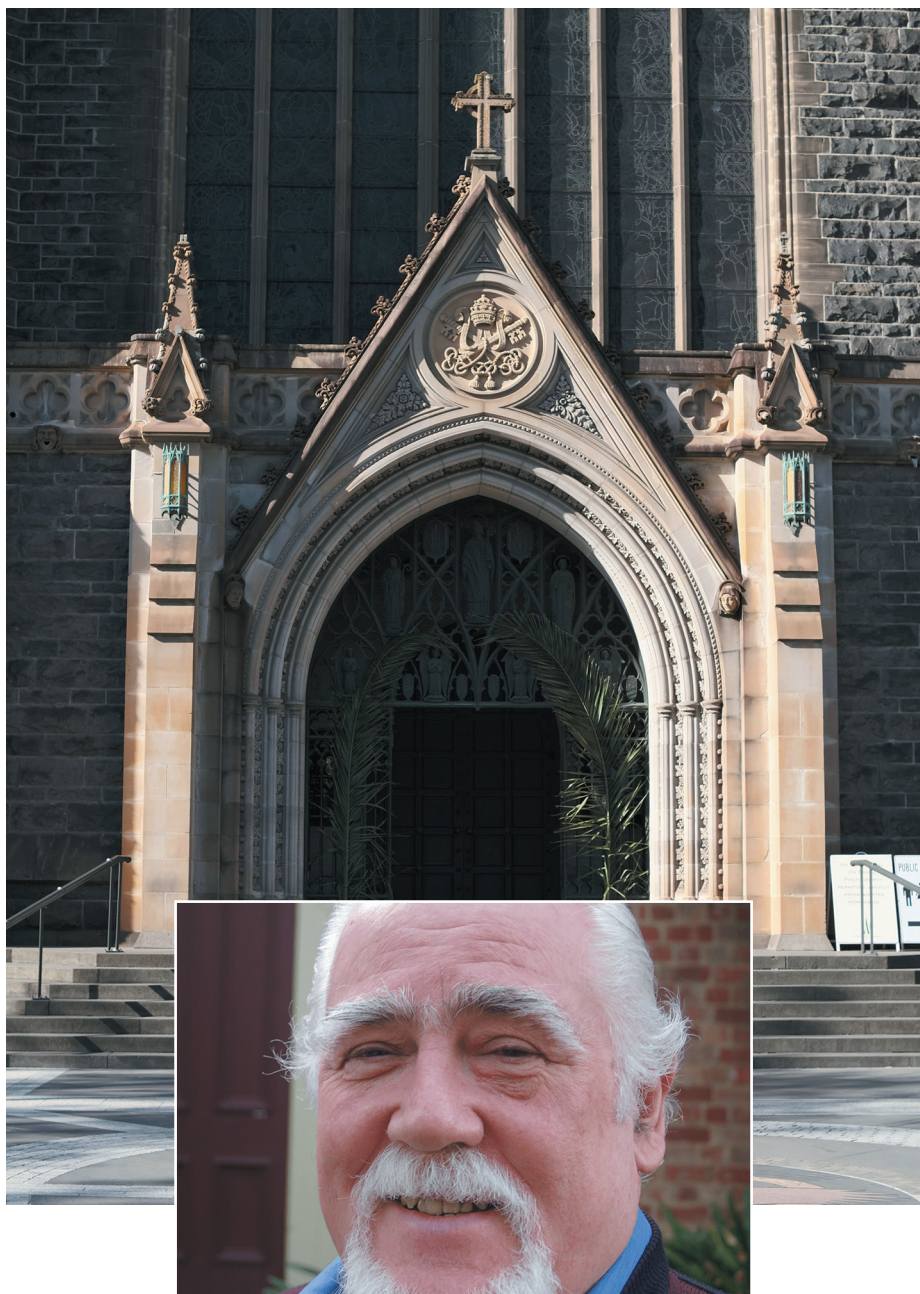
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Led by the Spirit

51 Years a Columban Priest

By Fr. Bernard Dagge

On May 19, 1973, I was ordained a priest at St. Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, Australia, along with eleven other candidates. I was in Form 5 at St. Joseph's CBC North Melbourne when I began wondering

about what I would do with my life after school. That was it, I was concerned about my life, not about a job or career. I had been blessed with a loving family and childhood, raised with faith by Mum and Dad and always loved by them and my sisters,

so I wanted to use my life in thanks to God for all the blessings I had received. What was I to do?

As our family had always been closely involved in the parish of Sacred Heart Newport, the priests were a part of our life, I said to myself, why not go to the seminary. There I would have time to further think about what I would do with my life. It wasn't necessarily about the priesthood. I was shy, locked in my inner self, afraid of the world and all it involved. I needed a haven. Then I had to decide — which seminary?

As we used to get the *Far East* magazine and the Columban Calendar, naturally the Columbans came to mind. So one day after school at North, I got on the tram and came out to Essendon and met the recently deceased Fr. Bernard Cleary who was vocations Director at the time. And so I entered the seminary in 1967. About a month after arriving there, I was thanking the Lord Jesus that He had brought me to the right place. For the first time in my life I felt free, I was with like-minded people and I knew — for the first time — that I was on the way to priesthood.

The next relevant thing in the story happened on this date in 1973 during the prostration in the Ordination Ceremony. I got cold feet; I guess I had a panic attack. I was thinking that I cannot do this, but just as suddenly a feeling of peace, like a warm, soft blanket came over me and I heard my Lord Jesus say "You can do this, Bernie, relax and believe in me." So when I stood up from the prostration, I was a new man looking forward to my future. Furthermore, since that day I have always prayed and talked with Jesus as a brother, a mate, a loving friend.

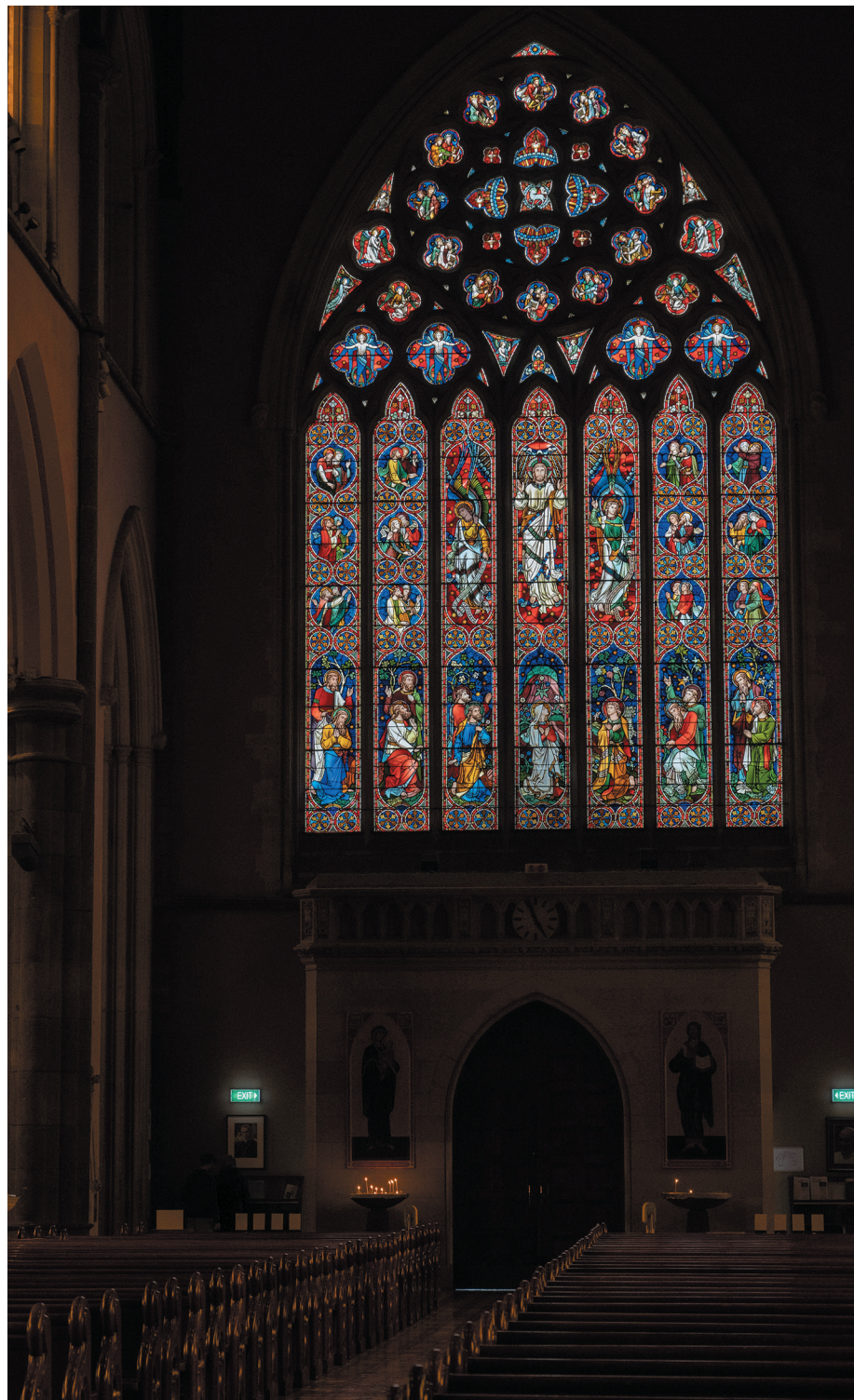
In June 1974, I left by ship from Port Melbourne for Korea on July 5,

and Fr. Jack Evans joined me in Sydney. We arrived in Seoul on August 20, 1974. As feast days are important in Korea, I discovered later that August 20 is Bernard's Feast day. I arrived in Korea on my feast day. So far, everything for me was blessed, and I was happy.


We did one year at language school, then as a curate in a parish, and another year of language study. Although I did well in the parish in Chuncheon, back at language school I was hopeless — I couldn't understand what the teachers were saying — I dreaded having questions directed at me. I was really embarrassed because all the students were conversing in Korean, and I was a real dummy. I fell into despair and decided that if I couldn't speak Korean, then I would have to go back home. But just as I was thinking this, the Regional Director appointed me to Mosulpo parish in Cheju Island. I knew that Mosulpo was a one-man parish, so I said to him "What by myself?" He said yes as the parish priest. I thought to myself maybe I will be better able to learn the language on my own on the job. In the next 12 months, I discovered that even with my limited language ability, I was still able to be a witness of the Risen Lord, a disciple of Jesus. Since then, apart from two brief stints in the United States, I have been in Korea for 48 years.

After Cheju Diocese, I was in Chuncheon Diocese, Kwang Ju Diocese, Suwon Diocese, and in Seoul Archdiocese. In 1998, I went into the Mission Promotion ministry, first in Seoul, then Jeju and later Busan where I worked until retirement in 2018. Since then I've helped out in a small way by celebrating benefactors' Masses when called upon.

That then is my story of the past 51 years. I really want to say, the



common thread throughout my life is — I can say that from day one — I have always had the attitude of waiting upon the Lord. To quote Scripture "The Lord formed me in my mother's womb." The spirit of the Lord led me to the Seminary. The spirit of my Lord Jesus led me to the Columbans, the Spirit of Jesus spoke to me during the

prostration at ordination. I was sent to South Korea, and from then on I have been led by the Spirit of Jesus from day one to this day....Amen. 

This article is an abbreviated version of the homily given by Fr. Bernie at his Golden Jubilee Celebration Mass in Melbourne. Fr. Bernie lives and works in Korea.

Mom's Last Lessons

Treasured Memories

By Fr. Robert Mosher



Fr. Robert and his mom at his ordination

My Mom, Marie, was a happy mother, giving me, together with Dad, a wonderful sense of security that I appreciated from my earliest years.

I treasure the reassuring memories of the large gingerbread man she would make every Christmas, complete with a story to tell me and my sisters and brothers who arrived to the family after me, thanks to a special Betty Crocker cookbook from the 1950s that included the tale along with the recipe and pattern for the single large cookie. There were lots and lots of similar loving moments, of course.

She was studying at college for a degree in teaching, planning on working as a professional CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) professor, as Catholic education was termed before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). She was a smart lady, the valedictorian of her class at St. Michael's High School in Union City, New Jersey.

"You'll never be smarter than your mother," my Dad would tell us, from time to time. Indeed, she always seemed a few steps ahead of me, even later on, as I grew up. When my parents adopted two baby boys after I entered the seminary, they brought them along with them about ten years later, when they visited me for a week in Chile, my assigned country as a Columban Father for 30 years. I marveled at what wise parents they had become, handling them with calm assurance and just the right amount of flexibility!

"Who are these people?," I wondered. As the oldest child, my parents and I discovered together what skills were essential to family life, and I could take a little indirect pride at what my parents had learned, over time. My job here is done, I told myself, as I marveled at their patience and guidance of the two boys.

We also knew that a time would come when Mom would need to be

cared for herself, towards the end of her life, by us, her children. Her own parents lived with us for a long time as we grew up, so we kept Mom's example of caring for our parents in our hearts. Eventually, Mom moved in with one of my sisters after Dad died, and then, after my brother-in-law suddenly succumbed to a brain tumor, my second sister joined them.

There was a happy moment when Mom turned 90. My sisters invited relatives and many friends of the family to come over, and Mom loved it, especially when a couple of people her own age came to see her, and she remembered them! Soon afterwards, however, COVID-19 swept the world, just as Mom entered a stage of dementia.

As my ministry in El Paso, Texas, eventually shut down, I moved to New England and took the guest room of the house to help care for Mom at that stage. After so many years of my missionary priesthood spent in other countries and faraway regions of the world, it seemed to be the time to finally live closer to my family and help them.

We deeply feared what would happen if Mom contracted the coronavirus and had to be isolated in a hospital. We couldn't take a chance of a well-meaning visitor accidentally passing on the virus to her, so we asked most people to stay away, especially if they hadn't been vaccinated. Keeping Mom safe became our highest priority, especially when she would be at her most confused and vulnerable stage of life. She also became unreasonable, combative and delusional.

In my spiritual readings and retreats over the years, the idea was introduced to me that the people I found most challenging in life, and hard to get along with, were actually to be considered as my teachers. That is, they revealed to me my shortcomings and impatience, and pointed out areas in my life that still needed to grow.



Marie Mosher

I needed to learn that the ways that others chose to relate to people or situations didn't have to be the same as my own perspective or responses. "Troublesome" people could teach me new ways to understand a problem, and help me identify and dispel my hidden prejudices and generalizations about people. I needed to pay grateful attention to those who bothered me the most in my life. And we soon found that accompanying Mom would give us a doctoral-level course in the field of Caring for Parents with Dementia!


Increasingly, we found it harder to anticipate how she would get up in the morning. Sometimes, she couldn't remember precisely who we were, while at other times her memories of early childhood seemed very available for her, as if they were experiences of only a few days before. We heard about beautiful moments of holding her dad's hand, tales about her siblings and mother, and going to church. On St. Patrick's Day, she surprised us by singing by heart many verses of old Irish songs.

We developed our own capacity for humor, too. When Mom complained of how often she would be made to get up and go the bathroom, she went so far one time as to declare that this would be the last time she would ever go. "After this, I refuse to go anymore!" My sister Mary took the threat in her stride, gently taking her arm and walking with her to the bathroom, saying, "Well, Mom, let's make it one for the ages, then!"

Towards the end, with only weeks of life remaining, she seemed to regain clarity, and awareness that her time remaining with us was short. She began to tell us, "I want to go home, now." At the end, the request took on a new meaning — she would be going home soon to our Creator's embrace, and would see my father again.

Finally, we didn't plan on any traditional dinner for Thanksgiving, because Mom was failing fast. She said goodbye to our relatives during her last week of life. Our wonderful neighbors brought over some of their Thanksgiving food to us in the evening, and we ate a few bites while sitting with Mom in her bedroom. A hospice nurse came by to help us, and Mom passed over into the New Life of Christ on the morning after Thanksgiving Day.

Thank you, indeed, dear God, for such a gifted and beautiful person that you provided for us as a model of a faithful and loving companionship to my Dad for over 60 years of marriage, a mother of five children and many more foster children. We selected the Biblical readings for her funeral Mass, including these lines, which seemed to appropriate:

*When she opens her mouth, wisdom
issues forth,
and on her tongue is kindly advice.
She keeps close watch on the conduct of
her household,
and she does not eat the bread of
idleness.
Her children stand up and proclaim her
blessed,
and her husband joins them in
praising her.
'Many are the women who have done
admirable things,
but you outdo them all.'
(Proverbs 31: 26-29) *

Columban Fr. Robert Mosher lives and works in Rhode Island.

A Neighbor Nearby

Better than a Distant Relative

By Lee Kyungja Christina

The Korean proverb “A neighbor nearby is better than a distant relative” emphasizes the importance of having a good relationship with neighbors, as neighbors are often more reliable and helpful in times of need than distant relatives. It suggests that community and neighborly bonds are valuable and should be nurtured. As a missionary who is living with many migrants, I often reflect on what it means to become a true neighbor in the community.

Iteawon, Seoul, is a representative multicultural district in Korea. It is divided into two parts. One is where many foreign tourists and rich people

One of the things I feel grateful and rewarded by, while living as neighbors with these people as a missionary, is seeing the smiles of people who had lost their smiles.

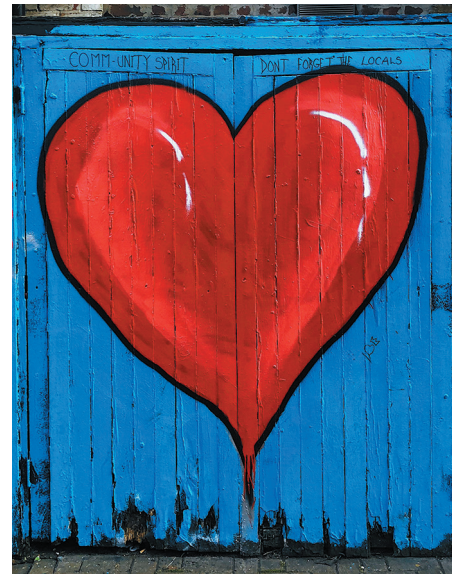
live a colorful lifestyle, and the other one is where poor people and migrants come to make money, to live and support their family in their home country. I am living in the second part, and my neighbors are mostly undocumented people, humanitarian sojourners and asylum seekers. In this place I can encounter more migrants than Koreans on the streets.

I believe that meeting people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, learning about their cultures, and sharing our own is a special gift. However, I think, it is important to recognize the challenges faced by migrants,

including humanitarian sojourners and asylum seekers in Korea. The strict screening process and relatively low refugee acceptance rate make it difficult for them to establish a new life here. Despite these challenges, many migrants are grateful for the opportunity of work, to save and send financial support to their families back home. But some people struggle with the cultural adaptation and find it difficult to build relationships with others and integrate fully into with new neighbors. When I see people facing various difficulties and challenges, it reminds me of the experiences I had while living as a missionary in other cultures. So I can easily relate my experience to their life and now, living in the community with them, helps me understand more about their real situation.

I am meeting the people and building friendship through visitation, teaching basic Korean language, inviting them to cooking classes and accompanying them to the hospital and immigration office. One of the things I feel grateful and rewarded by, while living as neighbors with these people as a missionary, is seeing the smiles of people who had lost their smiles.

For example there is one of mother from Bangladesh who is now learning Korean language. She had experienced depression and isolation herself staying at home without engaging in outside activities. The language, the cultural barrier and her attitude were challenging for both her and her children. When I visited her for the first time, she was lying down on her bed in a dark room. But



through visiting and encouraging her to learn Korean and inviting her to other activities, she is now slowly coming out from her self-contained world to the real world. We still have some difficulties in communicating with each other, but even if it is very seldom, I see her smiling and listening to others talk. She needs more courage herself, to be challenged to overcome her obstacles and connect to her new environment. But I am happy to see her smile, and I want to congratulate and welcome her out from her own world.

I can say I am still in the stage of learning about the migrants' situation and their life in Korea. What I am doing with them are little things, but I think the little things I am doing, and the time with them are valuable, enabling me to become a true neighbor. I will continue to build relationships and friendship with them in welcoming, respecting, understanding and giving empathy regardless their background or circumstances. And as a missionary, I hope to offer comfort and courage for those who feel fear in the darkness or cannot see hope in their life to emerge into a brighter place. **EM**

Columban lay missionary Lee Kyungja Christina lives and works in Seoul.

Does God Smile?

Years ago, when I was a seminarian, I was sitting in the chapel praying. Another Columban seminarian, Xavier from Korea, was also praying. At one moment, he turned to me and asked, “Chris, in the bible, when is Jesus happy?” I was caught off guard by the question. It caused my mind to race to find an answer. Eventually, I answered, “I don’t know but I am sure he did experience joy in his life.” It was sometime after that I encountered the passage from Luke’s Gospel (10:17-24) where, after the seventy disciples returned with joy from the mission, Jesus rejoiced with them. Yet, Xavier’s question always bothered me. As a child, when we entered the church, we were always told to be quiet, don’t laugh, don’t speak loudly, etc., as if God was offended that happy people came to church. Maybe because of this, it’s easier to maintain an image of God that is stoic, distant, and strict. I often asked myself, does God smile? After all, didn’t Jesus warn us about such appearances, “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face...” Matthew 6: 16

Sometime after, I was sent to Chile for my first missionary assignment as a seminarian. I completed two years and prepared to go home. One day I told a young person from my confirmation class that I was preparing to leave Chile. I was surprised when she told me, “thank you for everything brother. You know when you smile at me, it is as if Jesus is smiling at me.” I was shocked and didn’t know what to say. Of course, I quickly dismissed it and said, “only Jesus is Jesus.” Looking back, to this day, it has been the greatest compliment I have ever



FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Chris Saenz

received in my vocation.

Two years later, I had a homiletics class that taught the art of preaching. The professor divided us into small groups of four. We practiced preaching a homily in our small group later to be critiqued by our peers and professor. After I gave my homily, one classmate said to me, “you know, you did something that I never experienced before in a homily, you smiled at me.” I was taken aback. I was unaware I did so but all reassured me that it was a good thing. Sadly, a priest not smiling while



preaching is a common experience for the faithful. As St. Teresa of Avila, the 16th century Spanish mystic, would caution, “from silly devotions and sour-faced saints, good Lord, deliver us!”

Some years later, as a priest, I was taking advanced studies in Boston College for a degree in Spirituality. In one class, the professor asked all to anonymously write on small piece of paper one thing we do to make a difference in the church. I thought about it and eventually wrote, I smile in church. The professor collected the notes then he randomly read them out loud. When the professor read my note, the class burst

“What would happen if we hid what little sense of humor we had? Let us humbly use this to cheer others.”

~ St. Teresa of Avila

out in laughter. However, the professor said, “why do we laugh? Why is a smile so radical in Christianity?” Once again, St. Teresa of Avila reminds us, “What would happen if we hid what little sense of humor we had? Let each of us humbly use this to cheer others.”

When does God smile? God smiles when we express joy and rejoice. God smiles when Christians smile. Let us be radical in our faith and smile for God! A smile can evangelize more than any words we can say.



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– Isaiah 6:8

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