



Columban Mission

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OVERCOMING FEAR

C O N T E N T S

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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. Michael Riordan

Hospice Painting

Columban Fr. Michael Riordan, parish priest of Geumak Parish in Jeju island writes about the mural found at the door of St. Isidore Hospice and pastoral its function apart from its aesthetic value. The hospice takes care of people who are at the last stage of life.

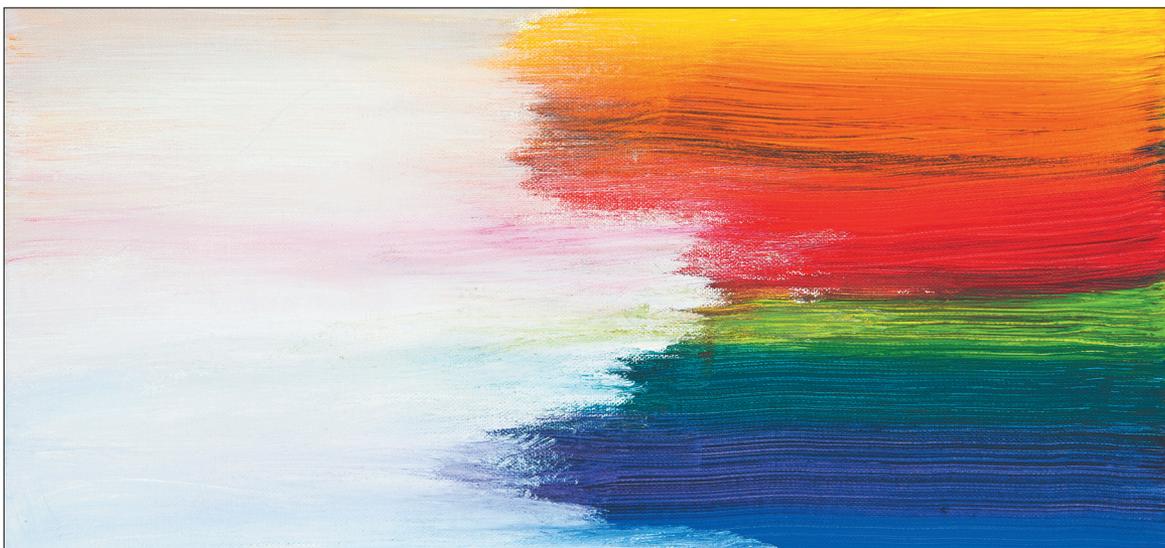
While the artwork could not be called “religious art” in the strict sense of the word, I would care to call it “pastoral art” not in the sense that it is of nature but that it has a pastoral purpose. These works of art are painted on the walls of the entrance to the Isidore Hospice for the dying and also on one of the walls and door of one of the rooms there.

The purpose of the hospice is to care for people at the last stage of life; to accompany them as they prepare to leave this world. Whether they are Christians or not we also aim to let them experience God’s love during this time. The way we listen and talk with the patients and their relatives and the respect we show them in the way we treat them are all part of this work.

I also think the atmosphere is important and without the painting the entrance and corridor had a very clinical and hospital feel about them. The paintings softened the atmosphere and this has an effect not only on the patients but also on the people who work there. It makes a difference to the way one feels as one enters the hospice; rather than a cold and clinical feeling it gives a sense of warmth. It also shows that the hospice has made an effort to make those entering feel a bit more at ease and comfortable. In this sense the artwork is part of the care and pastoral approach of the hospice.

In this sense the artwork is part of the care and pastoral approach of the hospice.

Columban Fr. Michael Riordan is the parish priest of Geumak Parish in Jeju Island, South Korea.





A Dead Man Can't Witness a Marriage

And Other Errors!

By Fr. Frank Hoare

The marriage ceremony was almost finished. It was time for the civil wedding. The groom's younger brother had informed me that the witness from the bride's side would be Durga Prasad. So to save time I had written this on the certificate before the marriage ceremony. Now the bride looked up from the certificate and gasped, "Durga Prasad was my grandfather. He is dead! Hans Raj here is the witness."

Shocked, I heard myself say, "Maybe he can sign as Durga Prasad," "No, the government registrar knows that Hans Raj will be the witness."

So I crossed out Durga Prasad and wrote Hans Raj instead. That was the last, but not the only, hiccup!

The Baraat [Groom's party]

This Indian wedding was to take place in the home of the bride near the town of Savusavu in Vanua Levu, the second main island of Fiji. I travelled with the

groom's party – my first time ever to do so. I arrived at the groom's house in Suva, on the main island of Fiji, in the early morning. I was a stranger to most of the extended family gathered there. They appeared to look at me as though I was out of place.

Everyone was taking photos everywhere — at the groom's home, at the airport, in the plane, on arrival, throughout the wedding ceremony and in all those places on the return journey. So I wasn't formally introduced. I did manage to introduce myself to a few of the men in the travelling party of fifteen.

There were two problems. Firstly, the groom and bride lived on different islands – a 40 minute flight. The groom's party wanted to get home that evening. The plane would leave Suva at 8:30 a.m. and the last return flight was at 4:30 p.m.

Secondly, Vanua Levu had just suffered massive flooding with serious

damage to the main roads. We would have to bypass a broken section of the road by following the old dirt road. This meant a difficult two hour journey by road to Savusavu. We struggled in stop-start fashion through torrential rain and arrived at the bride's house at 11:30 a.m. I began the wedding at 12:00 p.m. Time would be tight.

An Inculturated Indian Wedding

The wedding was between a Catholic groom and a Hindu bride and most of the guests were Hindus. I was relieved to see a group of Catholic Indo-Fijian friends from the next parish who were invited to sing at the wedding. The wedding was celebrated under a decorated canopy in the middle of a lean-to shed which was connected to the house. In the middle of the canopy was a small low altar, my chair at one end and a low settee at right angles for the bride and groom to sit in front of the altar.



The Catholic Indian choir



Left: Praveena and Aidan



Aidan and Praveena after the 7 steps

We began with the formal meeting of the two families at the entrance to the shed. I prayed for continued respect, and unity between them. The emcee called on different relatives from both sides to meet. They exchanged a hug and garlanded one another. All were then seated.

The bridal party made a solemn entry from the house to the wedding canopy. On arrival she garlanded the groom and he, in turn, garlanded her and showed her to her seat on his right side.

It was a Catholic wedding consisting of Bible readings, hymns, homily, the exchange of vows, intercessory prayers, and the nuptial blessing. But the ceremony also included a number of colorful, traditional Indian rituals. This made the wedding more meaningful, especially to the Hindus present.

Quenching the Fire of Patriarchalism

One of the most touching rites is the kanya daan — the gift of the young girl. Just before the exchange

of vows the bride's parents support their daughter's hands in their cupped hands with the groom's hands below theirs. As the bride's brother pours water over the hands on to a brass plate the parent's tearfully withdraw their supportive hands allowing the bride's hands to fall into the groom's hands.

I had made a point in my homily of emphasizing the words of Genesis 2:24 "...therefore that is why a man leaves his father and mother, is attached to his wife and with her becomes one flesh." The young man



Decorated hands of the wedding couple Aidan and Praveena



Groom, bride and Fr. Frank seated under the marriage canopy.

too must, at least psychologically, leave his parents.

After the exchange of vows the newlyweds, with clothes tied together by a ribbon, stood up to process slowly seven times around the altar. At each round they were to pour incense onto lighted charcoal in a container. I had suggested that instead of charcoal some hot cinders could be brought from a fire elsewhere. The bride's brother arrived carrying a large iron bucket with flames shooting up from hastily lit sticks. The emcee, with quick presence of mind, gave orders for the fire to be extinguished. I handed him the holy water. He sprinkled it carefully so there would still be some hot embers but no flames.

This was followed by the couple taking seven steps together after making a commitment before each step to protect their marriage together. They then returned to the settee but this time the bride sat on her groom's left.

I blessed *sindur* (red powder), a necklace called a *mangal sutra* (thread of joy) and two rings. While their

heads were covered with a cloak, the groom traced a red line through the bride's hair and a red spot on her forehead, and hung the necklace around her neck. Then, with the cloak removed, the couple placed a ring on each other's finger. This Western symbol added the mutuality lacking in the other symbols.

Before the nuptial blessing I invited the both sets of relatives to bless the couple by sprinkling them with rice mixed with flower petals (the original confetti, I suppose). I breathed a sigh of relief then as the choir sang the final hymn, and I called the witnesses to sign the civil certificate of marriage. That is when I discovered that I had included a dead man as a witness.

Togetherness Brings Acceptance

We had to rush our lunch. The young people began a spontaneous dance. Then it was time for the bride to leave her family, relatives and friends amidst many tears. We stepped through the rain into the minibuses and set off for

the airport. I didn't even have time to greet my friends who had graced the occasion with their hymn singing. We made it just in time to board the plane.

Back at the groom's house in Suva there were more photos as the newlyweds entered their home. Other close relatives came and all sat around in the sitting room drinking juice and eating sweetmeats brought from the bride's home.

One of the groom's uncles, in praising my Hindi, said that I must have an Indian girlfriend. Another uncle thanked me for the beautiful ceremony and said that when I visited the house again I should let him know so that he could come around for a chat.

I was happy that I had been able to share the Word of God and introduce the Church to the groom's extended Hindu family. In the morning I was a stranger, but by the evening I was a friend. **GM**

Columban Fr. Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.



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 Covid-19 Wedding

It had to be on June 6!

By Fr. John McEvoy

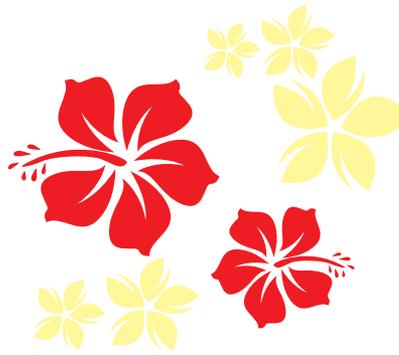
Jonathan Kunau and Hilda Vukikomoala had planned their wedding a year in advance. Since both of them were members of big families, they wanted a big celebration of their two families and friends (in excess of 200 guests). They had booked a fancy hotel in Suva, Fiji, for June 6, 2020.

The sixth of June was an important date for this couple. When they were high school students, Jonathon at Marist Brothers and Hilda at St. Joseph's Secondary School, they met for the first time. It was at a Marist Brothers school function on the June 6, 2012, the Feast day of St. Marcellin (founder of the Marist Brothers). They were engaged on June 6, 2019, and they would plan their wedding for June 6, 2020.

But in March 2020 Covid 19 struck not only in Fiji but also throughout the world. Here in Fiji, churches were closed for public worship, and only twenty people were allowed to attend functions like funerals and weddings.

But Jonathan and Hilda were determined to go ahead with their wedding on June 6, 2020. We considered holding it in the church with the allotted number of people allowed (20), but eventually it was decided it would take place in their home. This would mean they had only one place to decorate, i.e. their home – but still sticking to the allotted family numbers allowed to attend. In recent times our Archbishop was not worried where couples had their weddings, especially when so many tourists come to Fiji to marry. He

maintains that a wedding can take place in any sacred space/place. He is a great advocate of *Laudato si'* and the sacredness of the earth would not be opposed to a wedding taking place in a home especially under such present circumstances.



The setting was beautiful, lovely and homey. The celebration of the wedding Mass was as solemn as any celebrated in a cathedral or big church.

And so it was – on June 6, 2020, fourteen members of their immediate families gathered and transformed the house into a place of beauty for the occasion. Present were Jonathan's parents and three of his grandparents, Hilda's sister, Aunt and Uncle and two of her grandparents (fourteen in all including the photographer and the priest)! None of Jonathan's siblings were present which of course was a source of disappointment. The setting was beautiful, lovely and homey. The celebration of the wedding Mass was as solemn as any celebrated in a cathedral

or big church. Jonathan's mother, Essie, who is a member of the parish choir directed those who were willing and dared to sing a few hymns.

When the register was signed and the feasting and drinking got underway, it was easy for the two families to meet, chat and compare notes as how the lockdown affected them over the last months. Even the priest had no trouble in getting to know all present on the day!

There was yet another reason why Hilda, in particular, wanted to have her wedding at home. The house was owned by her Uncle and Aunt and in the garden of the house there were three large coconut trees growing. It is the custom in some parts of Fiji, that when a child is born the umbilical cord is planted with a young coconut tree. This was the case with Hilda. In this house her parents placed her umbilical cord and later on those of her sister Tiresa and her brother Wayne with a young coconut tree when they were born. She would see this day as a very special connection with nature and her growth. The Fijians believe that this ceremony will prevent the child from becoming mischievous in life. From our photos it is obvious that Hilda has grown into a most gracious and lovely young lady!

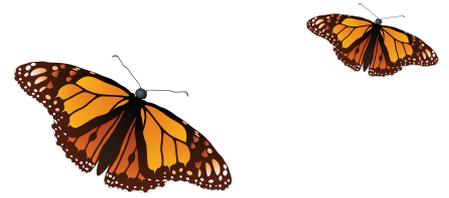
In the end, it was obvious that Hilda and Jonathan's wedding had to be on June 6, pandemic or no pandemic! 📷

Columban Fr. John McEvoy lives and works in Fiji.

Can You See Me Smile?

Connecting While Wearing a Mask

By Kevin Sheerin

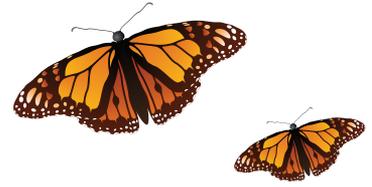


There is an old Chinese proverb that says “a man without a smiling face must never open a shop.” This is pretty sound advice. If you can’t smile and be friendly, then it’s probably not worth your while opening a shop. Pretty logical really. It’s the golden rule of customer service after all. We can all appreciate the value of a smile. It costs nothing to give but enriches those who receive it and is of the earthly good to anyone until it is given away. It is also one of the most powerful means of communication we have at our disposal, and we need no college degree to master its art.

So why am I writing about smiling?

We can all appreciate the value of a smile. It costs nothing to give but enriches those who receive it and is of the earthly good to anyone until it is given away.

Well, probably because this is the one thing I am beginning to miss most in this new Covid world in which we are now living. It seems that the common social smile has become one of the casualties in our determination to halt the transmission of the virus. It has become collateral damage as mask wearing has taken over as the socially accepted norm. We communicate so much through our facial expressions, but now those vital expressions are hidden behind the masks we wear. As missionaries, one of the first challenges we encounter in arriving in a new country is to learn the language in order to make ourselves understood,



which can be a long process. In the initial stages we rely mostly on the non-verbal communication that transcends all cultures – our facial expressions, particularly our smiles. It connects us to people. As the old saying goes, a smile speaks a thousand words and makes us feel at home, especially when that smile is returned to us.

When I arrived here in Hong Kong, although English is widely spoken, there are many who do not speak English or prefer not to, particularly among the homeless. As a person who smiles a lot, I found that although I could not connect to the local people by means of language, a shared smile made all the difference.

When you receive a smile, it does have a positive effect on you; it makes you feel good and brightens your day. We all know that when you are greeted with a scowl it causes negative reactions within you and leaves you feeling more irritable. That is why a simple smile is so important. You never know the impact it can have on a person and how it can change their day.

We are having to learn how to see the world through a mask, and it looks like it will be a regular aspect of our lives for the foreseeable future. When we first started to wear masks here one of my colleagues jokingly asked me “can you see me smile?” And to be honest, no, I couldn’t, although I knew that beneath the mask she was. We now have to rely on the expression behind the eyes, as it is the only part of the face that we now see, unless they too are hidden behind sunglasses. Some people have expressive eyes, others, not so much.

When we don’t see a person’s face, then sometimes we don’t see the



We communicate so much through our facial expressions, but now those vital expressions are hidden behind the masks we wear.

person. Everyone becomes the same, indistinguishable from each other. We become like zombies. We pass each other in the street without even a glance. Why bother smiling if no one can see you smile? I’ve asked myself that question on numerous occasions when I realize that despite smiling underneath my mask, no one can see it.

There is a risk of becoming desensitized and robotic in our daily interactions when we don’t see each other’s faces. The world is a sadder place when we can’t smile, and God knows we need something to cheer us up, now more than ever.

Research confirms how vital facial expressions are in human interactions, more so than verbal communication. One experiment carried out between a mother and her baby showed how

joyful and happy the baby was once the mother made faces and smiled. When the mother was asked to just look at the baby with no expression on her face, immediately the baby became uncomfortable and began to cry and squirm.

In the business world, when giving presentations, it is not so much what you say but how you say it, that is via the non-verbal facial expressions the presenter uses. It can make or break a business deal.

It’s ironic that towards the end of last year, here in Hong Kong when the city was rocked with protests, laws were put forward to stop people from wearing masks. Now, with the pandemic, the opposite has become the norm, and everyone is now required to wear masks. We know how important wearing a mask is to the prevention of disease. No one is disputing that, but let us not use our masks to disguise who we are and lose that which makes us human.

We hope that, in time, this virus that arrived on the scene so unexpectedly will eventually lose its virulence, allow us to ditch the masks and get to see people smile again. Like everyone else, I pray that the lockdowns and restrictions end, that people can get back to work again, and socialize as they did before, but most of all I pray that we can see people smile once more.

But even beneath the mask, let’s not become like robots. Let’s continue to smile even if no one sees. Smile, and the world smiles with you! 

Columban lay missionary Kevin Sheerin lives and works in Hong Kong.

The Call to Justice

How I Became a Human Rights Advocate

An interview with Fr. Cathal Gallagher by Fr. John Boles

Fr. Cathal Gallagher recalls the incident vividly. “It was in 1998. I was working in a poor parish in Lima. I got a call from a local clinic, run by the Mercy Sisters, saying someone was having a serious panic attack. I went over. The man there was in a real state. Kept saying, ‘My brother died last night.’ Fr. Cathal, recognizing him and thinking he was all confused with grief, assured him, “No, he died last Friday. I did the funeral.” “NO,” the man insisted, “my OTHER brother. HE died last night!”

The man had lost his two brothers in a week. Both had died of Aids.

This was the pivotal moment which Fr. Cathal reckons changed his life. Or, it might be more accurate to

say that it was one of a whole series of life changes that have seen him moving from being a policeman in his native Ireland to a Columban missionary priest in Peru, where he dedicates much of his time to caring for people infected with – or affected by – HIV/Aids.

Being from Northern Ireland, justice issues were always important to Fr. Cathal. Maybe it because of this that he felt attracted to public service.

Yet, by Fr. Cathal’s own admission, this remarkable journey began in a very conventional fashion. Born in 1951 in Co. Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, Fr. Cathal grew up in what he remembers as a “typical Irish Catholic family” of the time. “Rosary every night, Confession every Saturday, a boarder at the local Catholic grammar.”

Being from Northern Ireland, justice issues were always important to Fr. Cathal. Maybe it because of this that he felt attracted to public service, and at the age of 20 hopped over the border to join the *garda síochána* (or, “the guards”), the police force in the Republic.

“I enjoyed my time in the guards immensely,” he remembers, in spite



José Luis distributing foodstuffs at a reception point.



Victor of “Sí da Vida” at the controls of the center’s radio station

of what he describes as a few “hairy experiences.” It was the 1970s, the height of “The Troubles.” Yet, after just six years, he took the radical decision of quitting the police and entering the seminary. Why priesthood? Why the Columbans?

“I’d had an inkling of ‘something else’ calling me, ever since I’d been an altar boy back home,” Fr. Cathal recalls. “Also, I’d always been interested in mission. *The Far East* (the Columban society magazine) gripped me.”

Another factor was that the Columbans’ main house in Ireland, Dalgan Park, was only a stone’s throw from Navan, where Fr. Cathal was based as a policeman. He used to pass the entrance to Dalgan nearly every day. “Finally, I decided to drive in. Just turned up at the door. Asked to speak to a priest. Took it from there.”

“Two main driving forces in my life have been justice and rights,” he affirms. “As a priest. As a cop.”

One step led to another, and he joined the Columbans in 1979, did his priestly formation in Ireland and overseas in Chile, was ordained in 1985 and appointed to Peru.

For most people, Fr. Cathal had already run up enough vocation changes to last a lifetime, but more was yet to come.

“Accompanying suffering was the key,” he explains. He’d seen suffering caused by “The Troubles” in Ireland. He’d seen it in Chile, the product of a brutal military dictatorship. He met it on arrival in Peru, where the Maoist insurgency of the notorious *Sendero Luminoso* (“Shining

Path”) group caused havoc from 1980 to 1995. Finally, he saw the suffering inflicted by the AIDS epidemic which was ravaging parts of his parish in the 1990s— epitomized by that heart-rending tragedy of the death of the two brothers.

He decided to act. Again. “Two main driving forces in my life have been justice and rights,” he affirms. “As a priest. As a cop.” So, he went twice to London, first becoming a psychotherapist and then gaining experience as coordinator of the multi-disciplinary team working to protect the health and promote the rights of those with HIV.

Returning to Lima, Fr. Cathal set up an organization to put into practice all he had learned. He called it, “*Sí da Vida*” (roughly translated as, “Yes to Life”). “Human dignity was the focus, fighting the discrimination that people living with HIV/Aids



José Luis distributing foodstuffs to recipient.



Fr. Cathal with “*Sí da Vida*” personnel outside the organization’s center in Lima.

experience in Peru.” His guiding light was the idea of “responsibility”, or rather, “response-ability” – helping people respond to new situations in their lives, and giving them the tools to do so.

He implemented the Positive Self-Management Program (developed at Stanford University in the U.S.). This promotes a “social model of health care.” People are taught how to manage their own chronic health conditions. They are also educated in prevention, with former participants going on to become instructors.

Almost 20 years on, the results are impressive. Supported by funding from the Irish government, the Columbans and private benefactors, “Sí da Vida” now boasts a center and a dozen staff, including doctors, psychologists and social workers. Some 400 instructors have been trained, around 4,500 people

Finally, he saw the suffering inflicted by the AIDS epidemic which was ravaging parts of his parish in the 1990’s— epitomized by that heart-rending tragedy of the death of the two brothers.

have benefited from the programs and a much wider population have received prevention education through talks, literature and the center’s own radio station.

The staff liaise with government agencies and the police. Volunteers go into places as varied as universities, hospitals, prisons and discos. They always concentrate on the poorer areas.

“We go to the people; we don’t wait for them to come to us,” Fr. Cathal affirms.

Today, Fr. Cathal divides his time between “Sí da Vida,” his role as Director of the Columbans in South America, and the driving force behind an inter-agency network responding to the effects of the Covid emergency in North Lima.

It seems as though he has been ticking off all the “Ps”...from police to priesthood to psychotherapy to Peru. To continue with the alliteration, it has all been an extraordinary “pilgrim’s progress” for Fr. Cathal Gallagher. 

Columban Fr. John Boles wrote this article based on interviews with Fr. Cathal Gallagher. Columban Fr. Gabriel Rojas and Columban seminarian Atonio Saula Seeto provided the photos. All are on mission in Peru.



Fr. Cathal in conversation with Victor, Director of “Sí da Vida”, on the upper terrace of the center



Fr. Cathal back in the 1990's celebrating an open air Mass in that poor parish where the two brothers died of Aids in the same week.



LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

1% of Your Estate Continues the Mission Work

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

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

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

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



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Birmingham Seagull

God's Spirit

By Jung-Hae Roberta Kim

Since last August, I have been volunteering at a community garden here in Birmingham, Britain, run by one of the ecology organizations. Mainly young people come here to volunteer to plant, network, and socialize every week. It offers a good opportunity for them to learn about plants, eco-friendly life style, ecological activities, all the while working in nature.

As the season has ended, the community garden will only open to the volunteers once a month to look after the garden and prepare for the coming spring. We had a small gathering in the garden to celebrate the harvest and give gratitude for each other's support. It took place during a typical, windy, cloudy day which really made us seek something

warm. I was standing around the wood fire alongside the other volunteers, chatting and trying to pick up their stories and memories from their conversation. Then suddenly it brought me back to 2004 when I joined the Columban lay missionary program and went to Japan without having any knowledge of Japanese.

People there were so generous despite my poor Japanese and always responded to me with a smile and loved to teach me Japanese and share their culture. I still remember an elderly parishioner who had difficulty with his listening was passionate to teach me how to pronounce Azalea in Japanese. I was just like a baby in that unknown country. Those memories came back to me once more as I was immersing myself into Birmingham in 2020. And I

recognized that I had reverted to being a baby again, feeling small, powerless, and vulnerable among the local people. But again, people are so marvelous and warmhearted to open their community and welcome me.

While I was following their accents and the rhythm of their sharing, I happened to catch a glimpse of a seagull. This brought to mind another seagull I had seen during lockdown, flying low through a cloudy sky. One day when lockdown seemed to be going on forever, I went out for a walk as usual, troubled with feelings of frustration, anxiety, awkwardness and loneliness. As I walked, I looked up to the gray sky above and saw a seagull hovering, wings outstretched, silently riding the air, almost

motionless against the dark sky. Then suddenly, she soared upwards, higher and higher, and I heard a thought, “Be Still and know that I am God.” She seemed to be saying to me to stay calm and just be present, and when God’s time comes I will be led to where I should be.

Whenever I venture into nature it always opens its arms to embrace me, console me and teach me valuable lessons. The seagull showed me that when the wind is so harsh that I feel small and nervous, I should try not to struggle to find a way out but rather just keep being present there with all my heart and do what I am doing until the wind brings me to the right place where I should be. And I believe that it must be the time when God’s Spirit is working in my challenging time.

We’re still in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic, and Britain is one of the most seriously affected countries. Many people have lost loved ones, are missing families and hugs, and are living in uncertainty. Many of us are overwhelmed with feelings of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. However, thankfully, we still have nature around us, sharing its life with us, giving us spaces to rest and console our wounded souls.

From time to time when I hear the cry of a seagull, I remember that seagull that hovered above me and say to myself, “don’t worry, just be yourself and do what you are doing.” And I share the seagull’s amazing story when I meet someone else who is weathering a harsh storm in their own life. I am grateful that seagulls are flying and

abundant nature is surrounding us in Birmingham.

I am grateful for the opportunity of working in nature to build a bridge between the life-giving force of nature and the people. I admire how God is missioning and molding me while I am on His mission for His people. I also appreciate the Columban Missionary Society for their prophetic decision in 1990 to open its doors to help and encourage the laity to live out their lay mission vocation. Moreover, I deeply appreciate the Columban benefactors for their prayers and generous support to Columban mission. May all the people’s good will bring peace among all God’s creatures. 

Columban lay missionary Jung-Hae Roberta Kim lives and works in Birmingham, Britain.

Ongoing Response to God’s Love

Mission in Korea

By Sr. Margaret Moran

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10

Korea was the fourth country to open its doors to the Missionary Sisters of Saint Columban. The call of God to engage in mission in Korea came through the invitation of Archbishop Henry in Chollado and Bishop Quinlan in Gangwondo, both members of the Missionary Society of Saint Columban.

As in any post-war country, there was devastation at every turn of the road in Korea in the wake of the 1950-53 war. Having lost everything, the people had to start from scratch to

rebuild again. The people were also sick following the deprivations of war.

In addition, there was a great dearth of medical facilities, personnel and expertise. The two bishops realized that good health was an important step in motivating people to rebuild their lives and rebuild the nation. They petitioned the Superior General of the Missionary Sisters of Saint Columban in Ireland to send some Sisters to Korea to minister to the sick and the poor and to help with the health and well-being of the people.

Seven Sisters were assigned to the coastal town of Mokpo to run a hospital or day clinic. They began their

apostolate on July 5, 1955, the Feast of St. Andrew Kim, the first Korean priest to be martyred. In November 1955, the city of Chuncheon, close to the 38th parallel which divides North Korea from South Korea, welcomed two Sisters (a doctor and a nurse) who started home visitation of the sick and a makeshift clinic in two rooms. The news of the arrival of the Sisters spread like wildfire.

Between 1955 and 2020, the Columban Sisters conducted outpatient day clinics. Mobile clinics went to outlying villages in remote and doctorless areas, to leper colonies, and to the islands. They were also involved



in a nursing school, a midwifery school, mother and childcare, natural family planning, public health, general hospital care as well as in the training of intern doctors and residents to become specialists.

The Sisters were also involved in special care and the rehabilitation of all sorts of accident victims, tuberculosis patients and children and people with disabilities. In several areas the Sisters were involved in the care of the elderly.

St. Columban's Home in Chuncheon caters for about 80

residents, including both Alzheimer's and stroke patients. Myongdo Community of Life is a home, workshop, and education center catering to people with special needs. Our Lady's Home in Mokpo was founded to assist single mothers who had found themselves in difficulties for various reasons.

In the area of justice and peace, the Sisters campaigned for the human rights of undocumented migrants and the victims of prostitution in danger of contracting HIV/AIDS. They also

provided hospice care to enable the terminally ill to spend their remaining days with dignity and surrounded by loved ones. Other involvements included vocations promotion, organic farming and a weaving and knitting project in Hallim on Cheju Isand.

From 1970 through the 80s and later there was a noticeable decline in the numbers of vocation candidates in most Western countries and this also affected the Columban Sisters.

Thankfully, God showed us that when one door closes, another may open to us. From that time forward, young Korean women showed their desire to engage in God's mission as members of the Missionary Sisters of Saint Columban. They too responded to God's call to dedicate their lives to carrying on the same works of compassion and mercy for others.

Between 1970 and 2020, 33 young Korean women entered the Missionary Sisters of Saint Columban and, after appropriate training and preparation, were sent out on mission to various areas of need around the world.

Over the last of 50 years, they have been sent to many countries around the world: Peru and Chile in South America, China, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Pakistan and the Philippines in Asia, and to the United Kingdom, Ireland and the United States in the West. Their respective assignments and experiences are truly a great blessing from God for themselves and for the people they have been sent to. We give thanks for this ongoing response to God's love and compassion and ask that it may continue. CM

Columban Sr. Margaret Moran has been working and living in Korea for the past 43 years.

Mission During COVID-19

An Apocalyptic Time

By Sainana Tamatawale

The year 2020 was one of the most difficult and stressful years in the history of the last hundred years of the world and the church!

In Christmas 2019, I already had my plans and schedule set for 2020. The excitement, joy and happiness of the New Year suddenly became sad, stressful and even frightening as the Covid-19 pandemic spread throughout the world. It reached the U.S./Mexico border in March 2020, and our 2020 plans were cancelled or postponed. It was difficult to accept and adjust to the new forms, new ways, and new realities in order to survive: cancellation of Mass and sacraments, lockdowns, no classes, unemployment, travel restrictions, government and health department regulations and protocols that needed to be followed.

All these new norms, protocols and lockdowns made many people feel afraid, hopeless, frightened, stressed out, and depressed. Covid-19 caused people to stay home; no school, no work, limitations on everything. I found myself on the outskirts of Ciudad Juarez, with my fellow Columban, Father Bill Morton, in a poor area called Rancho Anapra. As days of lockdowns passed, the poor became poorer and the suffering more intense.

In Rancho Anapra, we continued to serve the poor and the migrants, the most vulnerable in our community. The missionary spirit in me would not let me to stay home on lockdown but pushed me to go out to serve



Worship in COVID times

those in need. I followed all the Covid protocols and regulations and always prayed before I went out, asking for God's protection from being infected by the virus and other accidents and to give me the courage, strength, patience and passion to serve the most vulnerable. I experienced God's presence, love, and compassion during this Covid -19 year because I didn't come down with the virus after being in contact with people that were positive. I had the Covid test four times and was negative for each. I thanked God for His protection over me.

It was the most challenging and stressful year I have ever experienced in many years as a long-term Columban Lay missionary. By the grace of God and in faith, hope and charity I survived the year 2020. After an evening Mass one day, Fr. Bill and I shared about the many struggles in our community, the many deaths, violence, poverty and uncertainty. I said I felt we are weighed down with such suffering and he told me, "yes, we are in an apocalyptic time." I reflected on our sharing that evening. In taking the risk to be courageous

and serve the vulnerable during this pandemic, I learned and have learnt that we don't only serve the poor. We serve Christ in the poor, because we see in the suffering poor the suffering Christ and the suffering poor see in us as the hopeful Christ. By sharing love with the poor and the migrants we are actually evangelizing to the poor and bearing witness to them.

I am so grateful to all the benefactors for your prayers and financial support which helps us on the mission field, especially the Columban Border Mission team here in Anapra, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. Your generosity and love help me, Fr. Bill, and several very active parishioners who collaborate with us in doing God's mission work to serve the poor, the hungry and the migrant. You benefactors are part of our team in doing God's mission by your support and prayers. Thank you all so much for your love, care and support. I pray that God will shower His blessings on you and your families. 

Columban lay missionary Sainiana Tamatawale lives and works in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

Five Hundred Years of Christianity in the Philippines

Columban Involvement

By Fr. John Comiskey



The Catholic faith came first to the Philippines as part of Spain's colonial expansion with Magellan's circumnavigating the globe. As in that and later journeys the friars accompanied the soldiers and sailors. The Philippines was not a unified nation but rather a collection of various indigenous communities divided by geography, language, religious belief and culture. Some native groups welcomed the Spanish as a defense against Muslim raids from Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago or as allies in struggles with other more local enemies. The Spanish authorities

developed a system of co-opting local community leaders to support their rule. As a result, the Spanish did not need a very strong military presence to keep control. Here too they took advantage of the Church's presence as an aid in their rule.

The interest of the Spanish colonizers was mainly in exploiting natural resources and trade. The missionaries' concern centered on the spread of the faith and the salvation of souls. In a relatively short time they were preaching the Gospel in many different areas of the island chain. Some missionaries showed an

appreciation of the local languages, culture and customs. They defended the native populations against abuses by Spanish colonists. A weakness in the evangelization process was the slow development of local diocesan clergy. Attempts in this direction initially failed due to weak formation programs. Adequate seminary training only began in the nineteenth century.

Over time, hostility developed against the Spanish colonizers. Abuses gave rise to pocket revolts led by native leaders. By their exploitation of people, the Spaniards succeeded in uniting the disparate native peoples against their regime. Gradually, a Philippine nationalism began to arise. The Church was often seen as siding with Spanish colonizers. However, as the spirit of revolution grew, Filipino priests joined the cause, and some became martyrs for freedom.

Spanish dominion did not cease due to local fighting but also because of American intervention during the Spanish-American war. Dewey's defeat of the armada effectively ended Madrid's rule and began American control. What is amazing is that despite the end of Spanish rule, Christianity survived. The friars had succeeded by their dedication to implanting the faith in the hearts of the people and by their selfless service of caring for their flocks in times of difficulty.

However, with the American occupation many Spanish priests returned to Spain. Parishes were left vacant. In addition, a breach occurred within the Church. Fr. Gregorio Aglipay split from Rome and founded the Philippine Independent Church which grew popular in some provinces. Later the Iglesia Ni Cristo developed. With the Americans came Protestant missionaries. Muslim hostility to Christianity continued to be evident in the south. The Church was in a

weakened state. Such was the situation when Columban missionaries arrived in 1929.

Originally the interest of the Columbans coming to the Philippines was for rest and rehabilitation of priests who had been serving in China. Their initial foothold was at Nuestra Señora de los Remedios Parish in Malate, Manila. From there they became involved in direct ministry at parishes east of Manila in Rizal Province and to the North in Pangasinan Province. They also expanded to work south of Manila to the town of Silang in Cavite Province. In the latter part of the 1930's ministry expanded to include parts of Mindanao in the south of the country. The Columban presence helped secure and expand the faith life of the communities they served. The 1930s also saw the beginning of Columban involvement in student ministry with the founding of Student Catholic Action by Columban Fr. E.J. McCarthy. The Columban Sisters arrived in 1939.

On the political front the realization gradually grew that the American occupation of the Philippines was more costly than valuable. Support grew for granting independence. A Commonwealth Constitution leading to eventual independence gained approval in 1935. Unfortunately, World War II delayed full freedom of the Philippines.

The Japanese invasion challenged church life and brought persecution. Columban missionaries remained faithful to serving their flocks. Some were able to flee with their people into the hills. Others faced imprisonment. Columban Fr. Francis Vernon Douglas and the Malate martyrs were put to death.

After the war in the early 1950s the Columban missionaries extended

their ministry in Zambales northwest of Manila and in Negros Occidental in the Central Visayas region. New emphasis arose for better training for Columban members in language and culture. Columban missionaries became involved in family life programs such as Marriage Encounter. Dealing with environmental issues became a major theme in the overall Columban approach to ministry.

In all the places where they served the central task was building the church through developing local lay leadership. Student Catholic Action provided leadership training on the high school and university levels. Emphasis was given to developing lay leaders in the communities that made up the individual parishes. The approaches to doing this varied according to the situation and needs of each area.

Columbans helped to encourage vocations to the diocesan priesthood. They helped fund and staff priest formation programs. They also supported Fil Mission, the missionary arm of the Filipino Church. The later acceptance of Filipino members into the Missionary Society of St. Columban continues to invigorate mission in other lands and in the Philippines.

Compassion and service to the poor and outsider has been an earmark of Columban ministry and mission. Attention to the needs of the poor came through development projects and direct aid. The establishment of schools particularly on the high school and college levels helped to equip many to rise out of poverty. Working with co-operatives and micro-lending programs like the Grameen Bank aided the lives of their people. Programs for the disabled helped many families in meeting the needs of their special children. Similarly,

anti-tuberculosis campaigns helped limit that dreaded scourge. Columban missionaries support housing projects for the poor and for victims of natural disasters. Columban missionaries work with tribal people develop economic opportunities and to struggle against mining and other interests from taking away their lands. Ministry to troubled youth also came within the Columban purview.

Columban missionaries have spent time and talent in promoting Muslim-Christian dialog. This has broken down misunderstanding and mistrust. Working together in common projects for the good of the community brings about respect and affirmation of our common humanity. This is not merely a dialog about beliefs but rather a dialog of life.

The coming of martial law under the Marcos regime gave rise to human rights violations, terror and killings. Columban missionaries have fought for true justice and even faced being jailed because of their defending their people against the abuses.

Over time the number of diocesan priests increased, and Columban missionaries were able to hand over parishes, campus ministries, and schools. The Columban Sisters continue their service in education, health care and work with the poor. Columban lay missionaries bring their own special talents to ministry. They develop close bonds with the people they serve. While the number of Columban priests have diminished due to age and taking on new missions in other lands, Columban missionaries continue to serve with dedication particularly for those who have less in life. 

After many years on mission in the Philippines, Columban Fr. John Comiskey now lives and works in St. Columbans, Nebraska.



Faith + Love = Unity

Inclusive Faith

By Elbert Balbastro

The Philippines is an archipelagic country where diversity in culture, language, tradition, and customs is visibly felt and seen. Since the country is divided into almost 7,600 islands, sometimes our being diverse and apart from each other could create misunderstanding, form a regionalism perspective, and disunity. Some would brag that their culture is better than others. However, as I journeyed here and abroad, I observed that wherever I go, one of the unifying factors that could make Filipinos one is through our faith and love. The Church is very instrumental in bringing us together as one despite our diversity and differences.

When I was working in South Korea, the Catholic Church in Hye-hwa dong is the most popular Church where every Sunday Filipinos from every part of the country gathered together to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. Also, in most of the industrial cities where Filipinos are working, the migrant centers are where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is also celebrated. Then, every time we gather for a Christmas party

and other Church-related activities, laughter and fun take place. Reflecting on my experience, I realized that, on an exclusive level belonging to a certain island in the Philippines is part of my identity, but from an inclusive point of view, most of the islands in the Philippines share that same Christian faith with me. I saw and experienced that when Filipinos work abroad unity despite diversity happens. In the migrant center where I was volunteering, we helped Filipinos because they are our fellow men and women; their religion didn't matter. It appears to me that our faith is much deeper, and it prevails over our differences even though we are living in an archipelagic country. Our faith which transforms in love brings us together as one Filipino community.

In Pakistan, I also saw and experienced a flourishing Filipino community whereby because of faith, Filipinos unite. Mostly, our Masses there were held at the houses or apartments of Filipinas married to local fellows. Filipinos who have birthdays for a certain month will contribute for us to have a *salò salò*

(banquet or party) after the Mass. Some would request a special Mass for some relatives who died, and others would ask for a house blessing. Our rich faith is our identity and hallmark that we bring as Filipinos wherever we go. We always put our faith in the center whereby during our Christmas party the Eucharist takes place first before anything else. Through our faith, we find comfort, care, joy, and support from one another.

This year 2021 is significant for us Filipinos as the whole country is celebrating 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines. This event is another sign of unity where every parish and diocese in the whole archipelago is preparing for this momentous event. I believe that one of the greatest legacies of early missionaries is our faith. That faith that they passed on to us goes lives in our hearts resulting in love for God and love for others. Our faith becomes inclusive extending to others, setting aside our differences, and respecting and celebrating our diversities. 

Columban seminarian Elbert Balbastro provided this reflection.

The Cry of the Poor

As I write this, I just got off the phone with Father Bill Morton. You remember Father Bill. He is the Columban priest whose parish in Juarez, Mexico, abuts the U.S. border just west of El Paso.

This morning the problems at the border were featured on the national news, so I thought I would call Fr. Bill and find out what was happening from his vantage point. When I called he happened to be in conversation with a woman who is about to apply for an emergency visa so she can attend her brother's funeral in Oklahoma. Family ties are strong, and they need to be attended to in times of grief. But so often the government rules and regulations prevent a nimble response. I hope she can travel.

When I think of the situation at the border, what comes to mind is the old French proverb, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." So much has changed since the book of Leviticus was written. The place and the people are different, but the problem remains the same. "When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself, for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:34)

As a Columban, I have been visiting the southern border off and on for more than 20

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. John Burger



years. It is a dramatic place where the superpower of the United States encounters mothers, fathers, and children the struggling nations of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. There is friction, incomprehension and even desperation at the legal crossing places and even more of it at illegal places.

Perhaps one type of place where the friction can be loosened is a shelter. Places like Annunciation House or Casa Nazareth are working once again with big

numbers of people in need of meals, clothing, showers, medication, a night or two of shelter and help traveling to relatives elsewhere across the United States. Along with those things, a listening ear, a few gracious words in Spanish, a little kindness, a smile are all part of what the shelters try to deliver. Sometimes a pair of shoelaces can be a precious gift. Of course, with 200 to 300 new people arriving at just one shelter on just one day, even simple kindness can become a daunting challenge.

I suppose many of the people who arrived at Ellis Island in New York a century or more ago needed help making their way to the ferries that would take them to the trains that would take them west. Now, someone has to help even the lucky ones make phone calls to relatives, get to the bus station, purchase the tickets to the right place.

For a long time, El Paso del Norte has been a place of passage. Volunteers from around the country are joining hands with local people to ease the passage to the north.

I suppose many of the people who arrived at Ellis Island in New York a century or more ago needed help making their way to the ferries that would take them to the trains that would take them west.

In many of our parish liturgies we sing the words, "The Lord hears the cry of the poor." We do want Him to hear us when we call to Him. I think I will meditate on, Proverbs 21: 13. "He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will himself also call and not be heard."

Fr. John

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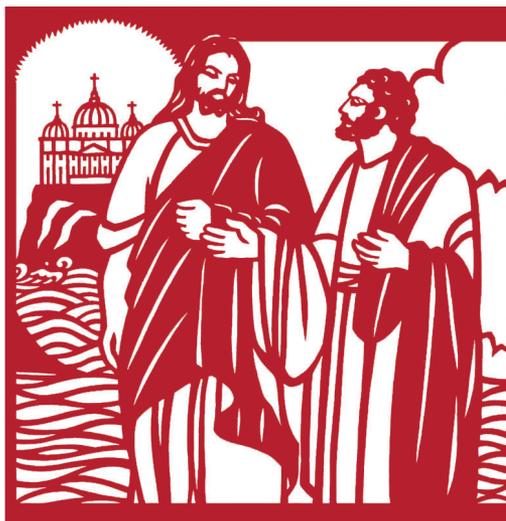
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