



Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

August/September 2024

A low-angle photograph of a massive, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots and a dense canopy of green leaves. The sun is shining through the center of the canopy, creating a bright starburst effect. The tree's trunk and roots are the central focus, extending from the bottom of the frame towards the top.

Firm in the Faith

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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. John Boles

Columban Witness

I am writing this crouched under a lazy ceiling fan, dripping with sweat and staring out at the squalid, chaotic, dust-blown bedlam that is Karachi, the biggest city in Pakistan. You might ask, “Who in their right mind would choose to live and work in such an area?” The answer is: the Columbans.

For over forty years Columban priests, Sisters and lay missionaries have been serving the people of Pakistan. We believe that Jesus calls missionaries to go even to places like this or maybe particularly to places like this. Here there are religious and ethnic tensions, grinding poverty, constant threats of terrorist outrages, chronic injustice and endemic corruption.

The “normal” reaction would be to avoid these kinds of spots, whereas we actively seek them out.

We do so because we feel that this is what Jesus would do. In that case, we are in good company.

Didn't Jesus associate with the poor and outcast rather than the rich and powerful? When he

did, I'm sure he met with the “other side of the coin,” as I have done during my brief visit to Pakistan — kind faces, warm welcomes, stunning hospitality from people who have virtually nothing.

Fr. Pat Visanti gave up a comfortable existence in a bank in his native Fiji to join the Columbans and accept an appointment to Pakistan. Now he is based in the long-established Columban parish of Badin, deep in the parched Thar Desert.

Here, Fr. Pat and Monaliza Sagra, a Columban lay missionary from the Philippines, oversee a college of 470 pupils and a clinic with five full-time health workers. Fr. Pat celebrates the sacraments in one main church and two satellite chapels (a third is under construction) in three different languages!

New Zealand Columban Fr. Dan O'Connor is a familiar sight as he speeds across the Thar on his trusty motorbike. I accompanied him to a village primary school, where I found Hindu, Christian and Muslim children happily studying together. This is a remarkable form of witness, as Pakistan is a country born in bloodshed. Over a million people perished at Partition in 1947 as Hindus and Muslims slaughtered one another. Even today there are occasional outbreaks of communal violence. Yet here are we, the Columbans, trying to bring people of rival faiths together to face their common enemies of

poverty and exploitation.

Columban Fr. Tomás King from Ireland has spent years in this area, serving not only the majority Sindhi population but also members of the Parkari Kholi tribal group — a people often despised for being both indigenous and largely Christian.

Yes, it's a crazy journey we are on in Pakistan. But that is just how Columbans are.

Fr. John Boles is Regional Director of the Columbans in Britain.



Giving Means Receiving

A Light in Myanmar's Darkness

By Fr. Alvaro Martinez

In a country racked by poverty, civil war and military dictatorship, Columban missionaries like Deacon Francis Xavier help shine small lights of hope.

It is often said that Columbans stride into places where others fear to tread. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of Myanmar (formerly Burma). Ever since the Columbans began their mission there in 1936 this south-east Asian nation has faced a catalogue of evils, including foreign occupation, World War, military coups, devastating cyclones, chronic misgovernment and civil conflict, reducing what was one of the region's richest countries to the status of economic basket case and international pariah. Fainter hearts would have given up on the mission long ago, but not the Columbans. We are still there, trying to be a beacon of hope to a suffering people.

Nbwi La Aung, who took the baptismal name of Francis Xavier, is from Myanmar. He is a deacon approaching ordination to the priesthood and, as part of his pre-ordination preparation, has returned to his native land to undertake pastoral

work close to the town of Myitkyina in Kachin State, a part of the country which has been particularly affected by violence and economic collapse. However, it would appear that adversity has only served to strengthen his resolve. Witness his testimony that follows.

“The parish where I am serving is called ‘Edin,’ and it was newly established in 2021. It is a small parish with around 300 Catholic families, most of whom are not educated and are struggling with poverty. Only a few families have a regular income, while others rely on support from family members abroad. I was assigned to the parish starting in October 2023. Currently, I am serving as both as a parish office staff member and a Eucharistic minister. I conduct funeral services, celebrate baptisms and provide spiritual care to the sick and elderly.”

So far, this all might seem pretty routine — until you realize that this area has been in the eye of the storm of violence currently sweeping Myanmar.

The storm had been brewing for a long time, brewing, in fact, for just about as long as the Columbans had been in the country. We'd established

our mission amongst the Kachin people, located in the northernmost extremity of Burma as it was known then in a sector wedged between India and China.

Just six years after we arrived, the Japanese invaded. The Kachin pledged their allegiance to the Allies, and for three bloody years assisted the fabled guerrilla forces of British Army Brigadier Orde Wingate's Chindits until the liberation in 1945. Burma's loyalty was rewarded by independence from Britain in 1947, and the future looked bright, with Burma wealthy from exports of timber, rice, jade, gold and rubber. However, the dream ended swiftly, with General Ne Win's coup of 1962. The military proceeded to ransack the country, living off the fat of the land as they led Burma into ruination, all while trying to paper over the cracks by cynically renaming the nation “Myanmar” (peoples together) in 1989. The population, and especially the ethnic minorities (such as the Kachin) resisted, prompting brutal crackdowns. All Christian missionaries were expelled with the last Columbans being forced out in 1979.



Deacon Francis and a parishioner



Deacon Francis and parishioners

Internal and external pressure eventually forced the military to grudgingly grant partial authority to an elected administration, with Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi's party assuming control after 2011 amidst a wave of optimism, and the Columbans were able to return to Myitkyina and Kachin State in 2015. However, it was too good to last. On February 1, 2021, the military took power again. The population protested, and the Kachin and other ethnic groups renewed the armed struggle. After eighteen months the economy had collapsed and over 23,000 lives had been lost.

But the Columban missionaries stayed on. We recognized that we couldn't solve the problems of the world, nor of Myanmar, nor of Kachin State, but maybe we could help bring the light of Jesus into some individual lives. This is how Francis Xavier sees his mission.


"During one of my pastoral experiences, while ministering at a community, I met an elderly woman over sixty years old who used to be very active in the Church before

she fell ill. She told me she couldn't attend church anymore and had not received Communion for a long time. She felt abandoned by the church and forgotten due to her old age. When I visited her that day, she was overjoyed and even cried tears of happiness. She felt that Jesus had visited her through the Eucharist at her time of suffering and that my visit meant a lot to her. I was moved by her words and although I didn't know how to respond to her sadness, I was grateful to see her joy in taking Communion. I thanked God for giving me the opportunity to serve in His ministry.

During the visit of our Superior to Myitkyina, I had the opportunity to take him to my place of pastoral work. We visited a community chapel called St. John Paul and, later that evening, we met a very generous family. The family lived in a state of poverty, and even in a short visit, I could feel their struggle to put food on the table. However, at the end of our conversation, I was surprised when an elderly woman named Udi Lu came out with some native chicken eggs in her hands. It was a simple gift,

but it came straight from her heart. It might have been all that she had, but she shared it with us. We could see her love and gratitude towards the Columban Fathers. Udi Lu is now around seventy and living with one of her granddaughters, but she remains a very generous woman.

Looking back at my experiences as a pastor in the Parish, I feel abundantly blessed. It has been an incredible opportunity for me to explore myself through the lives of others, listening attentively to their unique stories and helping them along their faith journey. I am filled with joy as I continue to serve in this parish. I thank God for this."

Modest episodes, you might think. But perhaps this IS how the Light will come into the world. Not with momentous deeds, but with little sparks of light, like those being lit by Columban missionaries such as Francis Xavier in the darkness that is present-day Myanmar. 

Columban Fr. Alvaro Martinez recently ended his tenure on the Society's General Council in Hong Kong.



Andonie

On Feb 13, 2024, Andonie, one of the four original Subanen Crafters, died in childbirth. She died in her hut, on a remote hillside, in the middle of the night. Her husband, Golyo, was with her. She is also survived by her two children, Melanie, 14 years old, and Bernabe, 11 years old. She and her unborn child were buried on the same day near their home. Some of the Subanen Crafters were able to be there.

Jesus proclaimed that the least among us will be the greatest in the Reign of God (Matthew, chapter 18). Andonie is one of those “least” who, with her unborn child, are now in the embrace of our Creator. Andonie was a Subanen, and like other Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines, the Subanens see their homeland as a sacred gift from God and relate to their habitat through their songs, stories, dances, and rituals. Most of us in the Philippines have come to depend upon



The original four crafters, l to r, Jovie Balido, her sister Rodilyn Balido, Fr. Vinnie, Marcelita and Andonie

The Death of Andonie

Our Creation Story


By Fr. Vincent Busch

an economy that hungers for the water, minerals, and timber that happen to be on the homelands of Indigenous Peoples. In the past logging and mining activities were allowed to freely plunder their homelands. It was common to think that Indigenous Peoples were primitive (the least among us) and that they stood in the way of national prosperity and progress. Now, we are beginning to realize that Indigenous Peoples here have highly evolved cultures and life-styles that nurture the upland rivers, forest and soil of the Philippines. Such nurturing cultures are much needed in the Philippines if we want to have an ecologically stable and economically sustainable future.

One day, twenty-three years ago, Andonie and her three companions hiked many hours from their remote hillside homes to get to the site of our first Mandala-crafting workshop in the town of Midsalip. It was there, during our first crafting session, that I noticed a

smiling Andonie squatting in front of an electric fan. It was the first time she had seen a device that could create the wind.

At that workshop I marveled at how quickly and skillfully these young women could thread beads into the complex designs of our Creation Mandalas. Clearly they grew up in a culture that had a long tradition in weaving skills. The designs in the Creation Mandalas represent nine evolutionary births in the story of God’s Creation. It is a story that would eventually lead to the birth of humans and the birth of the Earth community. I feel blessed to be working with the Subanen People whose cultural way of life respects and nurtures our human bond with our God’s Creation.

May Andonie and her unborn child live life in its fullness in the embrace of our Creator. 

Columban Fr. Vincent Busch lives and works in the Philippines.



Jovie, Rodilyn, Fr. Vinnie, Marcelita



Andonie's children Melanie and Bernabe in front of their home



Subanen crafters and Andonie's family at her funeral

The Creation Mandala Song



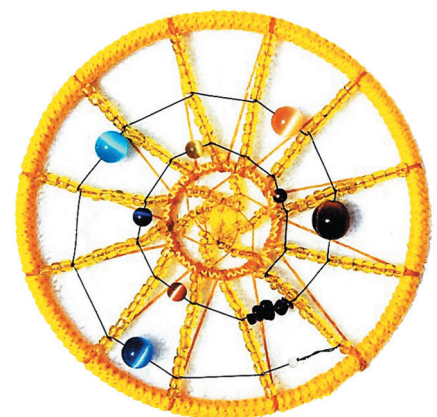
The Birth of the Universe

In the beginning the Spirit sang:
 "My Love's ablaze and from its warmth
 Let all creation come flaring forth.
 Let matter and energy converse
 And sing the hymn of the Universe,
 And through the course of time and space
 I'll cherish all in my embrace."



The Birth of the Galaxies

Then the Spirit sang:
 "Let Creation begin to dance
 In cooling clouds of elements
 Where the tug of gravity
 Draws atoms into galaxies,
 And hugs the stars till they ignite
 To fill the darkness with their light."



The Birth of the Solar System

Then the Spirit sang:
 "Let stars blaze till they consume
 The nuclear fire in their wombs,
 And bursting forth as they collapse
 Sow the elements in their grasp,
 And from their dust let new stars grow
 With moons and planets in their tow."

The Creation Mandala Song

(continued)



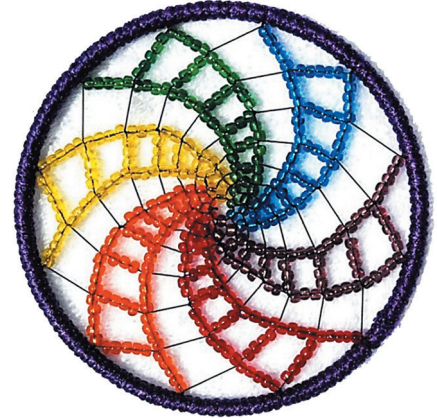
The Birth of the Earth

Then the Spirit sang:
“Along with planets near and far
Let Earth take shape around its star.
While its crust solidifies,
Let molten rock throb inside,
Lifting the mountains, spreading the seas,
Molding and folding its geography.”



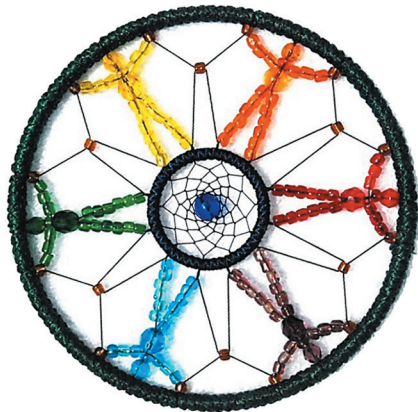
The Birth of Life

Then the Spirit sang:
“Let Earth and Sun warm the seas
To animate its chemistry,
And from that swirling pool of genes
Let Earth give birth to living beings,
Sprouting forth all kinds of things
With roots and legs, fins and wings.”



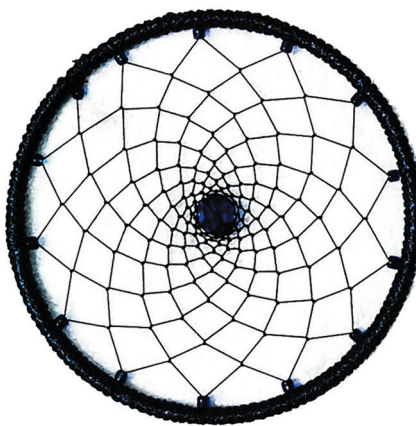
The Birth of the Earth Community

Then the Spirit sang:
“From desert sand to mountain snow
Let habitats emerge and grow
Where plants and beasts participate
In nature’s rugged give and take
And every creature plays a role
In keeping Earth alive and whole.”



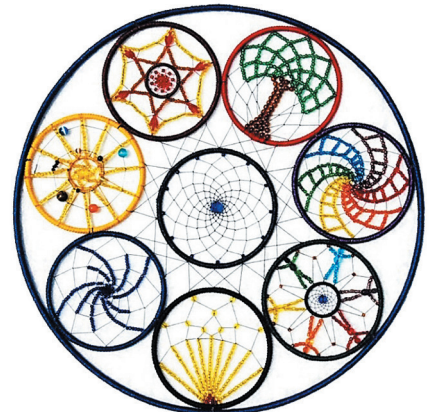
The Birth of Humans

Then the Spirit sang:
“Let the glory of nature’s chorus,
Its raging storms and mighty forests,
Its pounding seas and soaring peaks,
Its blazing skies and teeming reefs,
Touch human hearts with its splendor
And forge their souls in awe and wonder.”



The Birth of the Ecological Age

Then the Spirit sang:
“Let life entwine the land and sea
In the web of its community
Where humans keep in good repair
The habitats all creatures share
And sing with every leaf and stone
“This is our Earth, our sacred home.”



The Birth of Your Story

And then the Spirit sang:
“The habitats that grace the Earth
Were there to hold you at your birth,
May they guide your life and journey,
And weave your voice into the story
Of my love which grew to be
A wondrous blue-green symphony.”



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.

For the Sake of Her Children

Women Empowerment Base



Ma Hkawn was married for 20 years. She lived with eight family members including her five children, their grandmother as well as her sister-in-law and her husband in the same compound. Brang Zet, her husband, was the bread winner, and Ma Hkawn stayed at home and took care of her sick mother in-law and their

five children. She could not earn any income herself. Her husband drank a lot and regularly got very angry with his wife and children. Sometimes, when he got drunk, he threatened Ma Hkawn.

On one occasion, when he was not satisfied with the meal she had prepared Brang Zet told her, “This food is tasteless... it is like food for a

pig.” Ma Hkawn replied, “I have to take care of my mother-in-law and our children. But I did what I could to prepare the food nicely.” Her husband told her to be quiet and slapped her cheek. Ma Hkawn warned him, “You have no right to hurt me.” But knowing she was financially dependent on him, he told her, “You are my wife, and I can

Decisive factors in many instances of gender-based violence are women's low level of education, their lack of a regular income, and the low level of awareness around community development.

kill you if I want." He then took a small axe and tried to hit her. Luckily, she moved quickly and managed to avoid his attack.

But then he came after Ma Hkawn with a knife. Three of the children clung to their mother and the other two children clung to their father's leg and cried out, "Daddy, don't do that to mummy. If you want to beat mummy, hit us first." It was only then, the father set the axe aside. But he was still very angry and continued to verbally threaten his wife. The children sent their mother temporarily to a neighbor's house.

Sadly, Ma Hkawn suffered violence not only at the hands of her husband, but she also suffered sexual and verbal abuse from the husband of her sister-in-law, who was staying in the same compound. Ma Hkawn's husband passed away at an early age. Her inheritance had been made clear before he died, but after Brang Zet's death, Ma Hkawn's mother-in-law no longer wanted to give her the inheritance and tried to get rid of her by negotiating a marriage for her with another man. Because of her love for her children, Ma Hkawn opposed her mother-in-law's wishes and refused to marry again. For the sake of her children, she patiently continues to live "at risk" of further abuse from her mother-in-law and the husband of her sister-in-law.

In 2020 as a response to the situation of women like Ma Hkawn I worked with three colleagues to set up a space called Women Empowerment Base (WEB), which seeks to promote gender equality and human dignity within families. Each year since then, we target different urban villages where we promote the protection of women from all forms of gender-based violence (GBV), as well as preparing a community-based resilience group on gender-based violence in communities.

We try to enable and empower women in the following ways: by

In 2020 as a response to the situation of women like Ma Hkawn I worked with three colleagues to set up a space called Women Empowerment Base (WEB), which seeks to promote gender equality and human dignity within families.


facilitating growth in self-awareness through counselling, psychological/legal care and medical treatment for survivors and those at risk; to choose and make decisions for their own families and also in other social contexts; and to have a regular income by using their skills in projects that generate money.

We realized that very few women in some areas of our state could make decisions on the development of their lives, their families and their communities. Decisive factors in many instances of gender-based violence are women's low level of education, their lack of a regular income, and the low

level of awareness around community development. Many cases of domestic abuse continue to occur because of reluctance on the part of parents or other significant persons in the family to report it. Some cultural and traditional practices result in silence which enables abusers while it leaves the victims to suffer.

Despite many obstacles, we support victims of gender-based violence through awareness sessions in their local communities. We refer victims for medical, legal, emotional treatment and to the security of a safe house. These sessions have made us aware of how the risk of gender-based violence is greatly intensified at times of a pandemic such as Covid-19 and in times of war.

We promote a message which helps people to understand that our services are life-saving interventions and different to the traditional "silent way." We have supported and accompanied many victims toward inner healing and growth in self-esteem and self-confidence. Now, more of them have a voice, good inner strength and are growing in awareness of their rights as a human person. They are now on the road to discovering their own dignity as women and they know they have a support group with a safe place to which they can go in time of need.

We are grateful to all our benefactors and friends who enable us to provide this space and assistance to victims of this violence and to help them grow in freedom and hope towards a life in abundance despite all the restrictions and challenges they face. 

Editor's Note: Due to the difficult nature of the work with victims of abuse, the author of this article remains anonymous, and no photos of program participants are provided.



Man with a Mission

Transforming Young Lives in Lima, Peru

By Fr. John Boles

“For me, life began at 40,” laughs Fr. Tony Coney, remembering how he arrived in Lima on August 30, the Feast Day of the city’s patron, St. Rose of Lima, which also coincided with his fortieth birthday. Fr. Tony came as a man with a mission. For years he had dreamed of setting up a project to help needy children. He knew all about children, coming from a family of seven.

However, his interest in disadvantaged children sprang from his experiences as a newly ordained priest working in his native Belfast during the early 1990s, where the poverty and violence of the “Troubles” had taken its toll especially on the young.

Fr. Tony was also inspired by the writings of pioneer Scottish educationalist AS Neill who, in his seminal work *Summerhill*, had advocated a whole new approach to rearing difficult children. “The idea was for those children to be given freedom and scope for self-expression. This really resonated with me,” Fr. Tony recalls.

In Peru he found himself in a huge parish on the northern outskirts of the capital, where shanty towns sprawled endlessly over the barren hills. Here, the children suffered from poor diet, poor housing, poor education – poor everything. Fr. Tony’s chance came in 1997. “A house became available. I bought it with my ordination money.”

He made it into a day center for needy youngsters. “We started with six volunteers and about 100 children. In a few months, we had 300. After a year, we had to extend. Irish Aid paid for the extension.”

Fr. Tony also increased the services on offer, employing psychologists, speech therapists and social workers. The latter staffed a “defense desk” to cater for children at risk. “Nowadays we receive up to 400 kids a day from a weekly pool of 1,200.” As to the day-to-day activities, Fr. Tony has adopted the “AS Neill system.” “The kids do whatever they want — arts and crafts, play, homework, reading, theatre, music, dance, computers, the lot. There

are no ‘closed doors.’ Children get the chance to be children, with no adults telling them what they have to do.” Instead, the children themselves come together to agree their own norms and rules.

Fr. Tony called it, St. Bernadette’s Children’s Center. “After buying the house, I had no money to renovate it, so I wrote to my home parish in Belfast — St. Bernadette’s. Theirs was the first donation I ever got, so I adopted their name.” Unfortunately, it soon became clear that child sexual abuse was rife in the area and the abuser was often living under the same roof as the child-victim. The subject was taboo; no one wanted to listen.

Meanwhile, the kids remained in abusive situations. Consequently, “the idea arose that we needed a residential home, where the child could be separated from the abuse and get therapy until the legal set-up in the family could be resolved.” And so it was that a second center was born: St. Bernadette’s Home, with capacity to care for 36 children.



“Now, attitudes have changed,” explains Fr. Tony. “People are more conscious of the problem and open to doing something about it. We work with the government. It is they who refer cases to us. We still meet with resistance from the police for instance, but that’s where our defense desk comes in. We more or less force them to act.”


Meantime, St. Bernadette’s Child Protection Program seeks to combat the threat of child abuse in the wider community. “We go into schools, do formation courses for pupils, teachers and parents, get them to set up protection teams.” They have gone into some 30 schools and prepared thousands of children. “In 2019 we

reached exactly 10,016 children,” adds Fr. Tony proudly.

But, as you address one issue, another appears. Fr. Tony’s team quickly noticed that many of the youngsters in the day center displayed learning difficulties, not necessarily because they weren’t bright, but because of the emotional difficulties they were experiencing at home. This awareness moved Fr. Tony to found a third premises, St. Bernadette’s Remedial School.

Here, he explains, children can, “attend for a year or so, come up to standard and go back into mainstream education, given that they’ve often been thrown out of the state system

because of low grades.” Up to 120 pupils at a time reap the benefits of this initiative.

Taking stock after over 25 years, Fr. Tony’s dream has realized itself in the form of three centers, 65 paid staff and a child protection outreach program, almost all financed by overseas donors. He says that the priority now is, “to sustain all this. The goal is to make it permanent. We’ve achieved a lot, but there is a way to go yet!” 

Fr. John Boles was ordained a Columban priest in 1996. He ministered in Peru and Chile from then until 2021, when he returned to Britain to take up the role of Regional Director.

Learning from Those with Least

Exploitation and Poverty

By Fr. Robert Mosher

Chileans are hardworking people. Mothers and fathers instill their work ethic in their children from an early age, in many families that I have come to know, by instruction and by example.

“Don’t just laze around, there’s work to be done,” a parent may typically declare to their children on a Saturday morning. “In this place, all the monkeys dance!”— an expression which may refer to a circus or carnival act.

No one gets to sit around, in other words. You, get dressed and come with me to the open-air market, help me carry the potatoes and produce we’re going to buy. While I’m gone, you two sweep the floors and wash up, dry and put away the dishes. We’ll wax the floors when I get back, and then get ready for lunch. Let’s go!

We missionary priests, Sisters and lay people of the Missionary Society of St. Columban could appreciate, for our part as immigrants from sometimes wealthier countries or backgrounds, how impoverished people in Chile maintained their own habits and culture of acting in community, pitching in to cover the costs of a funeral, debating in small groups two or three times a week in long sessions about the by-laws and plans of their organizations, whether sports-related, labor-union related, church-related or political.

Poverty seen as a product of structural injustice — of economic policies, social marginalization, amoral business priorities — rather than, say, just a feature of life that we can do nothing about, may be a big step to take for people not used to thinking about this ugly reality as a violence.

However, since the characteristics of poverty undeniably include poor nutrition and inadequate shelter, exclusion from employment and educational opportunities, and a lack of whatever is essential to establish and maintain a person’s basic human dignity, then its destructive effects on people are not hard to see, since it has the same effect as other forms of violence, like war, kidnapping, torture, etc. Poverty starves children, divides society, exposes people to a lack of shelter from the elements or disease, puts medical treatment out of reach, degrades self-esteem and reduces life spans.

In Chile, I discovered not only the brutality of the conditions people had to suffer, from their earliest years, but also the edifying traditions and perspectives that, in comparison, seemed absent or at least anemic in contrast to life in suburban communities in my own country and background, where families generally lacked nothing for their own wellbeing. For people from my

background, there were comparatively few circumstances that could bring us all together as a community. We may even have grown up with little idea of who lived next door to us, and tried to isolate ourselves from the problems of other families.

True, there were moments of compassion and outreach even in the communities of my upbringing in the U.S., like the summer afternoon when we heard the sudden, screeching sound of a car’s brakes on the street outside our house, bringing out people from all over the neighborhood to see the twisted tricycle lying on the ground, and the crying child— physically uninjured, thank God—in his mother’s arms. The other mothers and adult women of the nearby houses quickly gathered together in the street, consoling the mother and talking among themselves in what was a rare moment of solidarity, very much like the coming together of neighbors in my Chilean neighborhood.

But in Chile’s cities and towns, it was expected and customary to come together for all of life’s moments, both planned and unexpected, and customs such as dropping in unannounced for a cup of tea and a visit, or automatically taking up a collection for a family facing funeral expenses for a departed loved one, or organizing a soup kitchen to serve hot

meals to the most vulnerable children of the neighborhood at least once a day. People needed one another more frequently in areas racked by low employment and little income, and offered help spontaneously to one another.

I could see, as well, that when accidents or incidents did happen in Chile, people would gather on a spot, after the ambulance left, or in front of the house where children were abandoned to their father by a runaway mother, to discuss and analyze the sad or unexpected event for hours afterwards. There was an effort to find a consensus of the ethical lesson of the event, and discern what could be learned from it, for the accumulated wisdom of the community—a community long denied much formal education in Chile, until the reforms of the 1960s, which guaranteed free education up through secondary (high school) education.

Such generosity and compassion, union and commitment weren't perfect, of course, human beings being what we are, but it did seem to me that mutual concern, support and growth in shared understanding was far more developed in a "developing" nation like Chile, than in our own relatively wealthier country—at least compared the middle-class life that I grew up in. I learned a lot, after arriving at our missions in Chile.

Thus, our Church's preference for accompanying the poor, the vulnerable and the excluded, as Jesus lived His own mission, is not only an invitation to take on the sacrifice of living

with less goods to be consumed and thrown away, and with greater respect for our natural home, in solidarity with those experiencing distress and discrimination.

It is, besides, an opportunity to live better, by allowing the economically-challenged to teach us to build and rely on relationships within our own communities, to perceive with greater clarity the God who is close to those who have little, to discard the corrosive effects of materialistic accumulation

of more things than we need, and to experience a deeper conversion to a lifestyle of deep commitment to greater economic equality in the world, a sign of the nearness of the Reign of God that Jesus inaugurated and announced as already present, and growing, a Good News that we continue to shout out to the world, just by the way we live. CM

Columban Fr. Robert Mosher lives and works in the U.S.



Child's Play

Wonder and Delight

By Fr. Robert Mosher

As I sat in my office at the Columban Mission Center in El Paso, Texas, I felt that something was missing. It had been a busy morning so far, on that hot day. We still had about half of the 30 migrant families that immigration authorities had brought for us to shelter. Some of our guests might stay with us for up to three or four days, as they waited for the volunteer drivers from the area to take them to the airport or one of the bus stations in town.

A group of teenagers among them were chatting together on the front steps. The mothers had gathered to share their stories in the large dining room, and one seven-year-old child was by himself, in the lecture hall next to the dining room, not far from his mother—and bored.

I was catching up on correspondence that morning, and had a pile of deskwork ahead, but I thought about this smart little boy, all by himself, from Honduras, who had been helping with housecleaning and pulling up weeds outside to the best of his ability. It was too hot to work outdoors now, though, in the great Chihuahuan desert that El Paso, Texas, Juarez, Mexico, and other towns of this region were located in. I decided to help him pass the time, since no one else his age was around to play with him.

So we invented a game, with some of the toys and items at hand in the lecture hall. I found two “Hot Wheels” tiny cars, and we built a ramp from a narrow board, putting one end on top of a half-dozen hardcover books, on top of a folding table that was about six feet long. Then we



University students on Border awareness trip

placed seven dominoes at different points at the other end of the table, standing them up, and I got a paper and pencil.

Taking turns letting each of our two cars run straight down the ramp and hitting one of the dominoes, we kept score according to the dots on each fallen domino, until the first one to score more than 50 points won!

It was a silly game, we both knew, but we got into it, and the boy was very happy. His mother confided to me afterwards that it meant a lot to him, to be paid attention to like that. Curiously, it also did something for me, after about an hour of play had passed and I returned to my deskwork. I began to reflect on how we, as adults

who took many things so seriously, needed to get in touch with the value of play for a sense of balance into our lives. Not for the first time, I felt thankful for one of many lessons I learned from migrating people.

Many universities in the U.S. would send us groups each year, of about a dozen students each, to spend a week or more under our guidance to the Borderlands—as locals call their binational area of business, educational, commercial and social life—to spend a week under our guidance, when we weren't hosting migrant families. They would hear, see and reflect upon their experiences of the U.S.-Mexico border, formed by the Rio Grande River.



University students at the Columban Mission Center, El Paso, Texas

One of the most gratifying effects of this Border Awareness Program offered by the Columban Mission Center was when I followed up with such groups afterwards, and found out about the important decisions the participants made once they returned to New York, Chicago, Omaha, or wherever. Immigration lawyers, government leaders, social workers and, yes, even cross-cultural missionaries like us emerged as the new career choices of some of the participants. I saw the same thing happen in many young people while I lived and worked in Chile, during the dictatorship, too, years before, and marveled once again at how such activities of solidarity and accompaniment of vulnerable populations altered their life decisions.

They obviously felt a tug on their hearts while with us, listening to accounts of the travails of migrating people, shared with tears on the faces of both speakers and listeners, with me translating from Spanish into English, and English to Spanish. The

impact of witnessing the suffering of people as well as the moral clarity and commitment of people motivated by faith, or by their ideals, to welcome and accompany them led our young visitors to walk along new paths in their lives later on.

A few years after leaving El Paso, the Columbans assigned me to Saint Columban's Residence in Bristol, Rhode Island, where I live now with our older and retired priests, and I saw an opportunity to offer Sunday Mass to some twenty students, on average, at Roger Williams University, right across the street. The Catholic campus ministry at the school had organized a weekly Mass for many years, but found it difficult to get a priest on a regular, constant basis at that time, so I offered to take on the service.

It's humbling for me to see how, once again, accompanying young adults enriches my life with their example of devotion during the Mass, and willingness to live their faith in their lives and in preparations for their careers. Some of the students find time

in their busy schedules to help out at a nearby parish, moving donated furniture from a storage building there to the homes of refugee families from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Ukraine, all sponsored by the Catholic Diocese of Providence. We had a towel-donation drive on campus before Christmas break last year for the refugees, and gathered over 50 towels.

Children and young adults have interrupted and run laughing through my life's plans, projects and schedules, much to my wonder and delight, no matter where Christ's mission brought me to over the years, and they still do. I thank God for the grace of these breaks in my routines, and for the part of me that gets invited to come out and get some exercise, in games and fun! The deep wisdom of Jesus' teaching gets clearer and moves my heart more deeply as time goes on, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3) **EM**

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



Photo: Kristin Ashley

Columban Centenarian

Missionary Life in Korea

By Sarah MacDonald

Sarah Mac Donald speaks to 101-year-old Sr. Bríd Kenny about missionary life in Korea and her memories of co-founders of the Columban Sisters, Columban Fr. John Blowick and Mother Mary Patrick.

Sr. Bríd Kenny from Coolmeen in Co. Clare, Ireland, joined the Missionary Sisters of St.

Columban on April 9, 1942. She got to know the Sisters because her cousin Laura lived close to Cahiracon, where the congregation first established itself in 1922, ahead of receiving papal approval in 1924.

Laura was born in Ceylon as her father served there with the British Army and Bríd was intrigued by this

faraway place. She was also reading about Columban missionaries in places like China through the *Far East* magazine.

As she was often “called on to look after Laura” when her uncle and aunt were busy or away, these visits to Cahiracon enabled her, “to get to know the Columban Sisters and Mother Mary Philomena” and to learn about the Sisters who had gone to China from 1926 onwards.

Sr. Bríd took her First Vows on October 17, 1944, and her Final Vows on October 3, 1949. In the novitiate, Sr. Bríd was on her own in her year but there “were nine or ten” ahead of her which helped create a sense of camaraderie.

During those formative years in Cahiracon, her brother Paul, who was eight years younger than Bríd came to visit “very often.” She believes the seed of his vocation as a Columban Father was planted in those visits. “He was only a little young lad. Mother Mary John would give him bamboo for a fishing rod.”

Later both Sr. Bríd and Fr. Paul spent time on mission in Korea and were able to meet up. “It was lovely,” she recalls of one Sunday when “about six of us drove in the van belonging to the Sisters to where Paul was, and we all had a lovely meal.”

After First Profession, Bríd was initially based in Cahiracon between 1944-45, before she moved to Dalgan where she worked with the Columban Fathers between 1945-1960.

“There was six of us looking after the kitchen and the college. It was wonderful to see a group of 30 men being ordained. But you had to work hard that morning to get a meal ready for them for after the ordination ceremony.” Her cooking was legendary within the Columbans!

Sr. Bríd was based in Magheramore between 1961-1962. Her first assignment to Korea was to Hallim on

Jeju Island, where she stayed between 1962-1971. The Korean War was not long over and many of the people were poor and in need of medical care.

“It was very sad, there wasn’t a thing you could buy. People suffered a lot. But they were determined to get on; they went to school, and they were ambitious and worked at it – they were really lovely.”

Columban missionary, Fr. PJ McGlinchey, was parish priest of Hallim. He set up projects to help raise people’s standard of living. One of these was a woolen factory that would offer employment, mainly to women.

Mother Mary Gemma appointed Sr. Bríd and along with Sr. Elizabeth Taaffe and Sr. Mary Rosarii McTigue to Hallim to work with Fr. PJ. They were to oversee the project from the time the wool arrived at the mill, through the various steps of weaving, to the sale of textiles and garments.

“It was mainly hand-knitting and weaving. Sr. Rosarii was very well up on weaving, and I was very good at knitting. Sr. Elizabeth did

a lot of administration work for Fr McGlinchey. By the time I left Jeju there were about 300 people in different places on the island involved in the project, some of whom were special needs. They did the knitting in their own homes. There was a U.S. military base on the island and the Americans used to buy items to bring home.”

Following her spell in Hallin, Sr. Bríd moved to Seoul, where she worked at the Columban Sisters’ mother house from 1971-2003. Visiting Columbans were always assured of a taste of Ireland thanks to Sr. Bríd’s culinary skills.

She remembers Columban Frs. Noel Daly and Jimmy McMahon rejoicing when she produced a small loaf of homemade soda bread, some scones and a cup of tea. “I had just taken the soda brown bread out of the oven, and you could smell it all over the place. We used to make our own marmalade. Jeju Island was full of oranges.”

At 101 years of age, Sr. Bríd is one of the few Columbans today to

have known both of the co-founders of the Columban Sisters, Columban Fr. John Blowick who died in 1972, and Mother Mary Patrick who died in 1959. She describes Fr. Blowick as “a lovely man” who was “gentle” and would “always stop on the corridor for a little chat — he was friendly and very charitable.”

She remembers Mother Mary Patrick recounting how the ocean liner she was travelling aboard was torpedoed in the Atlantic in 1940 during World War II. “She was coming home because they were cut off from the missions. She was very nice, a strong but gentle person who liked to have things right.”

Looking back over her long life, Sr. Bríd gives thanks to God. Being a Columban Sister, she says is like being part of “a family where everybody helped.” It was “like being at home. We had wonderful people who directed us and taught us prayer. There was a great family spirit.” **EM**

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



Brid and other Sisters



Sr. Bríd in Korea



Left to right: Sr. Bríd and her brother Columban Fr. Paul Kenny; Sister Bríd and friend; Sr. Bríd now; Sr. Bríd and Fr. Paul in 2021



A Pakistani family at the well



Jerry and his family



Jerry and friends in Pakistan

Elated by the completion of my Urdu language refresher course, I felt ready to jump-start into the ministry. It is true that the more knowledge one gained on something the more one realizes how limited is his/her knowledge on the matter as if one just landed on the tip of an iceberg. The rest of it is yet to be explored and discovered. This is the same case when learning a language, Urdu, Pakistan’s national language. It is a hybrid of Hindi, Persian and Arabic languages that speak volumes about the civilizations, history, anthropology, religion and culture as social fabrics embedded in the hearts and souls of the people.

At the outset, I know that learning the “mater lingua” of the people is imperative for missionaries. I likened it to a bridge that converges two worlds together as these two worlds take on a leap of faith journey.

Although, I was born and raised in Northern Mindanao, Philippines, my native language is Cebuano/Bisaya since my parents are from Cebu Island.

It was later on that I learned to speak Filipino, our national language and still later English. Learning a new language is tedious, yet it will be paid off in many returns as it makes our adaptation to new people and environment easier and fun. However, with my new assigned parish just born this year which comprises of thirteen purely Parkari Kohli tribal communities, I found myself in a bare start (in a good and positive way), I must say.

Only a small percentage of Parkari Kohli people speak Urdu (most of them are men) and generally the Parkari Kohli dialect is learned orally which means they have limited materials in formal language literature for learning. This just makes learning my second language in this country more interesting to figure out. I must add that it makes an enormous difference when the language barrier will be cleared up.

With the length of time I see myself working in this “bare vineyard” —where potable drinking water is rare, education of the most of the children of these communities is

very poor, health services from the government has not yet reached to these communities to date, many children are malnourished, the majority are living in a “survival state” and the majority of the communities have no electricity — I hope I won’t grow weary and tired.

This reminds me of the first Parkari Kohli who was baptized as a Catholic Christian in 1943, more than 80 years ago. I would compare the believing communities here to an infant which requires so much attention and care to help her grow in stature and wisdom.

With so much work needed to be done in terms of laying down the foundations that are crucial in their faith formation and human development, I hope that alongside them I may also grow as a missionary and a shepherd; a keeper and a guest; a teacher as well as a learner; an evangelizer and as the one being evangelized. After all, I am just a worker in this vineyard, not a Messiah. **CM**

Columban seminarian Jerry Lohera lives and works in Pakistan.



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Recently, a huge influx of thousands of Venezuelan immigrants have entered Chile. Columban parishes have always welcomed the immigrants and tried to provide some material help (school supplies, warm clothing, blankets, and more) for them. We hope to continue providing relief for those who come to this "land of dreams." However, we know that the most important gift we have to share with them is our faith in the Risen Lord.

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Help to Beat Summer Heat

Keeping Our Cool

By Fr. Barry Cairns

Atsui ne, “Isn’t it hot” has become a summer greeting here in Japan. Announcements on our televisions tell us to use air conditioning and drink lots of liquid to avoid heat stroke.

Even with these modern aids Japanese still use ancient traditional ways to give one a “feeling” of coolness.

But first let us look at feeling! Six months into Japanese language school we were introduced to a keyword in daily conversation. The word was *kimochi*. The dictionary lists translations such as: feeling, mood, sensation, emotion, but warns that the word *kimochi* has multiple nuances according to text. Just one example: There are certain traditional ways to give one a cool *kimochi* in summer’s heat. The idea is that outside-of-self physical things can influence inside-one’s-self to give us a cool *kimochi*.

The first cooling instrument is a *furin* or wind-bell. This is usually a fist sized small bell made of tempered steel (at times glass) with a small stopper attached to a long, narrow piece of stiff paper. Even a gentle breeze will give us a melodious note, so creating a cool *kimochi*. My *furin* hangs by my bathroom window which I leave open. The gentle melody is soothing!

Another cool *kimochi* aid is a potted morning glory flower — especially light blue. This delicate touch of nature resonates in the heart to give us a feeling of coolness.

Another summer cooler is to watch goldfish swimming in their tank or to look at a painting of a goldfish or carp. There are many ancient scrolls of swimming fish.

I bought my first goldfish in 1957! One fish cost 10 yen, bought from a goldfish-man pushing a hand cart

through the streets. Such a salesman is no longer with us. I bought my latest goldfish from a big pet shop for 150 yen. I find goldfish both relaxing and cooling!


The last summer cooler is a ghost story or painting. But despite a long tradition, here I draw the line! In Japan there is a deep residual fear of spirits or ghosts — as there was in the time of Jesus.

When Rome directed that the Japanese Mass text be closely transliterated from the Latin, for example the reply to the priest’s greeting “The Lord be with you,” from “And also with you” to “And with your spirit,” there was consternation among liturgists, linguists and even Roman trained bishops!

Spirit and ghost are the same word in Japanese. The Japanese bishops in unity ignored this directive. Our Bishop explained that people would be looking over the priest’s shoulder for a scary ghost! Ghost belief is alive in Japan!

I tackle this deep-seated fear head on! I use Gospels showing how Jesus had power over evil spirits. I use especially the scene in Matthew 14:22-33 where the disciples are in their sinking boat in a raging storm. They see in the mist someone walking on the water. In fear they cry out: “It is a ghost.” Jesus replies: “Fear not. It is I. Be not afraid.”

The Scriptures have an eternal present tense. The Risen Jesus says the same words of encouragement to us in a living voice today.

So let us be cool both in heart and body. But also let us consider why our summers are getting hotter because of global warming. Just what can each of us do in the concrete to keep our universe cool. This universe is our home. Let us care for it. 

Columban Fr. Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.

Firm in the Faith

As a child, one might say I did have an active Catholic faith much to my parents' efforts. We never missed Mass, and we all received the sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation. My family was friends with several of the Columban fathers and often would visit them or have them over for dinner. I heard the many stories of mission in faraway lands. They sounded exotic and adventurous. I attended Catholic schools and became an altar server. Actually, I had no desire to be an altar server, but my mother insisted. I was determined to win out my mother's insistence but when I saw all my school companions volunteer to be altar servers, I didn't want to be left out so I volunteered.

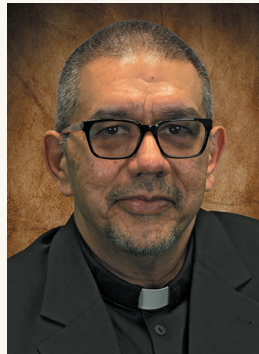
In spite of all this Catholic upbringing, at the age of fourteen, I stopped going to Mass. In fact, from the age fourteen to twenty, I probably attended Mass about five times. The few times I did, I would arrive in time for the Gospel to be read and left immediately after receiving the Eucharist. I wanted to have the shortest experience possible. At this juncture of my life, friends and weekend parties were my highest priorities.

Today, people often ask me, why did I become a priest? I jokingly say that when I was a little child, I asked my parents who is the man that is always last to arrive into the church and first to leave. They responded, the priest. With that, I sarcastically stated that I will be a priest. Little did I know that a childish joke would become a reality. As Psalm 8 states: "From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have establish strength..."

In reality, my first sense of a priestly vocation came at the

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Chris Saenz



age of 21 when I read the book *The Song of Bernadette*, which is about the life of the visionary of Lourdes, St. Bernadette Soubirous. What moved me about her were two points. First, that she had such a strong experience that no one could persuade her that she didn't, even under threats from governmental and law enforcement authorities. Although intimidated and threatened, Bernadette didn't back down. Second, her later life as a nun. Too sickly to mission in foreign lands, which was her strongest desire, she was placed in charge of the



infirmary because, as her superior put it, "she spends all her time there anyway."

Bernadette proved to be a miracle worker with traditional herbal medicines and other remedies. Her care for her fellow Sisters was highly praised. However, most importantly, she wanted to lead a simple humble life away from the fame of Lourdes. Many dignitaries of the church, and nobles would visit the convent requesting to see the little visionary. Bernadette didn't like to be bothered but complied out of obedience. Once, Bernadette saw a woman wondering the hallways of the convent and inquired what she needed. The woman replied, "I came to see the little visionary of Lourdes." Bernadette pointed to a door and said, "if you watch

In reality, my first sense of a priestly vocation came at the age of 21 when I read the book *The Song of Bernadette*, which is about the life of the visionary of Lourdes, St. Bernadette Soubirous.

that door, you'll see her go through it." Without another word, Bernadette left the woman's presence and walked through the doors.

Although I had heard St. Bernadette's story many times as a child, it touched me differently than before. Bernadette reawakened my tradition of saints, mission, and service. She tapped into my parents' efforts to instill a Catholic tradition and faith. In time, I realized the faith, which was firmly planted in me, returned after a season of drought. Therefore, as priest, I recognize that faith is not a straight path but often a winding path with twists and turns. To step away may not be a loss of faith but a transformation of something more at a later date. Take heart that the seed that was planted will bear fruit, but in God's time not ours.

Fr. Chris Saenz

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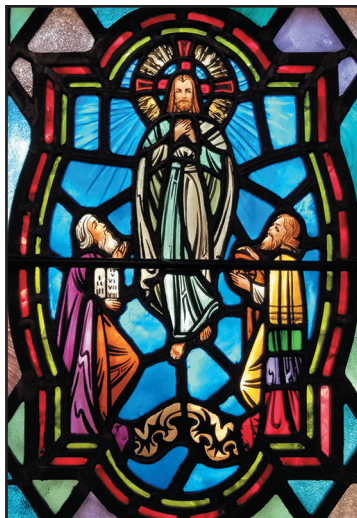
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