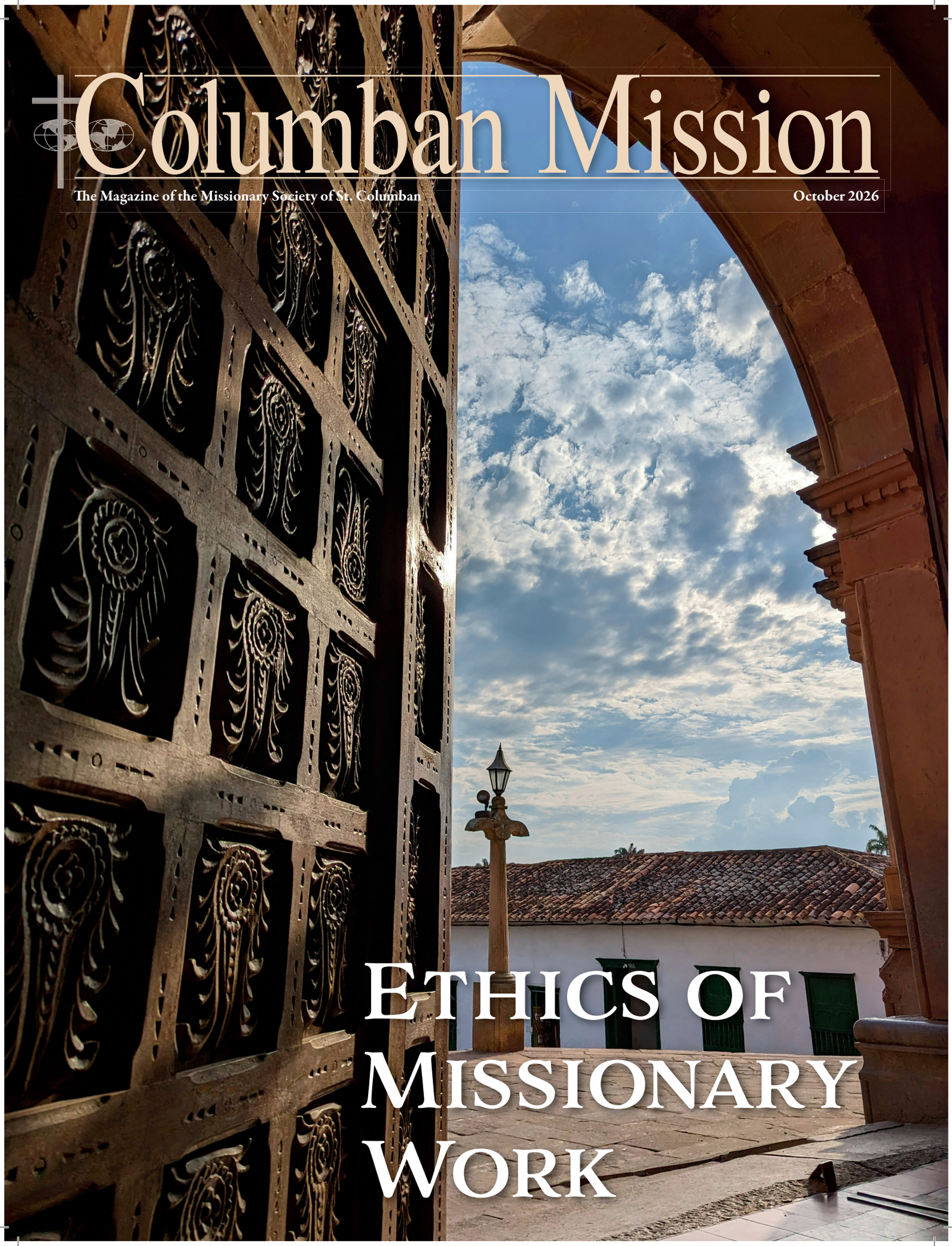


Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

October 2026

Ethics of Missionary Work

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Issue Theme – Ethics of Missionary Work



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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 Columban Missionaries

Meaningful Benefits

The ethics of missionary work sit at a delicate intersection of faith, culture, power, and human dignity. At its best, missionary activity emerges from a sincere desire to serve, to accompany others, and to share a message that the missionary believes brings hope and meaning. Many missionaries have contributed to education, healthcare, and humanitarian relief, often in places where resources are scarce. These efforts can reflect a genuine commitment to love one's neighbor and uphold the dignity of every person.

Yet good intentions alone are not sufficient to ensure ethical practice. One of the central concerns surrounding missionary work is the potential imbalance of power between those who come to serve and those who are being served. Missionaries often arrive with greater financial resources, institutional backing, and cultural influence. This can unintentionally create dependency or reinforce the idea that local traditions and beliefs are inferior. Ethical missionary work requires a deep awareness of this imbalance and a commitment to humility, listening, and mutual respect.

Authentic faith, by its nature, must be freely chosen.

Another ethical tension lies in the question of cultural preservation. Missionary efforts have historically been tied, at times, to colonial expansion, where the spread of religion went hand in hand with the erosion of indigenous cultures and identities. Languages, rituals, and social structures have sometimes been dismissed or replaced rather than engaged with thoughtfully. An ethical approach today calls for inculturation rather than imposition—seeking to understand how faith can be expressed within, rather than over, a culture.

Consent and freedom are also essential. Authentic faith, by its nature, must be freely chosen. When material aid—such as food, education, or medical care—is linked, even subtly, to religious conversion, ethical lines can become blurred. People in vulnerable situations may feel pressured to accept beliefs not from conviction but from necessity. Ethical missionary work must clearly separate acts of service from expectations of conversion, ensuring that help is given unconditionally.



For many Columban missionaries, sharing their faith is an expression of love and a response to a deeply held calling. The ethical challenge is not whether to share, but how. Missionaries who prioritize relationships over results, dialogue over monologue, and presence over persuasion are more likely to embody integrity in their work. As Scripture reminds us, "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope but do it with gentleness and reverence." (1 Peter 3:15) This verse captures the ethical heart of missionary work: not coercion, but respectful witness which has been the cornerstone of Columban mission for over 100 years.

Ultimately, ethical missionary practice demands ongoing reflection. It asks missionaries to examine their motives, methods, and impacts with honesty. It calls for partnership with local communities, respect for cultural richness, and a commitment to justice. When grounded in humility and genuine care, missionary work can move beyond a model of "giving" to one of mutual transformation—where both the missionary and the community are enriched through encounter.



Missionary Journey into the Unknown

Never Alone

By Fr. Martin Koroiciri

As I was on the last journey of my initial formation in the seminary, I was privileged to share a couple moments with my fellow brother in mission, Fr. Amini Ravuwai, who was a couple of years behind in the seminary but had a strong conviction to serve on mission as well.

At one point in time, we were sent to serve in a summer mission in the north of Lima, Peru, in the middle of the desert. A small village called Caceres near the city of Chimbote. After a hard day's work of visiting the families in that area, we came back to the lodging house and sat on the street overlooking the endless mountains of desert lands.

We sat there for a while enjoying the cool breeze and the beautiful sunset; we were tired and satisfied with the day's work. He turned to me and said, "Can you imagine how far we have come? From the day we accepted the invitation to serve our wonderful God and walk into the unknown, we have come from the tropical islands of Fiji to these desert mountains of Peru." This reminded me of Joshua 1:9: "I hereby command you; be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." It was there that I came to this profound experience of what it truly means to follow God into this beautiful journey into the unknown.

I was finally ordained in 2018 and was sent to serve in Chile, while Fr. Amini was ordained in 2020 and was sent to Peru. We would occasionally

meet when I would visit him in Lima, and we would share about the joyful moments and the challenging moments we experienced in our mission journey, which was very encouraging and life-giving for both of us.

In May/June 2024, we had the Columban General Assembly in Lima, and part of the informal conversations were that some of us might have to leave our current places of mission to work in other countries and start from scratch, like learning languages and learning new cultures. I found it very difficult since it took a long time to even understand half of what people were talking about in Chile, since the Spanish they spoke was very fast and challenging.

I feared what this might entail for me, so I called Fr. Amini and asked him "brother, if you were told that for the necessity of mission, you had to leave Peru and serve in another country and learn a new language and restart from scratch again, would you do it?" he asked me what this meant and why I was asking him, I replied to just answer the question from the heart.

After a long pause, he finally answered, "I have followed Him this far, and after all that He has given me, I am willing to follow Him anywhere." I

It was there that I came to this profound experience of what it truly means to follow God into this beautiful journey into the unknown.

wiped the tears from my eyes and went back inside with my heart affirmed.

In September 2024, my brother Fr. Amini was diagnosed with cancer, which surprised and worried me, so I called him and asked how he felt. He said, "There are a lot of things going on in my mind, but one question that resounds stronger in me is, "Why? Why me, why now? I am only beginning my mission, four years on the journey and he has given me this." I told him I couldn't answer his question but that I would pray about it and call him every day to see if he was able to find the answer.

On January 9, 2025, my brother breathed his last and passed away. He never told me the answer to the question. I kept praying about it though, and for the first year of the anniversary of his death I decided to write a song about him.

It took a whole year to bring the words into paper, as the whole song revolved around that question that my brother had asked me, and after so much discernment and prayer and with the help of Fr. Napa and Fr. Iowane (my fellow Columban brother priests on mission in Peru), we finally managed to compose the song, but the hardest to form was the chorus, but it was worth it as it answered my brother's question, or so to what we believe.

The first part of the chorus to the song goes:

Why me? Why now? I've just been anointed, why here? Why now? Is all I am seeking?

And the second part of the chorus is what we would imagine God answering him, saying:

It is I who have called you, from the womb; it is I who have sent you, to be my voice to the poor.

After all the roller coaster of emotions and this journey of accompanying him in mission, I realized that following Christ in mission to the unknown is a sacrifice and a life-giving journey where to serve the poor is to laugh with them, and cry with them, and if the necessity comes forward, to die with them.

Fr. Tony mentioned in his reflection at the cemetery before we finally placed his body to rest that Fr. Amini gave his life to the mission until his final breath,



Fr. Martin at Mass



Fr. Martin and friends



and he was willing to be buried in his land of mission, to which someone in the mourning crowd mentioned, "And now he is part of us as well."

In the silence that followed his burial, as the desert wind carried the last prayers into the evening sky of Peru, I began to understand what my brother had lived so faithfully. The question "Why me? Why now?" was never truly about timing, nor about fairness. It was about trust. And trust, I have learned, is the deepest language of mission.

When we first sat on that dusty street in Cáceres, dreaming aloud about how far God had brought us—from Fiji to the deserts of Peru—we could not have imagined how far "wherever you go" would truly lead. Not just across oceans and continents, but into suffering, surrender, and ultimately into love poured out completely.

My brother followed Him this far. And in the end, he followed Him all the way.

Fr. Amini's life became the answer he was searching for. He was called from the womb. He was sent to be a voice to the poor. And even in his illness, even in his dying, he remained that voice—preaching not from the pulpit, but from a hospital bed; not with grand homilies, but with quiet endurance and unwavering faith.



Fr. Martin with parishioners

In the silence that followed his burial, as the desert wind carried the last prayers into the evening sky of Peru, I began to understand what my brother had lived so faithfully.

Standing at his grave, when someone said, "And now he is part of us as well," I felt the truth of those words settle deeply within me. Mission had taken him from Fiji to Peru, but love had rooted him there forever. He was no longer a foreign missionary. He was a brother of the land, a seed planted in the soil he had come to serve.

And perhaps that is the mystery of this journey into the unknown: we never walk it alone. Not when we first say yes. Not when we are sent to new lands. Not when we face fears of beginning again. And not even when we pass through death.

The Lord who commanded us to be strong and courageous has remained faithful. He was there in the desert sunsets, in the laughter shared after long days of visitation, in the trembling uncertainty of new assignments, and in the hospital room where my brother wrestled with his final question.

I don't yet fully understand why it was him or why it was then. But I know this: his life was not cut short—it was completed. Completed in fidelity. Completed in love. Completed in mission.

And as I continue my own journey—into new places, new languages, new uncertainties—I carry his words in my heart: "I have followed Him this far... I am willing to follow Him anywhere."

Mission is a journey into the unknown, but never alone. Because the One who calls us walks before us. And sometimes, He also walks beside us in the life of a brother who shows us how to say yes—until the very end. CM

Columban Fr. Martin Koroiciri lives and works in Chile.

The Missionary Society of St. Columban

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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.

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When Rice is Sprinkled

Joy and Festivity

By Fr. Louie Ybañez

One of the great privileges of missionary life is the opportunity to encounter cultures profoundly different from one's own. In interior Sindh (Pakistan), one immediately senses a heritage that is both antique and intimately shaped by the land itself. This culture is not merely observed—it is felt in the rhythms of daily life, in the symbols people cherish, and in the rituals that carry meaning far deeper than religious identity alone.

During the winter months—from November to February—the Parkari Kohli community celebrates the wedding season with great joy and festivity. Having officiated countless weddings, I have come to appreciate how profoundly symbolic these celebrations are. What strikes me most is how each gesture and ritual reflects a deep sense of communal interconnectedness—linking families not only to one another, but also to the land and its harvest that sustain their lives.

In Parkari Kohli weddings, the elements carry rich symbolic meanings. The weddings use husked coconut, which is alluded to fertility; cloves; cardamom; dried dates; and Gurr or hardened sugar. Rice, a staple of the harvest, is used by mothers as they offer their blessings upon the couple—a gesture of nurturance, fruitfulness, and continuity. In an inculturated Christian marriage, these cultural symbols are reverently preserved and given renewed depth.

The priest, too, blesses the couple by sprinkling rice, affirming both tradition and faith. The Bible is placed alongside these elements, and as the vows are proclaimed, the bride and groom rest their hands upon it—invoking their commitment to live according to the values of the Gospel. The vows unfold through a series of symbolic gestures. Among them is the Phira, in which the bride and groom circumambulate three times—walking around the sacred fire



Wedding scene

and the cross positioned at the center of the marriage canopy, known as the Rupwo. This canopy, often adorned with rice grains, sindhur powder, and glimmering decorations, becomes a sacred space where culture and Christian faith meet, intertwining tradition, community, and covenant.

In many cultures—particularly in the West—marriage is understood primarily as a personal decision between two individuals. In Pakistan, however, marriage is far more than a private commitment; it is a deeply rooted family affair. Within tribal communities especially, it becomes a profoundly communal event, marked by the active participation and blessing of the entire community. The commitment binds families, which is essential in surviving such a challenging environment.

I often find myself filled with quiet awe as I witness the many rituals and practices unfold—so simple, yet so deeply meaningful. No excessive and elaborate activities, no restless pursuit of extravagance. Everything is marked by restraint, shaped more by tradition than by display.

If anything is abundant, it is not luxury but life itself: the rhythmic chants of the women rising into the air, the unrestrained joy that accompanies the festivity, the careful attention to cultural customs, and the generous blessings offered by each person to the couple. In these moments, I sense that what sustains the celebration is not material grandeur, but the richness of shared faith, adherence to tradition, and community.

As I reflect more deeply on these wedding symbols, I cannot help but see how intimately they are bound to the land itself. The husked coconut, the rice grains, the cloves and cardamom, the dried dates and hardened sugar—all arise from the soil, from seasons of sowing and reaping, from human hands that depend upon the rhythms of nature. Even the fire at the center of the Phira and the decorated Rupwo or wedding canopy speak of elements drawn from the earth. A wedding, in this sense, is not only a covenant between two people; it is a quiet acknowledgment of dependence on creation.

Yet in the arid plains of interior Sindh, environmental fragility is never far from consciousness. Drought, water scarcity, soil degradation, and the uncertainties of climate increasingly threaten the very harvests that these symbols celebrate. When rice is scarce, when crops fail, when the land yields less than it once did, the symbols used in marriage rites take on a deeper expression. They are no longer simply signs of abundance; they become prayers for sustainability, resilience, and hope.

When I sprinkle the rice grains, I do more than a gesture of blessing. It is coupled with a prayer that quietly carries an ecological meaning—a reminder that every prayer for fruitfulness is also a prayer for the land that makes such fruitfulness possible. They remind the community that human love and commitment are inseparable from care for the earth.

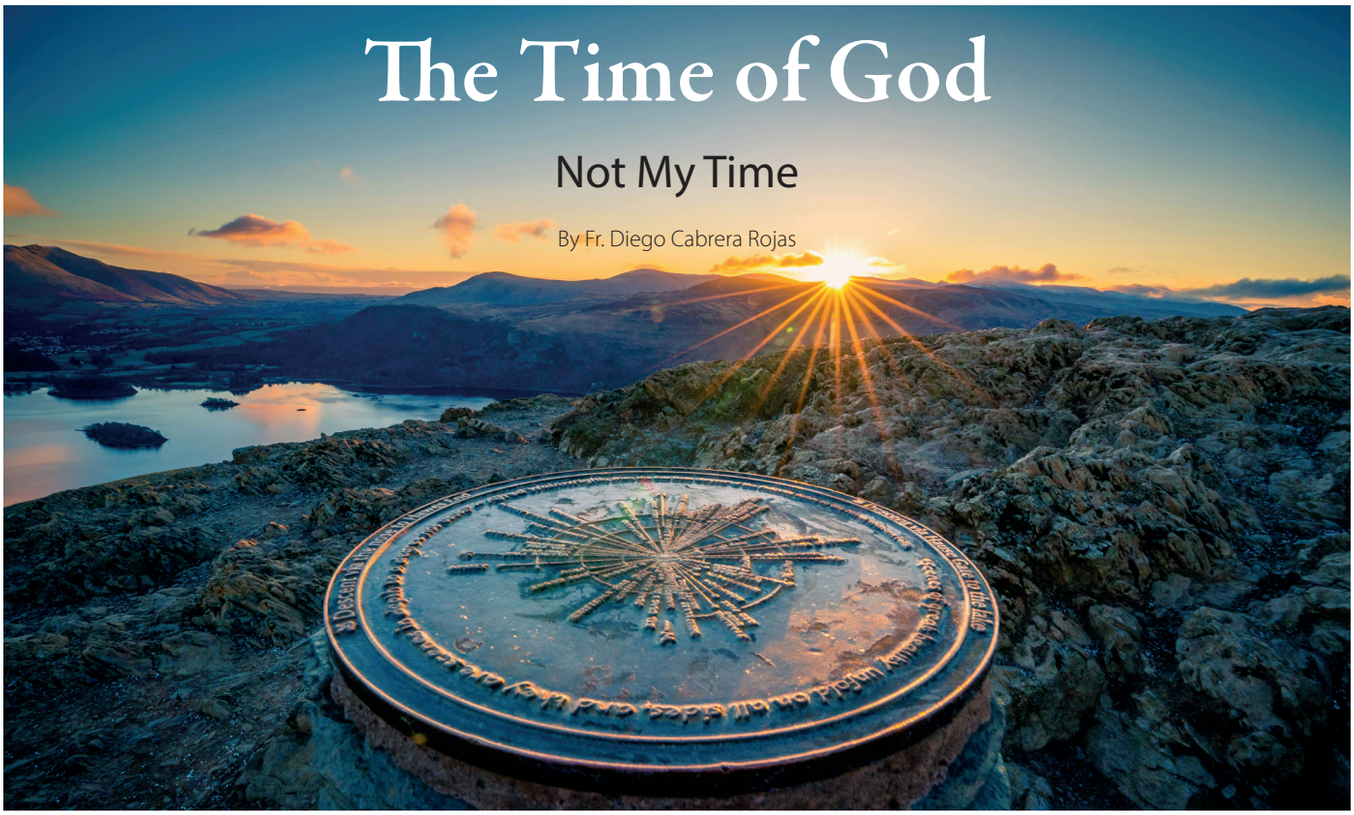
If marriage binds two lives together in fidelity, it also implicitly calls the community to fidelity toward the land that sustains them. In blessing the couple with rice and invoking fruitfulness, the community is, perhaps unknowingly, expressing a longing for harmony between human relationships and the fragile environment upon which all relationships depend. CM

Columban Fr. Louie Ybañez lives and works in Pakistan.

The Time of God

Not My Time

By Fr. Diego Cabrera Rojas



I wrote a song once, in a small wooden room on a humid night in the Fiji Islands. I did it in English and Spanish. I was a young missionary priest then, barely beginning to understand the world, yet convinced that my own time in it was drawing to a close. Illness, exhaustion, and the quiet loneliness that sometimes visits missionaries had wrapped themselves around me. I felt fragile, like a candle flickering in a restless wind.

So I wrote what I thought might be my final prayer—a song that began with the words "If I go, let me go, with a smile on my face…"

It was not a lament. It was a surrender. A way of placing my life, trembling and unfinished, into the hands of the One who had sent me so far from home. I remember the moon that night—how it hung above the palms like a patient witness. I remember the faces of the people I served, the laughter of children running barefoot on the coral paths, the quiet dignity of the poor who carried joy as if it were a birthright. I wanted to take all of that with me. I wanted my last breath to be gratitude. But God, in His gentle and disarming way, had other plans.

Thirty years have passed since that night. I am in the United States now, still walking, still working, still discovering that the horizon stretches farther than I ever imagined. The song I wrote as a farewell has become something else entirely: a reminder that my sense of time is not God's sense of time. What I thought was an ending was only a pause, a moment of reshaping, a doorway into a longer journey.

Looking back, I see that the song was never about dying. It was about learning to live with open hands. It was about trusting that love, the love I received, the love I tried to give, would outlast my fears. It was about believing that joy is not naïve, but necessary; that the poor, whom I once asked God to let me "feel their joy," would continue to teach me how to see the world with unguarded eyes.

Time has softened me. It has also sharpened me. I no longer rush to interpret what God is doing.

I no longer assume that I understand the seasons of my own life. I have learned that God's timing is not a schedule but a mystery, unfolding quietly, like dawn over the Pacific.

And so, I keep the song close. Not as a farewell, but as a compass. A reminder that whenever my time truly comes, whether soon or far, I want to meet it the same way I wanted to meet it then: with a smile, with peace, with gratitude for the people and places that shaped me, and with the certainty that love, if it is alive, can still make this old world better for everyone.

In the end, the song was right. But the timing was God's.

If you want to listen this song please go to my Youtube chanel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JsUkHt_g18 CM

Columban Fr. Diego Cabrera Rojas lives and works in California.



If I Go, Let Me Go with a Smile on My Face

By Fr. Diego Cabrera Rojas

If I go, let me go,
With a smile on my face, with the sun, with the wind
or the moon above.
If I go, I wanna go,
With a smile on your face, with the love and the peace
that you gave me every day.
If I go, If I go.
Don't let me be sad, don't let me down,
let me see how your love is spreading around to renew the world.
Don't let me be late, don't let me rush,
let me feel all the joy that your poor are enjoying
since you came down.

If I go, let me go,
with a smile on my face, with the sun, and the wind
or the moon above.
If I go, if I go.

I want to be new, I want to reach,
with my hand in your hand walking up
where the love never turns off its lights.
I wanna stay, umm, forever more,
by your side day by day, night by night
where the time never knows the end.
If I go, if I go.

I wanna take memories of love,
all the people, the places and moments that we always love the most.
No matter what comes, no matter what goes,
If your love is alive, this old world will be better for everyone.
If I go, let me go,
with a smile on my face, with the sun, and the wind
or the moon above, if I go.

If I go, I wanna go,
With a smile on your face, with the love and the peace
that you gave me every day.
If I go, if I go.
I wanna, wanna go
Yes I wanna, go
with a smile on my face with the love and the peace
that is living in you and me.
I wanna, wanna go,
with a smile on your face with the love and the peace
that you gave me every day.



Airport Resurrection

A "Guardian Angel" Appears at Heathrow Airport

By Fr. John Boles

There have been many significant landmarks in Columban Fr. Ray Collier's sixty years of priesthood, but surely none can rival the moment in 2010 when, after collapsing in one of the world's busiest airports, he was saved just seconds away from death by the intervention of a complete stranger. Even more extraordinary is the reason the stranger happened to be there in the first place!

By 2010, Fr. Ray had already had a very eventful life. He comes from Drogheda in Ireland, from a family steeped in Columban tradition. Two of his uncles had been Columban Missionaries: Fr. Kieran, who'd worked in Burma, and Fr. Tony, who'd served—and been martyred —in Korea.

Ordained in 1966, he was appointed to the Philippines and was on mission in various parishes in Mindanao, an island long troubled by tensions between Christians and Muslims. Health problems forced Ray to transfer to Britain in 1983 and, after a spell in the East End of London, he found himself in a deprived inner-city parish in Birmingham. On the fateful day in question, he was flying back to England after having visited a Philippine friend in Montana, United States.

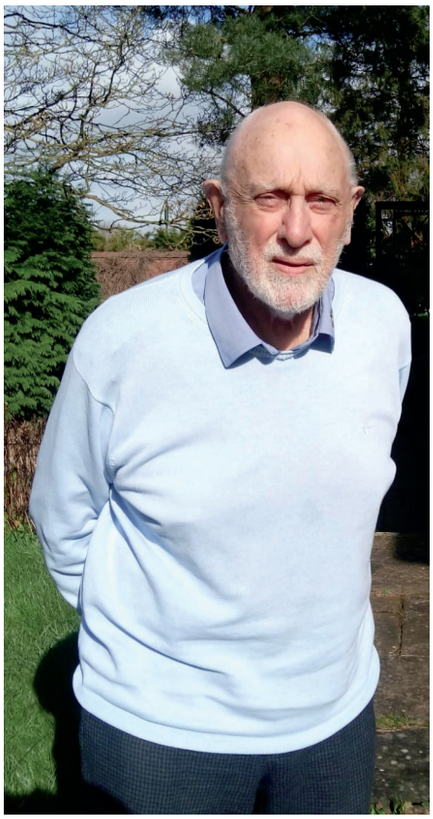
Fr. Ray himself takes up the story.

"To get home, I changed in St. Paul's, Minnesota, for a flight to London Heathrow. I arrived (at Heathrow), picked up my bag, was walking to the lifts (elevator), and that's when it happened: I collapsed. I was unconscious for over two weeks. Can't remember a thing. Next I knew I was in bed looking at my brother Paddy. 'You're back, ' he said. I'd been 'out of it' all that time."

He'd suffered a massive heart attack. After regaining consciousness, he was subjected to intensive surgery, involving a triple heart bypass and the fitting of an inbuilt defibrillator and pacemaker.

One day, while convalescing, a nurse came to his bedside to say he had a visitor. Up came a stranger, a young Japanese lady who smiled and said, "You don't know me, but I know you." It was she who pieced together the details of Ray's near-miraculous escape from death.





Fr. Ray Collier

It seems she was a nurse herself and was in London to do further studies related to bowel cancer. On the day that Ray was arriving from the U.S., her New Zealand flatmate was to meet someone also coming to Heathrow and asked the Japanese lady to accompany her. She said no, she was too busy.

According to Ray's account, "once she said that, she felt a little voice saying, 'go to the airport.' The more she tried to ignore it, the more urgent, more persistent. In the end, she got fed up hearing it and finally said, 'Okay, I'll go.' With that, the voice stopped. Don't ask me how or why. That's just how she said it happened. And…she's not a Christian, by the way."

Fr. Ray continues, "According to her, they got to Heathrow and were just walking around when she saw me on the floor. She rushed over. Got these Chinese students to help turn me on my side. Then saw I wasn't breathing! Put me on my back, ripped off my jacket, tried CPR—nothing! Two policemen were there. One had a bike. Dashed off to get a defibrillator. The other stayed with her. All this was super-quick. She told me, 'You hadn't breathed for one-and-a-half minutes. A few more seconds and you'd have been a vegetable. Then, the defibrillator arrived. We applied it. You started breathing.'"

Subsequently, both the lady and the two policemen received Certificates of Commendation from the Chief Constable. Fr. Ray tells me that the whole episode was captured on CCTV, and the police still use the footage for training purposes.

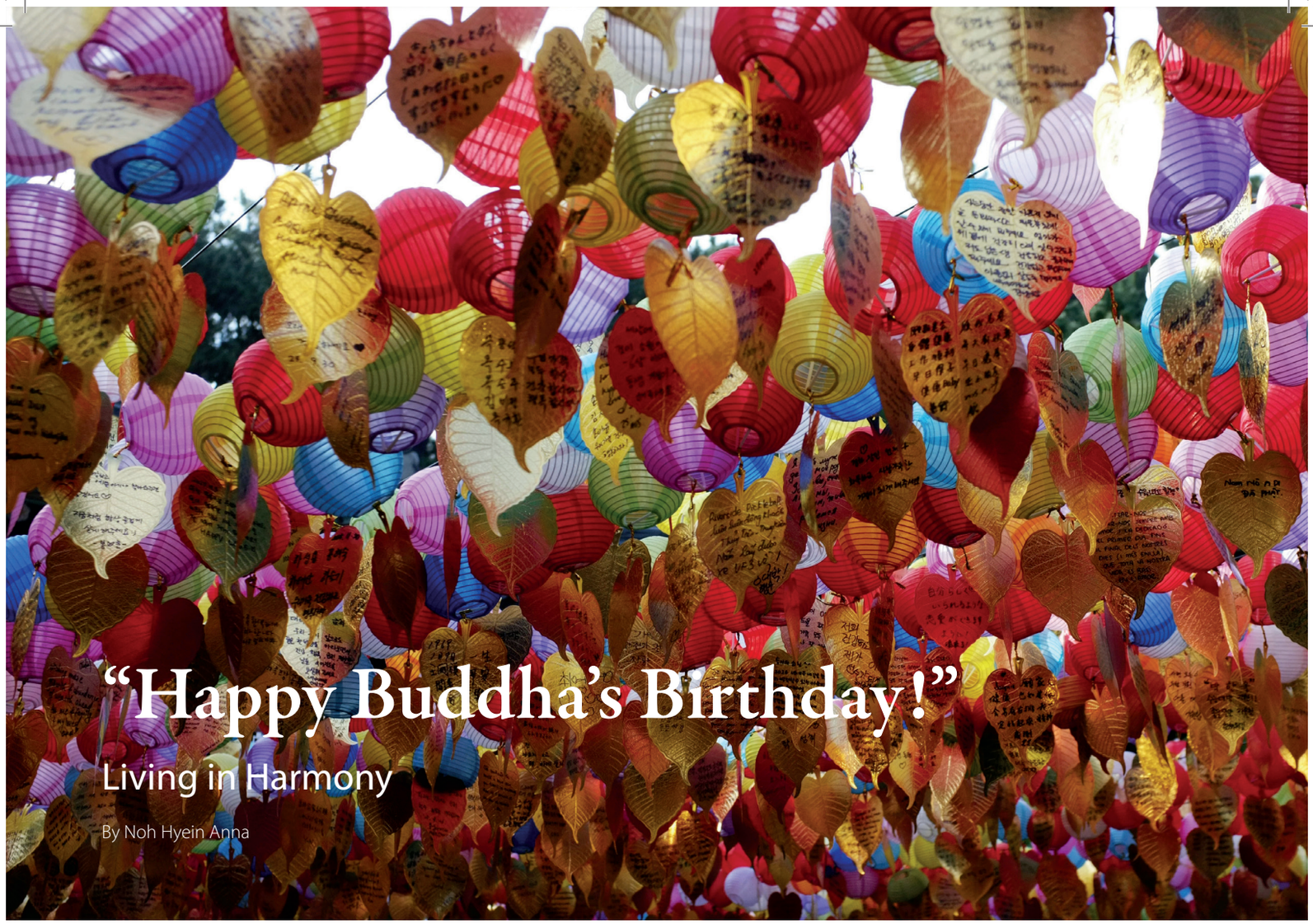
As for him and his 'guardian angel,' the hospital meeting has been the start of a lifelong friendship. They exchange birthday greetings. "Easy to remember", Ray says, "because our birthdays are only four days apart." The lady fell in love with a Scotsman and invited Fr. Ray up for the wedding. "She's not Christian but still asked me to bless the marriage. So, I went to the wedding and gave them a REAL GOOD blessing, the very best you can do for non-Catholics." The newlyweds settled in Britain, and Fr. Ray sees them often.

And that little voice? "She has no explanation. Never happened again. Says it was totally outside her experience."

Fr. Ray adds, "I ask myself many times, why was she there? What does it all mean?" Whatever the 'whys and wherefores,' he knows that God was in it all, giving him a type of resurrection, extending his life for a purpose. Fr. Ray makes full use of that gift, working tirelessly in migrant and inter-religious dialogue ministries in central Birmingham.

His last word on the episode? It seems that the enduring theme of changing planes gives him a clue. "I've been allowed an extended stopover," he says. He feels he's been granted a new lease of life "in the 'Now of God" before he boards his final, happy flight. CM

Columban Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.



“Happy Buddha’s Birthday!”

Living in Harmony

By Noh Hyein Anna

“Happy Buddha’s Birthday!” It is a greeting rarely heard in the Philippines, where nearly 80% of the country’s 110 million people are Catholic. Yet on the second Sunday of May 2025, the streets around Malate were filled with this joyful exclamation celebrating the birth of the Buddha. It was Buddha’s birthday, and a Korean Buddhist organization had organized a distribution of grocery packages to 200 families in the mission area of Malate Church. Since the day also happened to be Mother’s Day, many beneficiaries unfamiliar with the greeting responded cheerfully with “Happy Mother’s Day!” instead.

At that time, I had not yet been assigned to Malate Parish, but I was invited to the event not only because I was Korean, but also because it was an opportunity for me to meet the Korean supporters. I was also personally curious about the activities of this Buddhist group in the Philippines, so I gladly accepted. I wanted to understand what motivated them to cross religious boundaries and work under the scorching sun in an impoverished urban area, offering relief goods filled with care and compassion. That day became my first encounter with the Jungto Society.

The Jungto Society is a Buddhist lay movement founded by Ven. Pomnyun Sunim in Korea. It seeks enlightenment and a harmonious community through daily practice and mindful living. Rooted in the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism, it integrates spiritual practice with social engagement, focusing on three major areas: international relief, peace and reunification, and environmental protection. Guided by this vision, the Jungto Society established organizations such as JTS (Join Together Society), Good Friends, and EcoBuddha.

Among them, JTS Korea—recognized with special consultative status by UN ECOSOC—operates under a simple yet powerful motto: “The hungry must be fed, the sick must be treated, and children must be educated.” This motto resonated deeply with me, as it echoes the Columban mission to prioritize the most vulnerable, the displaced and the marginalized. JTS has carried out humanitarian work without regard to religion or ideology, supporting impoverished communities in India, assisting children in North Korea, and building schools in remote areas across Asia. In 2019, they distributed

100,000 small gas stoves to Rohingya refugees in Myanmar, and since 2024 they have begun an environmental improvement project in Bhutan.

The Jungto Society also has a long-standing relationship with the Philippines. In 2002, Ven. Pomnyun Sunim received the Ramon Magsaysay Award (Peace and International Understanding), often called "Asia's Nobel Prize," for his humanitarian work across India, North Korea, and other impoverished regions. During the award process, His Excellency Most Rev. Antonio J. Ledesma, S.J., D.D., who served as liaison in the Philippines, introduced him to the severe poverty and conflict in Mindanao and personally requested JTS involvement there. This became the starting point of JTS Philippines.

Responding to the Archbishop's request, JTS began working in Mindanao, focusing on education, healthcare, and peacebuilding. They supported schooling for children in conflict zones and assisted the most vulnerable like indigenous peoples and Muslim communities without discrimination. Beyond emergency relief, they invested in agricultural training, community development, and livelihood programs to help communities stand on their own. Also, from 2003 to 2025, they built 86 schools across six provinces (Bukidnon, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Misamis Oriental, Maguindanao, and Agusan del Sur). When constructing schools in conflict areas, they often invited parents to help. Hearing the words "This school is for our children," parents regardless of religion gladly joined the effort. In those moments, shared hope for their children's future became a small seed of peace, nurtured through encounter, dialogue, and cooperation.

The Jungto Society's connection with Malate Church also runs deep. In 2009, a priest visited a Jungto Society



member who operated a business in the Malate area and asked whether he could help the local poor. The member discussed the request with other members, and together they decided to offer their support for Malate Church. Through this connection, the Jungto Society became linked with Malate Church and has continued its service ever since, preparing and distributing meals every Saturday in the parish's meal program. When the pandemic began, they shifted from cooking to financial support, but their steady service beyond religious boundaries remains a powerful witness of compassion.

At the Buddha's birthday event mentioned earlier, I first met Erica and Mr. Hur. Erica, with her bright voice calling out "Happy Buddha's Birthday!," and Mr. Hur, quietly organizing heavy grocery bags, were a Korean couple who had lived in the Philippines for 24 years. They were also among the long-time volunteers who had been faithfully serving at the meal program. From that encounter, we stayed in touch. I was always fascinated by Erica's stories about the Jungto Society's teachings, her spiritual practice, and their various activities in the Philippines and worldwide. In return, I shared with them the teachings and structure of the Catholic Church, as well as the history and charism of the Columbans.

As we continued to share our faith and our lives with one another, I learned that the Jungto Society was hosting a photo exhibition on its work in Mindanao, and that Ven. Pomnyun Sunim would be visiting Manila for a public talk. Erica and Mr. Hur invited me to serve as a volunteer, and I helped with the event. Later, I invited them to the installation Mass of the new parish priest at Malate Church. It was their first time attending a Catholic Mass, and witnessing their openness and respectful curiosity moved me deeply.

One day, I shared with Erica my concern about the containers used by the meal program beneficiaries such as cracked plastic boxes taped together, old red tubs donated six years ago, disposable ice cream containers, and even Styrofoam bowls. Beyond hygiene, I worried about the health risks of microplastics when hot food was poured into them. Upon hearing this, Erica immediately searched online for various stainless-steel lunchboxes, selected the most practical option, and



sent them to the meal program office. She provided enough for the 100 current beneficiaries and an additional 50 for newcomers. Watching people carry warm meals in clean, safe containers, I felt a quiet sense of relief. Reflecting on the difference Erica's thoughtful generosity made, a gentle gratitude filled my heart.

Over time, I came to see that Erica and Mr. Hur are people who seek to live meaningfully in the Philippines, where they have long made their home. They embody the teachings of the Buddha through their compassion, service, and genuine care for others. "I feel truly fulfilled when I can be of help to people going through difficult times," they once told me. Their lives demonstrate a simple truth: to journey together, we must support one another.

We live in a world where people of different faiths coexist in many ways. Yet religion can also become a source of conflict, even war. It is difficult to understand why religions that preach love and peace so often clash. As Pope Francis emphasizes in *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Fratelli Tutti*, religion is called not to build walls but to build bridges. God's goodness is present in different religious traditions, and interreligious dialogue and cooperation are essential paths toward peace.

The activities of the Jungto Society also embody this spirit of building bridges. JTS has consistently reached beyond religious and ideological boundaries, supporting impoverished communities in India, providing gas stoves to Rohingya refugees, and assisting Indigenous and Muslim communities in Mindanao, Philippines. These efforts testify to a commitment that places human dignity above differences in faith. Through such work, the Jungto Society quietly yet powerfully shows what becomes possible when people of different religions collaborate for the common good.

I, too, have learned through my friendship with Erica and Mr. Hur that this teaching is not an abstract ideal but something that can be lived out in daily life. Though we come from different faiths, we share the same desire to serve those in need. Our religious differences have never been a barrier; instead, they have become a pathway for understanding and learning from one another. As we replaced food containers together and worked to bring small improvements to the meal program, the fact that we belonged to different religions no longer mattered. What mattered was the shared intention to make someone's life a little warmer.

Ultimately, I believe that seeking ways to acknowledge our differences and live in harmony is a task entrusted to people of faith in our time. Small acts of solidarity show that religion need not be a source of conflict but can become a bridge that connects us. And such bridges are not built through grand declarations, but through the quiet gestures of kindness and care that we choose each day. CM

Columban lay missionary Noh Hyein Anna is from South Korea. She currently lives and works in the Philippines.

The Missionary Society of St. Columban

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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.

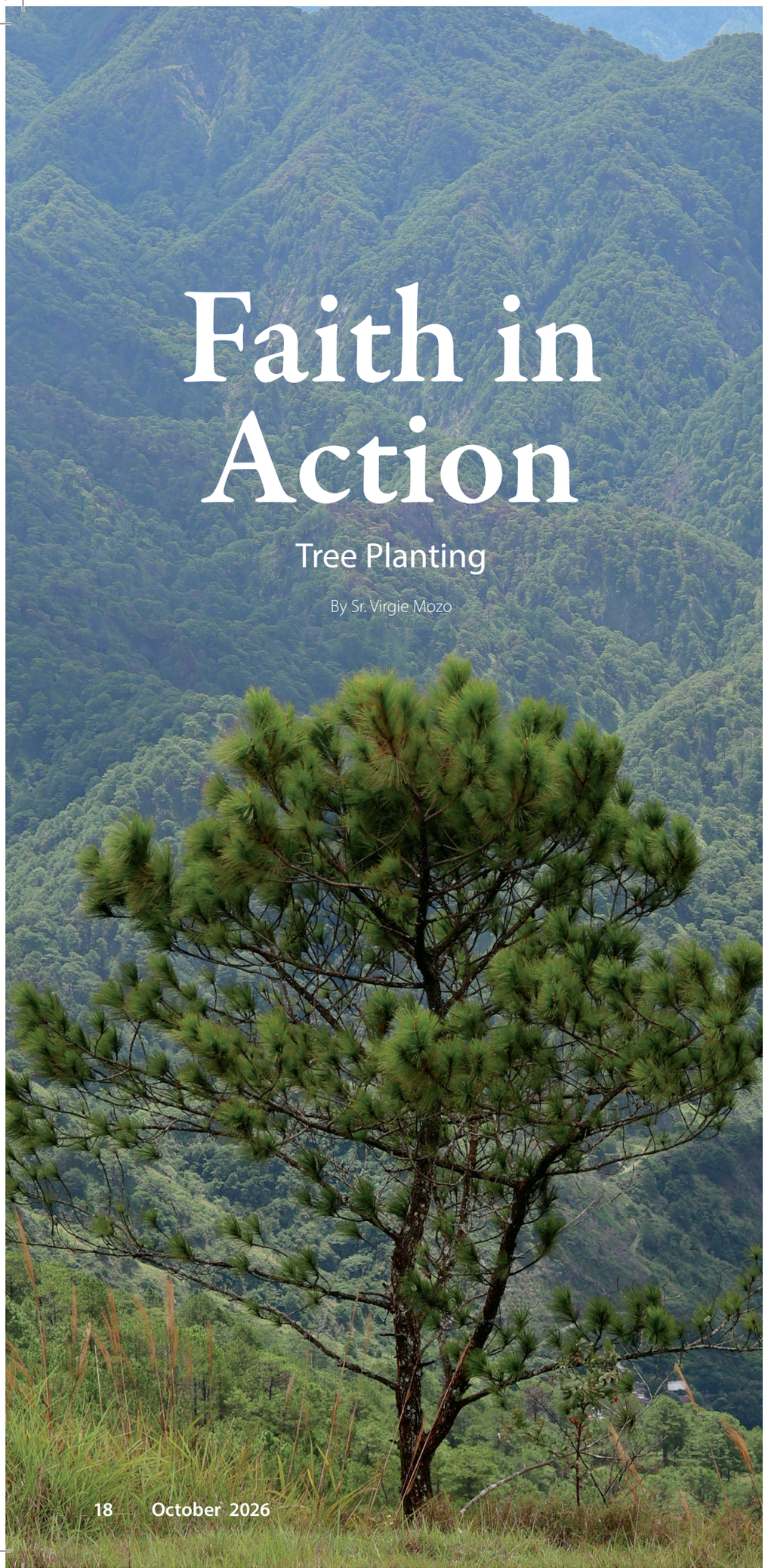
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Faith in Action

Tree Planting

By Sr. Virgie Mozo

Last year, in 2025, a major controversy emerged surrounding a proposed wind energy project near Mount Banahaw (in the Philippines), affecting communities in Laguna and Quezon Province. Local residents, together with environmental groups such as the Save Bundok Banahaw Network, and other non-government organizations (NGO's) strongly opposed the project due to serious ecological, cultural, and spiritual concerns.

One of the primary issues raised was the encroachment on protected areas. Critics pointed out that 28 of the 38 planned wind turbines would be situated within a three-kilometer (1.8 mile) radius of the Mounts Banahaw and San Cristobal Protected Landscape. Many fear that this proximity threatens the integrity of the conservation zone.

Beyond environmental concerns, Mount Banahaw holds deep sacred and cultural significance. It is revered as a holy mountain by numerous spiritual groups. Industrializing the area is seen by many as a desecration of its spiritual and religious heritage. Years ago, I personally experienced the mountain's sacred character when I joined religious sisters and priests from nine congregations in an exposure program on Filipino spirituality at Ciudad Mistica de Dios (The Mystical City of God). That encounter deepened my reverence for the mountain as a place of prayer, pilgrimage, and spiritual renewal.

There are also serious environmental fears. Construction activities could lead to deforestation in virgin forest areas, increasing the risk of soil erosion and landslides, and endangering watersheds that supply water to communities in Laguna and Quezon. Having had a brief mission experience in Laguna a few years ago, I witnessed firsthand how deeply communities depend on these natural resources for daily life.



This situation reflects what many describe as a "green versus green" conflict. While the wind energy project aligns with the national goal of achieving 35% renewable energy by 2030, activists argue that renewable development must not come at the cost of protected ecosystems. They caution against what they call "development aggression," insisting that climate solutions should not sacrifice biodiversity and sacred landscapes.

The proposed project spans approximately 4,536 hectares of land, with 38 wind turbines planned across 10 barangays. One of these, Barangay Bukal Ilaya—where I recently participated in a tree planting activity—has been specifically cited as a core area for the proposed construction.

In light of these realities, I volunteered for the tree-planting initiative as a concrete response to our chapter directive: that we continue to educate and update ourselves about the current climate and ecological crisis, while exploring meaningful ways to act in our journey of ecological conversion through prayer, lifestyle, and advocacy.

Our journey to the foot of Mount Banahaw with the organizers and fellow volunteers was originally scheduled for December 2025. However, persistent rains delayed our mission. It was a gentle reminder that creation moves according to its own rhythm—that the mountain, not our calendars, sets the schedule.

On February 14, 2026, beneath heavy rain, we gathered for early Mass at the Parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Tayabas, Quezon. That morning, we became more than volunteers; we became stewards of creation, responding to the call of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* to care for our common home.

In his encyclical, Pope Francis reminds us, "The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor" (LS 2). His words resonated with us deeply as we stood at the foot of a mountain long regarded as sacred.

In his homily, the priest emphasized that Mount Banahaw is not merely land to be utilized but a gift to be protected. He acknowledged the concerns of communities and organizations in Quezon Province opposing the proposed 247 MW Banahaw Wind Power Project. For many, the issue goes beyond development; it concerns ecological integrity and spiritual heritage.

Around 300 volunteers came from Laguna, Batangas, Cavite, Quezon, and Manila to plant indigenous tree species in Barangay Bukal Ilaya. These trees do more than absorb carbon; they help prevent flash floods in the Quezon and Laguna lowlands and restore the mountain's watershed. As *Laudato Si'* teaches, "Everything is connected." (LS 91) What happens in the uplands directly affects the lives of those in the lowlands.

The encyclical also calls us to an "ecological conversion," inviting us to recognize that "living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue." (LS 217) Each seedling we planted became a concrete expression of that vocation.

Just before the final blessing, the rain stopped. The seedlings were blessed, and we shared a simple local porridge before ascending the slopes.

Another day, we were welcomed through a traditional lambanog ritual. A young woman offered a glass with the words "Na'ay po," inviting us into the sacredness of the land. Our collective response, "Pakinabangan po," was both gratitude and promise—that our labor would bear fruit for both community and ecosystem. In that sacred exchange, faith and culture intertwined, echoing the spirit of *Laudato Si'* which calls us to respect both creation and the wisdom of local communities.

Mount Banahaw is a protected landscape, yet its true protection depends on people willing to walk its trails with intention and reverence. Pope Francis reminds us, "We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us." (LS 67) This humility must guide all decisions concerning its future.

As the seedlings take root, so too does our resolve. We have been nourished by the land; now it is our turn to ensure that it remains pakinabangan—life-giving and blessed—for generations to come. In caring for the mountain, we answer the urgent invitation of *Laudato Si':* to hear both the cry of the poor, and to respond with faith in action. CM

Columban Sister Virginia Mozo lives and works in the Philippines.

Father Bernie Grady

A Priest Remembers His Years in Peru

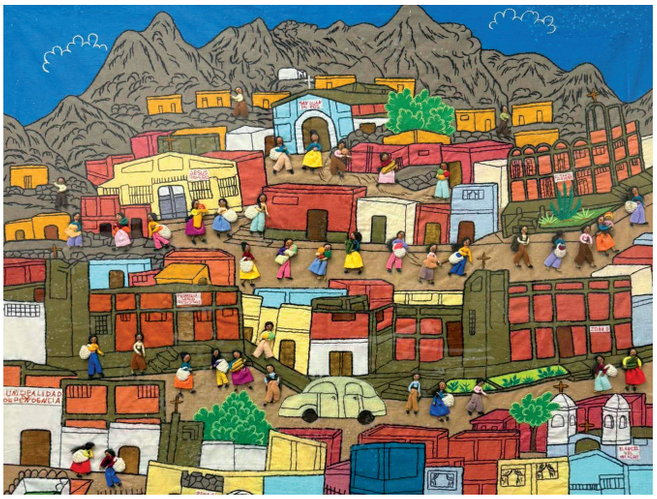
By Fr. Albert Utzig

As a priest of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, I was given permission by my bishop to do missionary service for five years and was accepted by the Columban Fathers in Omaha, Nebraska. The Columbans assigned me to their region of Peru, and I was appointed pastor of "Parroquia Jesús Resucitado," where I served from mid-1993 to mid-1998.

The parish is located in the Northern Zone of the city of Lima in the district of Independencia. The area of the parish is known as "El Ermitaño" (The Hermit). It is one of the "pueblos jovenes" which sprang up some 35-40 years prior to my arrival, during a difficult time in Peru when the infrastructure, the roads, schools, etc. of the rural areas were being neglected and many "campesinos" were forced to flee to the city in hopes of survival. After arriving and finding temporary refuge with relatives and others of their rural communities, they organized and sought vacant areas on the edges of the city and "squatted" until eventually being permitted to establish themselves. I recall being told that, during a period of some ten years, rural people were arriving in Lima at the rate of 1,000 per day.

Ermitaño is situated on a foothill of the Andes mountain range, adjacent to other such settlements. The Columban Fathers were asked by the local bishop to minister to these communities shortly after they began to appear. I think there were some 40,000 inhabitants in this settlement at the time I served there. The original squatters were from various areas of the country, and they brought, and sought to preserve, their original Catholic traditions.

As a result, "Jesus Resucitado," the Parish of the Risen Christ, was comprised of people from various rural pueblos and parishes, seven of which had chapels that bore the name of their communities back home. Two of us priests ministered to these people, celebrating weekend Masses in each chapel and offering sacramental formation and celebrations, and social assistance, during the weekdays.



At the time, at "Payet," the second hillside settlement north of Ermitaño, a group of women in the parish of "Espiritu Santo" (Holy Spirit), worked in a cooperative that created embroidered and appliquéd fabric artworks of various sizes and themes. A religious Sister from England had worked with them for a number of years, and by that time she had returned to England but continued to market their products for them.

In 1998, as I was preparing to return to the United States and to resume ministry in the Archdiocese of Dubuque, I approached this group of women with the request to make "Parroquia Jesús Resucitado" in Ermitaño the theme of an artwork, as a remembrance of my time there. As always, the response was: "Si, Padre, no hay problema." (Certainly, Father, no problem.)

So I obtained a map of the area and took photos of each chapel. I met with one of the women, showing her the map and indicating the location of each chapel on the hillside. I was quickly made aware that a map was not something familiar to her, so I asked her to accompany me on a tour.

We stopped at each chapel, where I gave her the corresponding photo I had taken. She sketched a bit of the surroundings of each. I also pointed out to her the outline of the rock formations at the mountaintop, one part of which the people call "La Bella Durmiente" (Sleeping Beauty).

Some three weeks later, this creation was brought to me. All of the chapels are clearly identified, compressed into their approximate locations in relation to one another. Homes and businesses line the streets, busy with pedestrians and a few automobiles, and "Sleeping Beauty" is depicted as she is.

For me, it is a work of art that evokes memories that I will always treasure.

—Father Bernie Grady, October 2015.

Fr. Bernie passed away in Iowa on August 29, 2025, at 82 years old. His brother, Peter, brought the image to St. Columbans late last year. We think it is worth sharing with all of our supporters around the world; Fr. Bernie was enriched, the Columbans were enriched, and the people of Peru were enriched. CM

Columban Fr. Albert Utzig is the regional director for the U.S.

Shaolin

A Movie of Redemption and Sacrifice

By Fr. George Da Roza

Oscar Wilde, the Irish poet and playwright, once wrote, "Life imitates art far more than art imitates life." (*The Decay of Lying: An Observation*, 1889). There is a certain amount of truth in Wilde's observation, particularly in terms of technology, mores and, yes, propaganda. Hollywood had for a time produced war movies that glorified and idealized violence and war as a means for its political agenda without examining the cost of suffering to the innocent victims of war.

The Chinese movie, "Shaolin," with its underlying Buddhist message of redemption, sacrifice and peace, does not shy away from violence but chooses to depict the consequences of corruption, violence, internal conflict and foreign exploitation on the general populace. "Shaolin" is set in the Warlord period of China's history (1916-1928). During this tumultuous period of fracture, regional military leaders each vied for power, wealth and territory. The protagonist, Hou Jie, is portrayed as a ruthless warlord who uses anything and everyone to his advantage to amass wealth, power and position. He plots to assassinate his sworn brother to gain full control, but his plan is thwarted by the betrayal of his ambitious second in command, Cao, who sends assassins to kill them all. Hou's sworn brother is killed, as are many of Hou's men, and Hou's innocent daughter is critically injured as she attempts to escape from the violence.

His love for his daughter and his desperation to save her bring him to a Shaolin temple where he seeks the assistance of the Shaolin monks to save her but their efforts are in vain. Hou's daughter dies; his wife blames him for her death and leaves him. He has lost his family, his army of men, and his power base. In one night, he loses everything. In his grief, he wanders aimlessly and encounters the cook of the temple who provides him with not only food and shelter but the beginning of his conversion. During his stay at the temple. Hou gradually sees the error of his ways, embraces the monastic lifestyle of calm and serenity, finally finding peace.

As the film unfolds, Cao, the new warlord, has entered into an alliance with foreign powers who bring military weapons that create even more havoc, suffering, human trafficking and death to the innocent people. Hou, conflicted with his newfound peace and a need to end Cao's reign of terror, comes to a decision that Cao must be stopped. Hou and the Shaolin monks plan a diversion. Hou is to distract Cao while the monks enter into the camp to save the many innocents who are imprisoned there. The monks succeed in saving those imprisoned and Cao, driven by revenge, attacks the temple with heavy artillery provided by his foreign allies. In the course of the battle, many are killed, both soldiers and monks. The temple is destroyed. In the final scene, Hou saves Cao, at the cost of his own life, from being crushed by a falling heavy beam. Hou is seen falling gently into the hand of the statue of the Merciful Buddha, where he dies peacefully. Cao steps out of the temple ruins and sees the total devastation and death that surrounds him. Guilt seems to overshadow him. From a distance, the surviving monks with the many saved innocents look down and move on to new hope and a new beginning.

> *"Life imitates art far more than art imitates life."*
> —Oscar Wilde



The film's message of redemption is seen through the lens of forgiveness. Hou's wife forgives him, he forgives himself, and in the end, he forgives Cao. Redemption leads to sacrifice; his wife releases him to follow the life of a monk, sacrificing a life she once imagined. Hou's sacrifice of himself to save Cao leads to Cao's redemption. The movie ends with the note that personal and communal sacrifices lead to peace.

In our current world situation, violence, internal conflicts and wars are constant themes on the news. Perhaps we can reflect on the consequences of our choices that lead to chaos and strife. If Wilde is correct that life imitates art, then let us be hopeful that we can still find redemption in the hearts of good people, willing to make sacrifices that bring about our peace. I pray that we will all find peace resting in the hand of God. CM

Columban Fr. George Da Roza lives and works in California.



Connections

Columban Missionaries

Across the red dust roads and rivers wide,
Where hunger once walked barefoot in the sun,
They came with faith not carried as a pride,
But as a seed—small, patient, never done.
With rosaries worn smooth by hopeful hands,
And hearts attuned to both the soul and field,
They listened first to needs of fragile lands,
Then taught the hidden wealth the earth could yield.

They built no kingdoms forged in gold or might,
But schools of chalk and benches, rough and plain,
Where letters flickered into learning's light
And broke the stubborn cycles forged by pain.
For every child who learned to read and write
A door swung open wider than before—
A future shaped not only by the night,
But by the tools of knowledge at its core.

And where disease had quietly held its claim,
They raised small clinics, humble, white, and clean;
They spoke each patient softly by their name,
Restoring worth where loss had long been seen.
The nurse, the sister, tending wound and fear,
Did more than heal the body's fragile frame—
She strengthened hands to labor without tear,
And lit again the will to build and aim.

They taught the soil to answer back with bread,
Through careful rows and seeds both old and new;
Showed how the barren ground, once thought as dead,
Could bloom with life when tended with what's true.
New wells were drawn from deep beneath the clay,
And water turned from burden into grace;
With every drop, a village found its way
To stand with dignity, to claim its place.

Not charity alone, but trade took root—
A market formed where none had stood before;
The crafts once made in quiet, now bore fruit
As roads connected door to distant door.
The weaver's cloth, the farmer's gathered yield,
The carpenter's firm hand, the mason's art—
Each found its value openly revealed,
Each shaped a livelihood, a hopeful start.

They formed cooperatives from scattered need,
Where many hands could share a single aim;
Together, planting not just crop but seed
Of trust, that wealth might grow without a name.
No longer bound to cycles stark and grim,
Communities found strength in unity;
The poorest voice grew steady, clear, and trim,
And spoke of work, of worth, of equity.

And still, through all, the Gospel softly wove
A thread of purpose deeper than the coin:
That labor done in justice, rooted love,
Would bless the many, not the favored few who join.
For what is wealth if hoarded in the night?
Or progress if it leaves the weak behind?
They taught that growth must also guard the right
Of every soul to flourish, heart and mind.

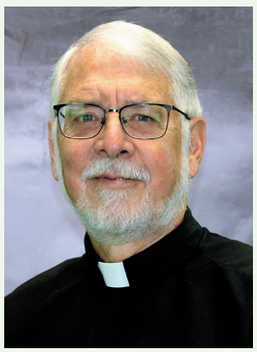
Across the continents, their quiet art
Still ripples outward, shaping what will be:
An economy not built apart from heart,
But grounded in shared human dignity.

“Biodiversity” Is an Important Word

Earth Day is a tradition that began in 1970 when a U.S. Senator from Wisconsin organized a national demonstration to raise awareness about environmental issues. By the end of that year the government had created the Environmental Protection Agency. By 1990 Earth Day was celebrated in more than 140 countries around the world on April 22.

Here at the Columban headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska, we decided to celebrate it with some students from our local parish school, St. Mary’s. They have a “Budding Botanists” Club that we tapped into. I had seen an article in the local newspaper where the Natural Resources District was offering various tree seedlings to farmers and local people who had some land where they could grow. We have 24 acres around us and have been losing trees every year to age, wind, and insects. What a great opportunity to replace some of them with new trees! After talking with the school principal and coordinator of the Club a plan began to form. So, I ordered 30 red oaks, some Douglas Fir, Black Gum, Allegheny Serviceberries, Persimmon, Pear, American Hazelnut, and Apple trees, 70 trees total.

On Saturday, April 25, at 9 am, ten families from the parish school came to our place. We began with a simple prayer that they had prepared, a reading from Genesis on creation—God formed all the lands, seas, sky, rain, sun, seed-bearing plants and animals and us humans “and saw that they were all very good.” Then we went outside and put together growing tubes that would cover our trees to keep the rabbits and deer from eating them. We had marked the spots where the tree seedlings would go. With shovels we dug holes deep enough for the roots and planted for about an hour and a half. We had bamboo stakes to hold the tubes upright. We watered the new trees and put mulch around them. We finished planting around 11:30 am and enjoyed some cookies and fruit drinks.



From the Director

By Fr. Al Utzig

The object was to give the children the opportunity to get their hands dirty, smell soil, touch worms, and be



part of a whole system of new life growing in our yard. The kids ranged in age from four years old to 13 years old, working with their parents and priests and workers who are here. That evening it rained a little, so God was taking care of us.

One of the main focuses of the Columban Fathers at this time is “protecting biodiversity.” As we keep using the word “biodiversity” I am seeing that it carries a lot more meaning. God created so many kinds of plants and animals, soils and waters, and they all interact with each other. They are all necessary in the way they relate with each other. Take one away and the whole system is weaker.

God created so many kinds of plants and animals, soils and waters, and they all interact with each other.

Here at St. Columban’s we planted oak trees for woodpeckers and acorns for deer and turkeys and squirrels to eat, fruit trees for us and birds and deer and bees, flowering trees for bees and insects and butterflies. Nature is not just around us; we are part of nature and we have to do our part to help it to thrive because we have the power to do so. Please God, our young people who worked on this little project learned a little how to live in harmony with our fellow creatures, respecting them, valuing them, and enjoying them.

Fr. Al

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"Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."
– MATTHEW 4:19

At once they left their nets and followed him.

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