A group of children of various ages are gathered in front of a wall covered in colorful, hand-painted murals. The murals include a sun, clouds, and other abstract designs. The children are dressed in casual clothing. A young girl in a pink shirt is smiling broadly in the foreground, while a boy in a blue and white striped shirt looks down at a small object in his hands. Another boy in a grey shirt is leaning his head on his hand, and a younger boy in a blue shirt is looking up. The overall atmosphere is bright and cheerful.

Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

October 2021

People of Faith

C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – People of Faith



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Volume 105 – Number 6 – October 2021

Columban Mission

PUBLISHED BY THE COLUMBAN FATHERS

COLUMBAN MISSION (Issn 0095-4438) is published eight times a year. A minimum donation of \$15 a year is required to receive a subscription. Send address and other contact information changes by calling our toll-free number, by sending the information to our mailing address or by emailing us at MISSIONOFFICE@COLUMBAN.ORG.

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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 Arlene Villahermosa

Faith in our Hearts

During difficult times, we may find ourselves asking, “To what or to whom do we hang on or cling to? What keeps us moving?”

I suppose, it is our faith! We’ve got to believe in something, or someone. For us, Catholics, we believe in God, the God who is full of goodness, mercy and compassion. We believe that something good will come out of difficult situations. We don’t know how or when, but we believe. We have faith in our hearts.

I remember a friend who shared with me her struggles to make both ends meet in the family, having a sick husband and a son who became a drug addict. Many of her friends and relatives told her to let go of the son since he was only causing trouble and difficulty. But she said that her son was born out of love, and that she would continue loving him until he was transformed by it. For her, he is a beautiful gift. He was born good. She believed that one day, good would triumph. Every once in a while, her son would become sober and would apologize for the mess he had been causing the family, and every time, she always forgave him and reassured him of her love. At the end of each day, she would thank God for surviving yet another day and prayed that God would always lead the way and give her the strength to love her son without ceasing. It took about 15 years before the son finally decided to quit his drug habit and straighten out his life.

How great was my friend’s joy when that time came! She had faith and was willing to wait, to persevere, to go through the journey with an open heart and mind, willing to welcome newness and participate in the unfolding of each day.

Faith allows my friend and us to move, live and thrive in a world of uncertainties. Faith is not about following blindly. It makes us see

more than what meets our eyes. Faith recognizes the good, the true and the beautiful in the person, the whole of humanity, and in creation.

We believe that when we are sleeping our body is at work repairing and restoring whatever was lost or spent during the day; we believe that the seeds we have planted are in the process of growing to become a tree even if we don’t see what’s happening deep down in the soil; we believe in the air even if we don’t see it. Faith is a grace and a gift from God. It’s there for us to receive and nurture.

Faith is not passive. In spite of the uncertain future, it was Mary’s faith, her “Yes,” that has made it possible for God to become one with us in Jesus. Faith moves us to speak, do something and share God’s goodness. This gives hope, brings joy and makes us see beauty amidst all the calamities and difficulties in life. We pray that our faith may continue to increase with the experience of God’s unconditional love in each passing day.

Faith recognizes the good, the true and the beautiful in the person, the whole of humanity, and in creation.

Columban lay missionary Arlene Villahermosa lives and works in the Philippines



On Mission and on the Move

The Dragon God Parish, Japan

By Fr. Noel Doyle

When I arrived in Japan the Columban missionaries had almost 50 parishes scattered over four different areas. Of those most of them were in cities with the exception of two. One of the latter which I ended up in was in the prefecture of Wakayama, and was called *Ryujin*, or the Dragon God. It was a long narrow strip of a parish bordering on a river which also had another couple of smaller rivers running into it, and it was in the middle of the mountains. The way into the parish – a two hour trip by bus and it was another hour and half up to the top of the valley – was a dirt road cut out of the mountains which were on both sides, and the river was in between with a few hundred feet of a drop to the water. There were passing places, mostly cut out of the mountain, every quarter of a mile or so.

One day as I was returning we pulled into such an overhang from the mountain to allow a truckload of timber to pass. Just as it was passing the road collapsed under the truck, and it started to roll down the slope. The driver was fortunate as there was one tree left on the slope, because it had an elbow shape to it. The truck rolled into it, and the timber went in one direction and the truck in the other. The driver escaped with only a few bruises.

There was a small amount of arable land along the sides of the river in some places which was turned into paddy fields for the growing of rice. Along the main river there were dams in places, and the water was run off from them into little drains which ran two or three miles down by the river bank until they were high enough to provide run-off water for

the paddy fields to grow the rice. The main occupation was the growing of timber on the sides of the mountains, and its cultivation from planting to cutting to transporting it out of the Valley. The Americans after the end of World War II had given the flat arable farming land all over Japan to the tenant farmers but overlooked the mountain land which was owned by big landowners out on the sea coast.

An American plane had crashed in Ryujin towards the end of World War II, and some six years afterwards, we were invited in to bless a small monument that the locals had erected. Some of the crew were killed in the crash, and a few survived. They were treated kindly by the locals but then were taken away by the secret police and never heard of again. There was a Catholic doctor in the place, and he was anxious that we should go in

and set up the church. We did that eventually, and built six small churches which we also used as kindergartens. His son, who was also a doctor, was captured along with the son's wife by the Chinese at the end of the war. The father retired and went out to live on the coast after his son came back and took his place. We soon found out that he had become a dedicated communist during his captivity by the Chinese communists. He and his wife were very energetic in trying to set up the Communist party in Ryujin.

One of the strange experiences that I had was saying an anniversary Mass requested by the son for his father each year. The son and his wife and three children always attended. Likewise, if I was sick I always went to the son and he refused any payment. Eventually when his daughter became seriously ill in her twenties, she decided to become a Catholic, and she died a short time afterwards. Sometime after that her father and her brother, who had become a doctor, also became Catholics. Years later my friend Columban Fr. Eamonn Horgan visited the mother out in the main city of Osaka where she was seriously ill in hospital. She said to him: "You



think that you are going to get me." He laughed and said that he was only there to visit her as a friend. She then pulled out a catechism and a Bible from under her pillow and showed him all the notes she had made on them as she studied them.

She then asked him to baptize her. He called her son who was a doctor in the same hospital and a few other Catholics in the place and baptized her. The next day he went back with a few Catholics and her son and the son's wife and said Mass in the room, gave her Communion and also

confirmed her. She lived for only a short while after that. God works in strange ways.

With six churches, Columban Fr. Malachy Hanratty and I could not get around them all at the weekend. We celebrated Sunday in one place, on Thursday night in another place, and in yet another place on Friday night. We were able to take care of the other places on Saturday night and Sunday morning. We had a motorcycle and a small bubble car (sidecar) for getting around and also used the six buses that travelled up and down the Valley from outside each day. It also involved sleeping on the floor of the church beside the wood burning stove at times.

There were five primary and middle schools in the parish, and there was one high school. All the time that I was there we had a regular drop in the population as many of the young people left for work in the cities after middle school. Some who had relatives in the cities went to stay with them for high school or other studies.

In regard to food we were able to buy the basics like bread and rice and vegetables in the Valley and also some canned fish and meat. When we went out to the district house, which was about four hours away if





the connections were good, we bought some meat and brought it back.

One Christmas our cook announced proudly to us that she had gotten a chicken for our Christmas dinner. We got back from the out-churches at about three in the afternoon and waited for its arrival. It was served with pomp. But when we started to eat it, we found that it was like trying to chew chewing gum. After a short while Fr. Malachy said to me: "Tomorrow I am going to write an article for the Columban magazines and it will start: yesterday the oldest inhabitant of the Valley died and today we had him for our Christmas dinner." I went to our stores and got a can of Spam for our Christmas dinner.

Looking back on it now, I wonder where she got the chicken as I never saw them in the Valley. What I did see were a large number of snakes, and they would kill hens unless they were well guarded by netting wire. The same would be true of dogs which I do not remember seeing there. During the Summer months if we were walking we wore wellington boots on the narrow paths because of snakes.

The river after a typhoon could be forty yards wide and a couple of yards

deep. Most of the time it was like a large stream with pools of water along the way and the bottom was made up of large stones. One day when I was swimming in one of these pools I found a large snake swimming beside me, and I quickly gave him the right of way. The Valley had heating in the Summer and air-conditioning in the Winter. The mountains which were sheer trapped the heat in the Summer, and once snow came in early January it stayed until the middle of March under the trees. The sun would melt it in the open, but the snow under the trees gave us a very bitter cold wind.

The people were extremely nice and the proportion of Catholics in the population was very high for Japan. I left it reluctantly to take my first holiday back in Ireland after an absence of six years. I traveled by bus and train up to Tokyo to make arrangement for my trip back to Ireland.

My two classmates decided not to fly out of Tokyo as there had been two very serious crashes in the previous month. Air travel had come into vogue instead of boat travel during the six years we were in Japan. However, I found another priest to

travel with to Los Angeles and then on to New York.

My first air trip was from Tokyo to Honolulu. We left Tokyo at night and when I woke and looked out the window of the plane we seemed to be suspended in the air. There was only a slight hum from the engines. With the calm ocean of the Pacific, and no ships there was no sense of movement.

I stopped over at the Columban house in New York for a few days of rest. I went down to Gaelic Park to see a football game. I had played there on my way out to Japan. One of the spectators told me that I was wasting my time in Japan and should come back to America.

The flight to Ireland was delayed for five hours as Europe was fogged in. When we tried to land in Shannon, we had to abort at the last minute which almost shook the plane apart, and then go on to Dublin where there was brilliant sunshine.

When my mother saw me, she thought that I was very thin, and said that she would put some weight on me, which she did. ❏

Columban Fr. Noel Doyle provided this reflection on his missionary work in Japan.





CHANGE THE WORLD

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*They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing
I also was eager to do. Galatians 2:10*

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Your gifts helped Columban Fr. Michael Hoban run a summer program for children living in one of Santiago, Chile's poorest areas. With your assistance, the Columban missionaries provided recreation, education and food for over 150 children during the summer.

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Finding Hope

Day by Day

By Lilibeth Sabado

Who would have thought that one day we would just awaken and everything had to stop, everything had to change, to be reconfigured? As I write this, we are now entering the eighth month of “captivity” in response to the coronavirus pandemic. My cry to God is getting louder day by day. “How long, O Lord, must we keep waiting? How long, O Lord, till we are free?”

During the fourth month of quarantine, the inability to physically connect and function in the usual way had started to take its toll on us in the house. Boredom, irritability, restlessness and feeling useless started to kick in. I thought we needed to be creative to save our sanity. In a conversation with our staff, we agreed that baking food items for online selling would be a good way to occupy our idle time. This also came with a hope that in some small way we could raise funds for Columban mission. We did some product research and development, and we continued to improve them as we went along.

Initially, we offered our baked items only to close friends. Packaging was a challenge, but we’ve managed to address it in due course. Eventually, our circle of supporters became wider through word of mouth, from friends who contacted their families and network of friends, then finally we had our first “official” buyer who ordered two pieces of round chicken pie.

Our enthusiasm and excitement died down when we received a



photo of the pies she ordered. They crumbled! With such embarrassment, I remember apologizing profusely. She assured us that the taste was great and suggested that perhaps we needed to use a properly sized box with a firm hold to lessen the chances of the pie crumbling. Looking at the image of the crumbled pie, it felt like the hope we had started to build suddenly collapsed...the flickering light of hope that was supposed to lead us somewhere had been extinguished.

Pope Francis said, “Amid so much darkness, we need to see the light of hope and to be men and women who bring hope to others.”

I have learned that hope gives birth to courage, and courage leads to creativity; and that creativity opens the door for the fruits of the spirit to dwell within. But one may ask, “What comes before hope?” I believe it is trust. And before trust comes gratitude.

The crumbled pie experience didn’t stop us but had motivated us to improve our product line, our packaging and handling. We wake up each day in anticipation of what it is to come. It is a small venture, but it feels good to be productive. From that tiny flicker of hope, it feels good to be able to contribute something. We continue to hold on to hope.

You, who believe in us, our friends, benefactors, partners and customers, have given us hope and your generosity has enabled us to help other during this difficult time. And we remain grateful beyond words for your goodness.

Hope leads to freedom. May we hold on to hope day by day. “Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfast in prayer.” (Romans 12:12-12) **em**

Columban lay missionary Lilibeth Sabado provided this reflection.



The Song of the Cicadas

A New Stage of Life

By Fr. Timothy Mulroy

I had slept on and off throughout the night. Then, just as dawn appeared at my window, I heard a loud and persistent chirping that pierced my ears and the haze that enveloped my mind. I wanted to reach out my hand – as to an alarm clock – to switch it off, but I quickly sensed that I was helpless against such a powerful and pervasive clamor that was calling me to embrace a new day, a new place and a new way of life.

The previous evening, I had arrived into the Columban house in Tokyo. Having come from Ireland on my first missionary journey, I was filled with a mixture of adventure, anxiety and tiredness. Since it was late August, by the time I finished supper with my Columban colleagues, darkness had already fallen. I decided, therefore, to rest so as to be ready early the next morning to begin exploring my new surroundings.

I woke much earlier than I had wished, thanks to the multitude of cicadas chirping loudly in the garden outside my bedroom window. In fact, their persistent buzz, unfamiliar to my ear, was deafening. I dressed quickly and went into the garden, eager to

catch sight of the culprits. In the grey dawn air, it seemed as if the different kinds of trees had formed one large musical instrument, playing a few shrill notes over and over again. I peered long and hard, eager to catch sight of some of those amateur musicians hidden among the leaves, but they remained mysteriously hidden.

Over breakfast, one of my colleagues informed me that the reason why the cicadas themselves could endure such loud, harsh noise – which flowed persistently into the dining room – is that they can turn off their hearing faculty in much the same way as someone can turn off their hearing aid. This insight served only to confirm my newfound conviction that cicadas are musically challenged and that my deep feelings of irritation were justified. Thankfully, however, as daylight advanced, the din from the garden faded and then stopped quite suddenly in the late morning.

Since then, over the course of many summers, I have found myself included among the audience for an early morning public performance by cicadas. An unexpected consequence of this is that, instead of pulling the

pillows tighter around my ears, I have gradually come to listen appreciatively to their song. Furthermore, I have discovered that there are many species of cicada, each of which has its own unique musical expression. This fact was confirmed for me upon learning that the Japanese language has several words – *washiwashi*, *jiyajiya*, *gingin* – to describe the various sounds that are played by the different sections of a “cicada orchestra.”

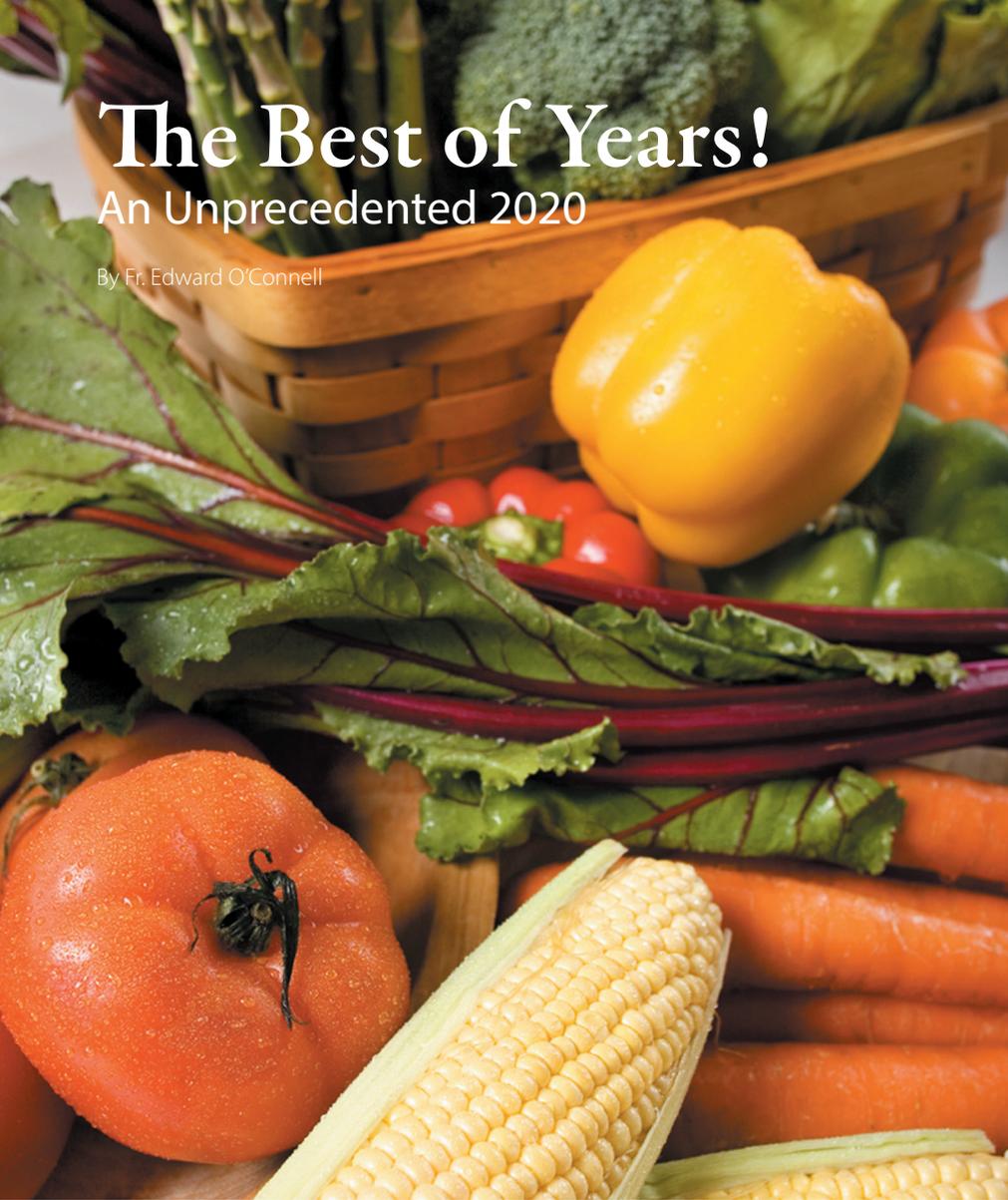
Having grown up in Ireland where there are no cicadas, I will forever associate the cicadas’ song with my first morning in Japan. They woke me up not only to a new day, but also to a new stage of my missionary life. They quickly made me realize that, having entered into another culture, I was no longer in control of the world around me. Instead, I would have to endure for a time the cacophony of sounds, sights and smells that were part and parcel of daily life in Japanese society. However, just as the clamor of the cicadas became a song over time, so too that cacophony became a symphony. 

Columban Fr. Timothy Mulroy serves on the Society’s general council in Hong Kong.

The Best of Years!

An Unprecedented 2020

By Fr. Edward O'Connell



It was going to be the best of years! At least that was what I thought in January 2020. The Warmi Huasi project teams had their plans of action in place with the local municipalities to improve the life of all children and adolescents on the northern outskirts of Lima, Peru, in the town of San Benito, district of Carabayllo, and high up in the Andes Mountains in the Province of Paucar del Sara Sara, Ayacucho, in the town of Pausa and the village of Lampa.

The children and youth were on their holidays and those in San Benito had begun their summer school activities with us. The Warmi Huasi teams were preparing for the year's activities in the homework and reading clubs, to keep the children safe and

help form them into active citizens through the children and adolescent committees.

Then came March, before we realized the impact of what was happening, we were in quarantine, also known as lockdown, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Since March 16, 2020, until spring 2021 the children and adolescents have not known a normal life, locked away in their homes, thirteen months and counting!

Our first response was to distribute all the books in the reading clubs to the children and adolescents in a program called "reading bags" both in Lima and Ayacucho. Volunteers, taking biosecurity measures, put a certain number of books and materials in a

small shopping bag and gave them out to the families, in a rotation system every two weeks. Also other materials were communicated virtually to help the family come together to resolve puzzles that held within them messages of patience, tolerance and togetherness. Competitions were held, and our psychologists were in touch with every child and adolescent offering support and also listening to the parents.

Many parents who work in the informal sector lost their jobs and suddenly almost overnight people became much poorer and at wits end to know how to feed their children and pay their bills. Lima was the hardest hit. In the midst of this darkness came a bright light, the mothers of the homework clubs came together in their four different areas of San Benito and began communal kitchens, pooling their resources to feed their families. And so they began and were soon joined by a key local activist and friend, Hortensia, who also formed a communal kitchen for her neighborhood.

As the Warmi Huasi community organizer, Luz Figueroa, who herself lives in San Benito, says of these times: "Communal kitchens were very important and a fundamental response to counteract the pandemic since many families were left without jobs and many of them were being affected by this disease. More than 80% of families in the area are being fed through the communal kitchens. The main beneficiaries are the families that have the least, such as single mothers, senior citizens, children and adolescents."

Luz wrote down for us the words of two of the communal kitchen organizers:

Dina Torres of the Sacred Heart chapel communal kitchen says, "the communal kitchen is a very important support for many families, especially to feed children and the elderly." Whilst Sonia Canaza from the Cipreces communal kitchen says, "the communal

kitchen helps me a lot, to feed my family and also my neighbors in my neighborhood. In this way we help children to have at least one plate of food, as many fathers and mothers were left without work and have no way to feed their children. What would it have been like if we had not opened our communal kitchen? What would have been our situation at this time?"

Without the support from generous benefactors, the communal kitchens would not have been able to keep going. As I have contacts through the Columban world and through our magazines, I thought of a solidarity scheme called "SOLFAM," that is solidarity between families from other parts of the Columban world to families living precarious lives in Peru. With the donations the program received, we were able to make a massive difference to the meals that were being served. Instead of stodgy [canned or preserved] food, they were able to buy vegetables and fruit for the week and fish or chicken at least three days a week.

As Luz points out "Also, the type of food provided by the communal kitchens, vegetables and salads three times a week, is balanced, improving the health of all beneficiaries. In addition, it is important to highlight the great support that different people offered voluntarily, and the program of the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion is of vital help for the continuity of the communal kitchens. The social cases which each communal kitchen serve is so important, as they are people with disabilities, older adults, and single mothers as well as people who get sick from Covid19. These families do not pay and are constantly monitored until their improvement."

But I think the most significant change has been in the women themselves. Luz remarks "This work of all the women together, they do for the common good. It is of vital importance for the entire community and is their



response to the difficult situation that affects us all over the world, due to the pandemic."

Luz underlines that the women have discovered a new dimension to their lives, something they say of themselves. Rosanita from Cruz Del Norte communal kitchen says "As a good leader, I have to look out for the well-being of my community, putting a lot of effort into it and together move forward as a united family that we are." Sonia says, "Also as brave women that we are, we always face solving

any difficulty introduced into our community." Dina says "It is also a way of serving others. It keeps me active rather than stressing myself out by staying home."

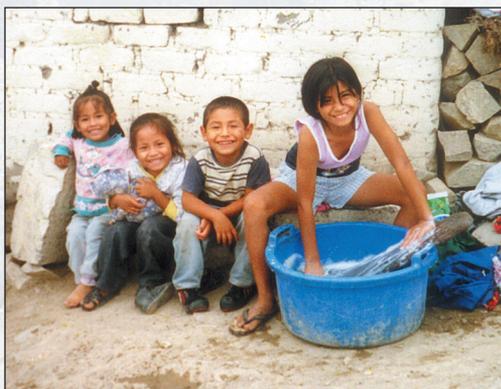
With the generous support of Columban benefactors worldwide, women were able to feed their families during the unprecedented, worldwide coronavirus pandemic. Thank you for your prayers and support. **EM**

Columban Fr. Edward O'Connell lives and works in Peru.

Let the Children Come Unto Me

Transforming Young Lives in Lima, Peru

By Fr. John Boles



Children from the neighborhood



Fr. Tony Coney



Learning together

“For me, life began at 40,” laughs Fr. Tony Coney, remembering how he arrived in Lima on his fortieth birthday. In addition, the date was August 30, providentially the Feast Day of the city’s patron, St. Rose of Lima. Fr. Tony came as a man with a mission.

For years he’d dreamed of setting up a project to help needy children. He knew all about children, coming as he did 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 1990’s, where the poverty and violence of the Northern Irish “Troubles” had taken its toll, especially on the young.

Tony was also inspired by the writings of pioneer Scottish educationalist A. S. 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, 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, in short, 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 children. 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 “A. S. Neill system.” “The kids do whatever they want – arts and crafts, play, homework, reading, theater, 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 on their own norms and rules.

Fr. Tony called it, “St. Bernadette’s Children’s Center.” Why choose St. Bernadette? “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, from the outset, there was a problem which perhaps vexed Fr. Tony more than any other, and that was the ugly matter of child sex abuse. It soon became clear that this was rife in the area. Worse still, the abuser was often living under the same roof as the child. “The subject was ‘taboo,’ no-one wanted to listen.



Children play at the Center



Fr. Tony with children

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 situation 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 serve 36 youth.

“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.”

Meanwhile, “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.” Up to now they’ve 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 facility, “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 members and a child protection outreach program, almost all financed by overseas donors (many of whom are “Columban Mission” readers). He says that the priority now is, “to sustain all this. The goal is to make it permanent. We’ve achieved a lot, but have way to go yet!”

Fr. Tony’s life may have begun at 40, but a great many people in Lima are hoping it’ll go on for a long time to come. **CM**

Columban Fr. John Boles wrote this article, and Columban seminarian Atonio Saulo Seeto provided the photos. They both live and work in Peru.



In Her Own Words

For many years, Christina has been connected with St. Bernadette’s Day Center. This is what she told us.

“When I started school I went every day to the library in the Center, where the staff helped me with my homework. They were very patient, and I was able to go on learning. In the workshops I learned how to make bracelets, necklaces, key rings and many other things. At home, though, often I felt very lonely and sad because my parents separated, and my Mum had to go out to work. Even now at times I feel sad because I have several brothers and sisters, and I have to look after the smaller ones, and feel as if I’m the mother who has to do everything. It’s because of this that in the Children’s Center I can forget all my sadness and problems.”



St. Peter and St. Paul's Embrace of Peace

Speaking About the Mural

By Fr. Jason Antiquera

I am generally not so enthusiastic about explaining my artworks. I would rather have the artwork speak for itself to those gazing on it, because I feel that words are not enough and, even if they were, they are limited. In this article, however, I'd like to talk about the process, my intended symbolism and my short reflection on the mural that I painted on the entrance door of the Martyrs Chapel of the Columban Formation House and Lay Mission Center in Seoul, Korea. The painting is entitled "St. Peter and St. Paul's Embrace of Peace."

The Process

The idea of a "painting" on the door of a chapel was initiated and requested by the Columban Formation House. The goal was to transform the door's bare look so that it is distinguished as a chapel door. The request was a big challenge to me in many ways: the door size and its metal surface, the subject, type of materials to use and my readiness do this kind of artwork.

Honestly, I felt overwhelmed when it was requested; however, I took it as a challenge for Art Ministry. My confidence lies in the strong belief that God has put this talent in me to serve others and although I felt inadequate, I trusted God would guide me.

The first task was to decide the subject, which was tough since I had to choose one instead of receiving any instruction. However, the moment I saw the double-door entrance of the chapel, I immediately thought of two human figures, since most of my works are portraits. If I were to paint human figures, the next question then was "Who should these figures be?" After getting suggestions from fellow Columbans, one encouraged me to follow my heart, always good advice.

As a result, I have chosen Saints Peter and Paul. On the surface level, the two of them seemed unlikely choices

for a Columban house. Usually, the saints I often encounter in many of the Society's places are those of St. Patrick, St. Isidore, Mary and, not forgetting, St. Columban. The Society founders, Bishop Edward Galvin and Father John Blowick, came to mind as well. Ultimately, my choice was St. Peter and St. Paul.

There was a personal connection to this choice as well. The feast of St. Peter and St. Paul is June 29, the same day of my diaconate ordination in 2014. And I found deeper meaning, relevance and significance upon realizing that it also the same feast day in 1918, when the Society was canonically recognized as a missionary society by Bishop O'Dea of Galway, Ireland. The decision to choose these two apostles led to more research, which opened my eyes to countless artworks by various artists about these two prominent apostolic-missionary figures in the Church.

Symbolism

The entire mural, from its images to its colors, is rich with symbolism that I intended to convey certain messages, although the viewers may draw out their own meanings.

Firstly, St. Peter and St. Paul's "Embrace of Peace" has been interpreted in different ways by various artists as St. Peter and St. Paul greeted each other with a holy kiss of peace, which is an early Christian expression of love and peace. Apostle Paul, in some of his epistles, has instructed Christians to "Greet each other with the holy kiss of peace." (Romans 16:16) Later on, this expression, which was derived from Hebrew's *Shalom Aleikheim* ("May peace be upon you"), has turned into the "Sign of Peace" in the Mass.

Secondly, I chose the colors to represent the Church's liturgical colors for all seasons. They also convey various cultural and religious virtues such as courage and martyrdom



The completed mural on the door

for red, passion and zeal for purple, warmth and light for yellow and orange, and life, hope and serenity for green and blue.

Thirdly, Peter and Paul's faces are touching each other but their eyes do not meet. This symbolizes the relationship of the two apostles, one a fisherman and the other a Roman citizen, whose opinions on faith, Gospel and the Church were often different. However, their embrace embodies unity and acceptance in differences.

Lastly, the act of people entering the chapel through the door of the mural itself influenced my decisions. We usually relate to art by gazing in front of it. However, the mural of Saints Peter and Paul invites us to the level of entering into the art itself and participating with Peter and Paul; it's entering into the space of prayer, peace and love, and to participate in the shared mission of Peter and Paul, whom Christ called and sent to "preach the Gospel to all nations."

Reflection

The mural work began July 1, 2020 and was completed seven months later. When I look at it now, I relate to it beyond the symbolism I intended. I

can't look at it without remembering my various feelings and experiences during the period of its making. In the middle of the pandemic, I kept painting. Whether I was sad or happy, anxious or calm, annoyed or pleased, lonely or joyful, bored or excited I kept painting. I also mourned the death of three great Columbans (Pat Murphy, Kevin O'Rourke, Frank Ferry) in the Korea Region.

While painting in solitude, I was not only deeply aware but also confronted with what was happening in the world, in the Society and in myself. I found deeper meaning and personal connection with it. So, the artwork, I would say, can speak on its own to different viewers in different ways in different times. I remember a nun who, upon seeing it, said, "It looks like a male counterpart of the visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth." An art professor I know once reminded me that, "the worst thing you could do to art is to explain it." Let art speak the way God speaks to us. With that, as you gaze upon any artwork, I leave you with a quote from a Croatian artist, "Art speaks its own language." 

Columban Fr. Jason Antiquera lives and works in Seoul, Korea.



Xavier College

Christian Education in Fiji

Fr. Patrick Colgan

Xavier College was established in 1953 as a boys school by the Catholic Archdiocese of Suva, Fiji, to provide Christian education, particularly to Indian youth in the western part of Fiji and was entrusted to the Columban Fathers at the request of Bishop Foley. The latter saw education, particularly of the poor, as key to the possible conversion of the many Hindus, Muslims and even Chinese in Ba, Fiji, to the Catholic faith. Many conversions did in fact occur, and all who studied there have enormous respect for the Columbans, Marist Sisters and Christianity in general.

The first lesson which started at 8 a.m. on February 12, 1953, was Latin for the duration of 40 minutes, followed by the second class which was grass cutting and then more grass cutting! Father Michael Cryan was the first principal to the 25 pioneering students. He was followed

Many conversions did in fact occur, and all who studied there have enormous respect for the Columbans, Marist Sisters and Christianity in general.

by Columban Frs. Tom Henaghan, Eddie McColgan, Colm McGovern, Tom Daly, Otto Imholte, (Tom Daly, again) and Dan Ahern. Other Columbans who taught there were Frs. Jim Gavigan, Kevin Fleming, Ted Gerkin, Pat O’Sullivan, George Gear, Martin Croghan. Particularly loved by the students was Fr. Vincent Batchelor of Australia, who was a teacher for 10 years and as chaplain for almost 20 years.

The College has excelled in national quizzes and also on the sports field – athletics, table tennis, rugby and soccer.

In 1970 the college went co-ed, and in December 1987, the Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel took charge of the College. Now there is a roll of almost 900. The College has excelled in national quizzes and also on the sports field – athletics, table tennis, rugby and soccer.

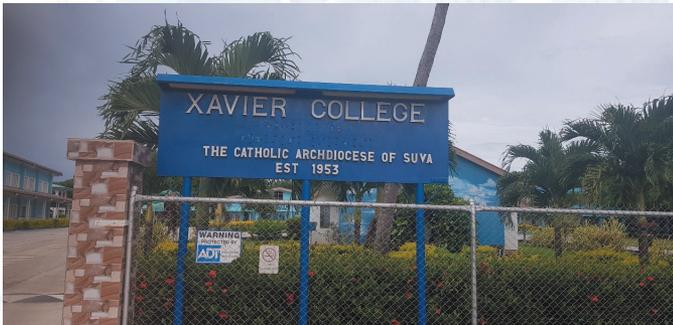
Xavier had provision for boarders for many years, until around 1980, when the dormitory was turned into a computer room. Boarders came from places like Navala, Vatukoula, Navunibitu, Nadi and Lautoka.

Among the students were a number of future priests, as well as others who work in the local business community, overseas judiciaries and even at NASA!

Among the students were a number of future priests: Frs. Veremo Dovarua, Lewis Henry SM, Veremo Nayacalevu CM, Jope Senikura SM, and Arthur Leger, SJ, as well as others who work in the local business community, overseas judiciaries and even at NASA!

A great friend of the boarders was Ishaq Ali, the man who cooked their meals and made sure he gave them the kind of food they liked – plenty of *casava* – which was grown in the college garden. He also cooked for the priests and provided morning tea for the teaching staff of the college. In his spare time, he milked the cows in both the morning and evening and did the shopping. According to Columban Fr. Dan Ahern, he was the most generous, selfless person he has ever known. “He wasn’t a religious man; he used to say he left that to his wife!” CM

Columban Fr. Patrick Colgan lives and works in Fiji.



Fr. Patrick Colgan (second from left) on the final day of the term



The staff in 1974



A recent school assembly

In Solidarity with the Homeless

Meaningful Purpose

By Sophia Chee Tzu Ting

I am a new Columban lay missionary commencing my first term assignment in the region of Britain. Together with my companion, Ling, we arrived here in Birmingham on September 4, 2020. Straight away we entered into a fourteen-day quarantine in compliance with the country's coronavirus pandemic safety measures.

I was excited about my first mission assignment. However, with the coronavirus pandemic getting in the way, I paused. People would ask me, "Why bother going there when cases are so high? What are you going to contribute over there? Please, you don't want to add on to their problems already! Can't you request to be sent to another country that is safer?" These are valid questions, and I needed to ask myself the same questions and yet I had no answers. But, by God's grace, my will to move forward came to light and peace through prayers of my family, friends, fellow Columbans and lay missionaries around the world.

Traveling from New Zealand to London had been exceptionally smooth despite the hassle of having to wear a mask at all times, washing our hands constantly and of course keeping social distancing. Nevertheless, our exhaustion vanished when we were met with the warmest welcome given by the Columbans here in Birmingham. Over the quarantine period, we kept close contact with the lay missionaries, and our daily needs were always met. I was able to rest and lived out the quarantine time in quietness and prayer. In a way, it became a silent retreat which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Now that I am in orientation, going out to the streets exploring and



discovering the newness and the way of life of the locals, breathing fresh air, meeting people of different ethnic groups, nationalities and cultures is fascinating. Despite the excitement, I am discovering, on the one hand, a vibrantly rich and diversified city Birmingham is offering, but on the other hand I see poverty.

According to recent statistics, 1 in 119 people are without a home in Birmingham alone, an astonishing figure. The refugees, asylum seekers, the homeless and the destitute are also part of that reality. While in the Philippines, I have seen beggars, children and families living in the streets, but I could never quite associate it with a western country such as Britain. That leads me to search for a meaningful purpose for coming here.

During one of our immersion programs with the Birmingham charity "Let's feed Brum," I had my very first encounter with the homeless, serving them breakfast one Tuesday morning. We served coffee, tea, porridge, snacks and fruits. Many came and would politely queue up for food. They would

then find a place to quietly sit down and have their breakfast. It was like a social gathering for them, and for us too. It was a nice autumn day, and I enjoyed serving and listening to them. In my mind I couldn't help wondering what brought them to this situation? "One of them used to be a professor at the university," explained one of the lay missionaries. "Something happened and he lost his job and became homeless overnight." This is just one tragic story out of so many.

Behind the face of every homeless person has to be a traumatic, life changing event. They have been through much suffering in life and they are just people like us. As Jesus explains in Matthew 7:12 "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Is this not what Jesus wants from us? That we support and be in solidarity with one another, especially with the poor, the vulnerable, the rejected, the abandoned, the unwanted? 

Columban lay missionary Sophia Chee Tzu Ting lives and works in Britain.



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

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

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



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Very Different Holy Week Celebrations

Creative Celebrations

By Fr. Michael Hoban

For Holy Week 2020, I found myself in Bellevue, Nebraska, where I found refuge in the U.S. headquarters of the Columban Fathers after my sabbatical program at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas, was cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic. I joined my Columban companions celebrating the liturgical ceremonies of Holy Week together but without a congregation of the faithful. I was grateful to be with them, but I think that we all missed celebrating with the people of God!

In November 2020, I was assigned to the Columban parish of the Sagrado Corazón de Jesús (Sacred Heart of Jesus) in a place called Alto Hospicio in the north of Chile. Alto Hospicio is located in the middle of the Atacama desert, the driest desert in the world. I was looking forward to celebrating Holy Week 2021 with the people of the parish. However, a sudden rise in the number of coronavirus infections sent us back into the quarantine lockdown. It came as an unwelcome surprise. The statistics, however, justified the strict measures. Despite a successful vaccination campaign with over seven million people vaccinated, the number of cases increased dramatically. The number of new cases over several days reached record high totals, and the intensive care units were filled to 95% capacity. The government limited the number of persons permitted at religious ceremonies to

five people. Our bishop, Monseñor Guillermo Vera, decided that we would have to find other creative ways to celebrate with as many parishioners of our parishes as possible.

The first reaction of our parishioners was one of disappointment. Many people expressed their need to celebrate in person Holy Week. We soon realized that we would have to find creative ways of celebrating together and that is just what we did! Traditionally, Palm Sunday is the day when most Catholics in Chile come to Mass. There is a belief that a *ramito* (a gathering of palm branches) placed above the front door of the house will protect the occupants if there is an earthquake. A typical ramito includes branches of palm, olive and romero. However, I wondered where in the desert would we get a sufficient amount of tree branches?

As it turned out, the pastoral agents in our four chapels were able to gather more than enough branches. The ramitos from the chapel of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús came from trees planted by Columban Father Tom Hanley and the coordinator of the chapel, Jorge Mendoza. Armed with special permission given to priests and ministers to go out, I went to the four chapels and blessed the ramitos.

I also wondered how we were going to get the ramitos to our parishioners? We came up with the solution: "Holy Week Delivery Service." The pandemic restrictions permit supermarkets

and restaurants to deliver food, so we decided to deliver the ramitos to the people. With Jorge Mendoza and his wife, Monica Escalante, we delivered more than 80 ramitos. The other chapels did the same. Over four hundred families received a ramito.

Our parish includes fourteen *tomas*, squatter camps with makeshift housing. The majority of the residents are immigrants from Perú, Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela. In Santiago, such areas are called *campamentos* (camping sites). For the past eight years, the parish has maintained a soup kitchen for the families of the *tomas*. Unfortunately, it had to be closed because of restrictions during the pandemic. However, the parish continues to distribute food parcels to many families in the *tomas*. I went with Jorge and Monica to one of the largest called "Toma Santa María" built over a garbage landfill. Monica and Jorge are well known by the families who received gratefully both the food parcel and a blessed ramito. They would return on Easter Sunday morning with chocolate Easter eggs for the children.

Holy Thursday presented a special problem for us. With a curfew imposed, we realized that we could not repeat our delivery service and distribute Communion to all those



who might want to receive the Sacrament. I celebrated the Lord's Supper with three Mexican missionary Sisters who belong to the Corde Jesu congregation. We were able to share the celebration using Zoom so that people could participate in the shared homily and offer their own prayers in the Prayer of the Faithful.

Our preparations for Good Friday began when we put up two *gigantografias* (banners measuring thirteen feet in height and six and a half feet in width) in front of two chapels. The banners showed the Crucified Christ with the caption of the familiar words of the Stations of the Cross: "We adore you and we bless you, O Lord, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world." As people drive by or walk

to their homes, the banners would remind them that we would soon celebrate Good Friday. On Good Friday morning, I gave a short retreat on the Seven Last Words of the Lord on the Cross and again we used Zoom to share it with as many people who would be interested. The viewers participated by reading the passages from the Gospels and sharing their own reflections.

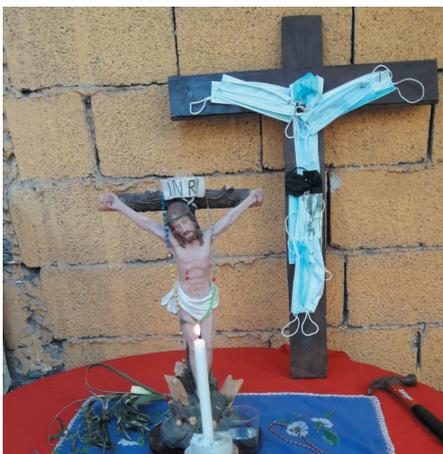
The community of the chapel of St. Theresa de los Andes organized the Stations of the Cross online. The families built crosses which in some cases included masks to prevent coronavirus! In the afternoon, once more using Zoom, we celebrated the Liturgy of the Passion of the Lord.

During the times that Alto Hospicio has been quarantined, we

have transmitted the celebration of Sunday Mass on Facebook Live. So it was obvious that was the best way to transmit the Paschal Vigil to our parishioners. But we weren't the only game in town! Many parishioners watched Paschal Vigil liturgy presided by Monseñor Vera. All during Holy Week my cellular phone was flooded with messages, videos and reflections on Whatsapp.

I may have been disappointed with not being able to celebrate Holy Week in person with our parishioners, but I could rejoice in the creativity of our parishioners who found new ways to celebrate the most important events of our faith. CM

Columban Fr. Michael Hoban lives and works in Chile.



Gardening

A Way to Connect

By Rose Basada

When the pandemic started to escalate, and the U.S./ Mexico border needed to impose restrictions, the ministries where I was involved in Juarez, Mexico, were in lockdown, including the church where I was helping as a catechist. There were restrictions on crossing back and forth over the border.

The city of El Paso released an ordinance on social distancing, and it added tension to me personally. It was disheartening that I used to be very active and suddenly I felt I just needed to stay in the house. I thought it was going to be only for a week, but as the lockdown continued, I started to look around for something to do outdoors.

I did all the things I could think of that I could do indoors, like cleaning, cooking, reading, praying, and catching up with family and friends online, until I realized that I needed to do something outdoors to keep me well and connected too. I noticed the Magoffin community garden, which lies just across the street from the Columban mission center, looked like no one was tending it because of the pandemic, as people are afraid to go out, so I decided to volunteer and tend the garden.

Some residents from the veterans' transitional living center also helped me clean and cultivate the garden. In the summer, in the El Paso desert, water was necessary all the time. One of these guys volunteered to water the plants twice a day, and he has been doing it every day. His name is Richard and used to serve in the Air Force for many years. He has been diagnosed with schizophrenia. He is



such a spontaneous man. I could tell he didn't have any idea or experience with plants, as sometimes he would pull some of the crops, and when I asked he kept saying that's because they are weeds.

One day I felt a bit uncomfortable when I visited the garden and found out that all of the tomatoes had been pulled out. I had been waiting for two months for the tomatoes to bear fruit. I could already see the small tomatoes. He said he pulled them, because he thought they were weeds, but later he said sorry, realizing they were tomatoes. Anyway, I kept planting while Richard kept pulling out some of them.

Truly, gardening teaches patience and having a gardening buddy like Richard takes a lot of patience. Having him help me in the garden didn't deter me, because my idea of the garden is not just about growing vegetables.

The garden became an avenue for me to reach out to others during this pandemic, being outside and touching the soil helped me connect to nature. During harvest time I had the opportunity to visit and share the produce with the veterans and some friends and also a time to listen to those people who come to the garden, which is important, as Richard said. For him it gives a sense of responsibility, a routine to do something every day. And he can go to the garden if he wants to talk to me, or, he goes to the garden with his housemate at the veteran center to talk and relax, and if no one in there he told me he talks to the plants.

As therapy, it's wonderful to reflect that during these difficult times being a listener can also be the best way to support someone who is struggling. **CM**

Columban lay missionary Rose Basada works in our U.S./Mexico border ministries.

Seeking the Humble and Contrite Heart

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 was quite close to what people think of now as the high-water mark of the British Empire.

Instead of triumph and bombast and celebration, Kipling wrote these memorable lines:

*The tumult and the shouting dies;
The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

Have we passed the high-water mark of American Catholicism?

Many of the people who write to us bemoan that their own children and grandchildren are not going to Church. Religious practice has unquestionably declined over the past generations. Opinion polls confirm this trend.

Nevertheless, while these surveys use different methodologies, the causes they cite are quite varied. We have all heard a host of opinions as to why organized religions (not just Catholic!) have suffered decline in members and influence.

People speculate that the reforms of the 1962-66 Vatican Council resulted in our diminished numbers – either because they went too far

or did not go far enough. The Vatican II changes were enacted at a moment of great cultural foment, the 1960s. Obviously changing times influenced Church life and faith life – both



FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. John Burger

positively and negatively.

If it took 50 years or more to come to this situation, it will probably take at least that long to chart a new and better future. There is consolation in remembering that Church history is marked by similar crises. The saints – martyrs, monks, mendicants, missionaries - in every era have led movements of transformation in the Church. They did so at a great cost – sometimes paying with their own lives.

Sin, of course, is not new. In recent decades, we

have witnessed corrupt behavior by individuals within major institutions, adding to our tendency to mistrust once-revered institutions. Clergy have been revealed to have engaged in criminal sexual behavior and cover ups – especially harming young people. In reaction, some of our Catholic people have headed out the door. There have also been financial scandals. Tragically, many who leave abandon not only our faith but also all religious faith.

Societal values have shifted. Today's society is permeated by individualism that discourages social participation in any form, including religious. Ideological divisions have seriously weakened our response to the challenges that the Catholic Church currently faces. Some things are beyond our power to

Today's society is permeated by individualism that discourages social participation in any form, including religious.

control, but not everything.

Pope Francis is trying to transform the entire Church into a more participative organization. And Cardinal Wilton Gregory said recently:

“We need a transparent way to tell the truth, to hold ourselves accountable, and to return to the central mission of our Church, which is Gospel concern for the poor, and the proclamation of the message of Christ for the life of the world. If we can do these things well, the other concerns will respond accordingly.”

The humble and contrite heart is still sought 125 years after:

*The tumult and the shouting dies;
The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

Fr. John

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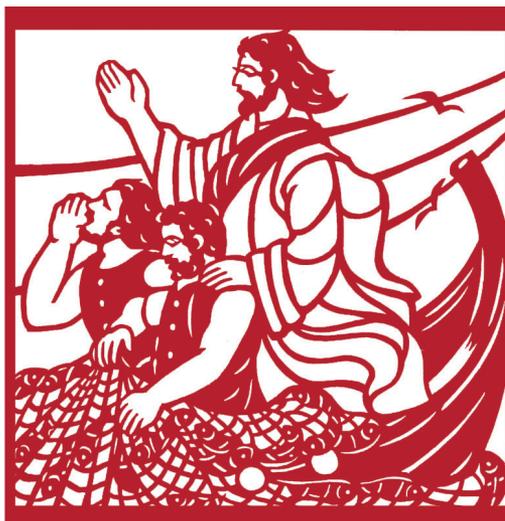
Columban Mission magazine is published eight times each year and tells the stories of our missionaries and the people they are called to serve. Columban missionaries live in solidarity with their people and, together, they move forward to improve their social, economic and spiritual lives, always with Our Savior as their guide and their eyes on God's Kingdom.

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*"If I your Lord and Teacher
have washed your feet, you
also ought to wash one
another's feet."*

— JOHN 13:14

All of us are called to Christian service. But some are called to a lifetime of service to the poor. If you feel attracted to such a life, we are waiting to hear from you.

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