



Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

November 2023

Internal Life

C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Internal Life

Volume 107 – Number 7 – November 2023

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.

MAILING ADDRESS:

Missionary Society of St. Columban
1902 N. Calhoun St.
St. Columbans, NE 68056-2000

TOLL-FREE PHONE: 877/299-1920

WEBSITE: WWW.COLUMBAN.ORG

Copyright © 2023, The Columban Fathers (Legal Title)

PUBLISHER

FR. CHRIS SAENZ
DIRECTORUSA@COLUMBAN.ORG

EDITOR

KATE KENNY
KKENNY@COLUMBAN.ORG

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

MARCI ANDERSON
MANDERSON@COLUMBAN.ORG

RENEA STEELE
RSTEELE@COLUMBAN.ORG

DYANNE WENDLING
DWENDLING@COLUMBAN.ORG

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

KRISTIN ASHLEY

EDITORIAL BOARD

DAN EMINGER
KATE KENNY
ERNIE MAY
JEFF NORTON
FR. CHRIS SAENZ



A CHANGE IN THE DIRECTION OF THE WIND

4



MEETING MOTHER TERESA

12

6 WITH GOD'S LOVE

We Find Purpose in Doing Things

8 PRAYING UNDER THE SHADOW OF AN ANCIENT GINKGO TREE

A Silent Witness

10 HOPE FOR FREEDOM AND EQUALITY

Justice for All

16 COMMITTED TO SERVE

To Keep Helping

18 THE YATSUSHIRO MARTYRS

Seeds of Faith

22 A COMPASSIONATE HEART

A Privileged Friendship

DEPARTMENTS

3 IN SO MANY WORDS

23 FROM THE DIRECTOR

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 Sr. Rebecca Conlon

A Thin Place

A “thin place” according to the late Irish philosopher and poet John O’Donohue is about a place or time where heaven and earth meet and we have access to “light” or the beyond in a different way. It is a threshold experience where time and eternity embrace.

John O’Donohue was steeped in the Celtic tradition and opened up for us the Celtic world, inviting us to enter and take note of times and places where the “veil” between the seen and unseen world is thinner than at other times. During this liminal time, we experience a greater sense of sacredness or presence of the Other in a deeper way as the distance between heaven and earth, darkness and light, past and future becomes porous momentarily.

November is such a liminal time within our liturgical calendar. The mood of this season is set as nature seemingly rests and sleeps having shed all its autumnal beauty, and the sky sports a bleak dark grey tone in the northern hemisphere. It captures the Celtic idea of November as a “thin place.” The month of November/Samhain in the Celtic calendar is thought to have represented the Celtic New Year.

All Saints, All Souls and Halloween invite us beyond our present reality into reaching out in love as we remember those who have gone before us whether saint or sinner. In some countries on All Souls Day, transport is hired to take people to the places where the remains of their loved ones rest, food is shared as the family gathers, with some offered especially for the dead. Prayers are said for the repose of their souls, Masses are offered and it becomes a family outing and a celebration of life.

The liturgy of these days tells us that life is changed not ended, the “thin place” becomes a place of bonding in love. Our loved ones have “only gone to God and God is very near.”

A “thin place” according to the late Irish philosopher and poet John O’Donohue is about a place or time where heaven and earth meet and we have access to “light” or the beyond in a different way.



The Bible too speaks of thin places. We see where Moses (Exodus 3) met God in the burning bush and God spoke, and also Elijah (1 Kings 19) met God on top of a mountain and heard Him in the still small voice. One needs to be truly present to listen and hear. Jesus had similar experiences, for example in His Transfiguration we see where the veil was lifted temporarily and the voice of the Father spoke saying: “This is my Beloved Son, listen to Him.” The ultimate thin place for Jesus was Calvary when the veil was torn, and He surrendered His all for our sake.

Thin places are not primarily geographical but a way of being present and listening deeply which enables the veil to fall even for a moment, and we experience a touch of heaven. Those who have gone before us have made it beyond the veil and may the Lord accompany us so that we too may participate in “what no one has ever seen, no one has ever heard, no one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor: 2: 9).

Columban Sr. Rebecca Conlon provided this reflection.



Columbans at Mass



A change in leadership

A Change in the Direction of the Wind

A Historic St. Columban's Day

By Fr. Frank Hoare

History was made on November 23, 2022, when leadership of the Columbans in Fiji passed from Caucasian Columbans to Columbans from the Pacific and Asia. Fr. John McEvoy completed his 3-year term of office as Vice-Director of the Columban Region of Oceania and in his place Fr. Felisiano Fatu from Tonga became the new Vice-Director. Fr. Frank Hoare finished his term as regional council member and was replaced by Fr. Carlo Jung from Korea.

At the beginning of Mass that evening in the Columban Center House in Suva, catechist and former Columban co-worker Leone Ratadamu offered a *tabua* (whale's tooth) on behalf of all the past Caucasian Columban leaders asking pardon for their mistakes and failings. Responding to this traditional Fijian apology, Fr. Willie Lee graciously accepted the *tabua* and thanked them for the service and missionary leadership they had given for many years. The phrase in his speech that struck me most was his calling the

occasion "*veisau na mata ni cagi*" (a change in the direction of the wind).

A New Vision for the Columban Companions

At the beginning and again at the end of Mass Fr. John welcomed everyone including the Columban Companions in Mission who were present. The participation of the Companions in past Columban assemblies in Fiji and in the recent Columban Synod of Oceania has made a big impact. The Companions, previously seen as supporters, are now recognized as an integral part of the Columban missionary family in Fiji.

They will be helped in the future by special missionary formation and will work actively side by side with Columban priests and lay missionaries in the missionary work of the Society. Some examples of the work to be done in Fiji are: interreligious dialogue, missionary vocation promotion, spreading and strengthening small Christian communities.

Fiji, for many years a separate region, is now part of the Region of

Oceania. Columbans in Australia and New Zealand are also part of the new region. Fr. Peter O'Neill of Australia also began his term as Regional Director of Oceania on the feast of St. Columban in 2022.

Columban Synod of Oceania

St. Columban's Day 2022 was also special as it occurred just after a very successful Columban Synod of Oceania. Over 40 Columban priests, lay missionaries, co-workers and lay companions participated in four days of two hour ZOOM sessions of the synod process.

We began with a meditative prayer at the beginning of each session. Then, after moving into breakout groups of five or six people, there was a short silent prayer on a topic selected by the group from a list garnered previously from questionnaires. Then each group member was given two minutes to share insights from the prayer. This was followed by each person stating what she or he heard in the sharing. Free discussion followed. A recorder from each group then summarized the group



Enjoying the celebration



Sharing music

sharing in a plenary session. The whole process was an experience of synodality — of listening to the Holy Spirit in prayer and in the sharing of others.


Outreach to the People of Oceania

Some exciting ideas and directions emerged from these discussions. These will be further refined, integrated and presented for voting to another synodal ZOOM gathering. The Regional Director and council, taking the voting into consideration, will then decide on the emerging mission

priorities and set the direction for the Columbans in Oceania for the future.

But something more happened than working towards both an inspiring and realistic direction for Columban mission. The synod is giving a new identity to Columbans in Oceania. Where previously Columban priests felt called to participate in God's mission, now a diverse group of ordained and laity are becoming aware of being involved together in God's outreach to the people of Oceania. We experience this inclusion as an

enrichment of a community dedicated to working for God's Kingdom.

The change in leadership here in Fiji and Oceania then coincides with an enriched vision of Columban identity and mission. The changes being brought about by our Columban Synod of Oceania will undoubtedly result in a new vigor in sharing the gospel and working for God's Kingdom in Fiji and Oceania. 

Columban Fr. Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.

The Missionary Society of St. Columban congratulates the 2021 Jubilarians on their years of mission service and prays they be blessed with health and joy.

2023 JUBILARIANS

60 YEARS

Michael Donnelly

50 YEARS

**John Burger
Ron Kelso**

40 YEARS

Albert Utzig

With God's Love

We Find Purpose in Doing Things

By Marvin A. Salarda



Very often, when we are confronted by unexpected or unpleasant situations, we hear from most people or even from ourselves the comforting words “God has a purpose for that” or simply “there is a purpose for that,” as if God gives us problems and difficulties to test us.

But as I reflect on a particular experience I had this year in the formation—which I will be sharing with you shortly—I think God never gives us problems, sickness and difficult situations, instead things happen as a product of own choices in life but also sometimes come

I don't think He wants us to suffer, be sick and have problems for a purpose, but instead I realize that as we grow older, we experience these things because we can find purpose in them and why we do the things we do.

involuntarily and unexpectedly from nowhere, out of our control. I believe that these things are not necessarily given or come from God. I don't think He wants us to suffer, be sick and have problems for a purpose, but instead I realize that as we grow older we experience these things because we can find purpose in them and why we do the things we do.

Last January, I suffered from pain in my ankle, and it was painful even in taking steps. I went to the nearby clinic for a checkup, and my laboratory results revealed that I had elevated uric

*I want to be healthy because
I value my body and myself,
because these are God's gift to
me, because He loves me.*

acid which was the reason for the pain with my ankle. I suspected that result with my own background in nursing, but what was surprising to me was for my blood sugar to be in a pre-diabetic range. When I saw the results, I was really frustrated and disappointed, and I was blaming myself about my condition. I never wanted to start any maintenance medication at the age of 38. I talked to the doctor about any other options to manage my pre-diabetic condition aside from taking medications. He advised me to diet and exercise. He challenged me by saying that we will check my fasting blood sugar every month for three months, to see if I can manage to lower it without medication, only exercise and diet. And happily, I was able to manage it.

Exercise was the least of my interests before although when I was still working in Manila in the past, I used to go to the gym. I do diet, but I was more focused to look good, toned, pleasant, and attractive physically. I never thought about being healthy when I spent my money for my yearly membership and monthly dues except "I want to look good." That was 15 years ago. Now that I started exercising to manage my sugar level, I set at least one hour a day for walking around the neighborhood. At first, it was really hard but as I went on walking every day, I started to love the effects it brought me. I was able to manage



Columban seminarian Martin Salarada

*And recalling my own reflections
in class, spiritual readings,
recollections and retreats I had
in the past, I have always known
how God loves me and how He
cares for me—how come I have
not cared for what God has
given me?*

my problem with constipation, I had better sleep at night than before and I have more endurance when I started to join playing sports with my brothers in the community. My weight trimmed down little by little, giving me a lighter feeling as I carried myself up and down the stairs.

One day, when I was doing a walk, I was able to pass by a building and I saw myself reflected so clearly in its glass windows. And as I look at myself there, I saw the significant loss I had with my weight and my bloated tummy seemed to size down. As I continued walking, I became so emotional that tears just welled up my face, which

brought me to stop somewhere as a question keeps ringing in my mind "for what are you doing this?" After sometime I felt pacified from the emotions. I continued walking as I realized that for so long I have never cared for myself like this. And recalling my own reflections in class, spiritual readings, recollections and retreats I had in the past, I have always known how God loves me and how He cares for me—how come I have not cared for what God has given me? And from that moment, I got the answer to the question that that particular encounter with myself and with God has brought me. I do care and will care for my body and myself because God loves and cares for these in the first place. If before, I was more concerned only with my physical looks for the reason that I pay so much for expensive membership, monthly fees and fitness trainers in the gym, now I do it for free, only with self-determination and dedication that I want to be healthy because I value my body and myself, because these are God's gift to me, because He loves me.

I believe God did not give me my pre-diabetic condition. It was the result of how I lived my life in the past. It was because of my choice to eat and drink excessively. It was my choice between looks and health, and it was also because of my hereditary health history, as diabetes also runs in our family. It was never from God. And I cannot just tell myself "God has a purpose for this" or "there is a purpose for that." Rather with this experience, I can say I find purpose in doing things, because God loves me, and because of that love, I will and should love and care for myself and my body. **CM**

Martin Salarada is a Columban seminarian.

Praying Under the Shadow of an Ancient Ginkgo Tree

A Silent Witness

By Fr. Dan Troy

November 23 is a special day in the Columban calendar. It is the Feast of St. Columbanus, and it is also the birthday of Columban co-founder, Bishop Edward Galvin. Fr. Dan Troy writes about a religious order in China which was founded by Bishop Galvin and has survived to this day despite many challenges.

In Wuhan, central China, where I live, I frequently visit the Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang, a diocesan congregation founded by Bishop Edward Galvin, co-founder of Missionary Society of St. Columban, a short distance from the spot where

Almost as impressive as the Yangtze River is the towering 550-year-old ginkgo tree that stands across the road from the convent.

the Han River enters the much bigger Yangtze River.

Almost as impressive as the Yangtze River is the towering 550-year-old ginkgo tree that stands across the road from the convent. Under its shadow lies the original hospital run by the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban until the late 1940s, now part of an expanded complex known as the Wuhan Number 5 Hospital. During the pandemic, this hospital was designated to receive patients suffering from Coronavirus.

Hanyang's famous ginkgo tree has witnessed many historical events. Dynasties have come and gone, floods have risen and abated, and wars have taken their toll on the people. Now, the tree is witnessing the Coronavirus. This latest healthcare event poses as big of a challenge as any before.

Considering its venerable age and all that it has survived, it is no surprise that the tree is now protected in a neat compound. An elderly couple living in a small house at the compound entrance ensures that the tree and its history live on.

One of the events the tree witnessed was the floods of 1931. After prolonged summer rain, combined with torrents of meltwater from snow on the heights of the faraway Himalayas, the Yangtze River burst its banks in Wuhan and many areas

outside the city. Refugees from devastated rural areas moved to Wuhan in the hope of finding relief.

But in a city struggling to cope with floodwater, taking care of refugees was deemed a task beyond its capacity. Acutely aware of the desperation of the newly arrived refugees, Bishop Edward Galvin began coordinating a relief effort. This involved providing shelter, basic food supplies, and medical care for tens of thousands of people.

For some, the only available accommodation was in small tents as they huddled together on Black Hill, a mound of ground that still stands beside the Han River as a silent reminder of that terrifying time. With limited resources and only boats to transport supplies, the 1931 relief efforts gradually became established thanks to all available



Fr. Troy with the Sisters and visitors at the Hanyang convent

Church personnel becoming involved, including a group of teenage girls.

The dynamic role these young Catholics took on considerably bolstered the relief efforts, and their contribution warmed the heart of Bishop Galvin in a way that was to be providential. After six months, as the flood relief effort reached a gradual conclusion, Bishop Galvin began preparing the way for the founding of a new diocesan congregation of Sisters.

The first members of the new congregation were some of the teenagers who had shown such selfless dedication during the flood relief efforts. Then in the late 1940s, political upheaval forced a tearful bishop to advise the Sisters to go home to their families and, if they wished, get married. Their departure from the convent was a day of bitter sorrow for all.

Forty years later, as if to prove that nothing is impossible for God, eight of these women returned to Hanyang one by one and began living in a simple residence within the parish compound. A few years later, the church reopened.

In the years following 2001, I often shared meals with five of these elderly Sisters at their convent. They were undoubtedly women of deep faith who had seen the full range of possibilities that life can put before anyone. Their humility and trust in God's ongoing protection in the face of extraordinary historical events could only be admired.

A few years ago, the last remaining Sister of that generation, Sr. Le Fenfang, died. She was 99 years old. As if to underline how God does work in mysterious ways, the life of the congregation continues through a younger generation of Sisters who joined since the mid-1990s and now provide dedicated care for older Sisters as age becomes an increasing factor.

During the peak of the Coronavirus in Wuhan, the younger members of the Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang looked across the road at the hospital where patients were being treated, living under the same restrictions of movement imposed on everybody else throughout the city, they could not become directly


involved in the care of patients or their families.

Nonetheless, the Sisters found a way to contribute. Some parishioners had family members who had contracted the virus. The Sisters supported them through regular communication and contracted friends to seek financial support for projects connected with the medical emergency.

*Through it all, Hanyang's
impressive ginkgo tree stands
calmly like a silent witness to
the hive of urgent medical
activity a short distance away.*

Faithful to their commitment as a congregation, they also committed themselves to extended hours of prayer for those most affected by the Coronavirus, sometimes praying throughout the night. While living with restrictions was unavoidable, the location of the Sisters' convent so close to the hospital has given their prayerful presence a deep symbolism.

Each day the Sisters' prayers merge with the prayers of so many other people. Through it all, Hanyang's impressive ginkgo tree stands calmly like a silent witness to the hive of urgent medical activity a short distance away.

We rejoice and give thanks to God as the growth of new leaves on this giant tree coincided with a turning of the tide in this latest challenging chapter in the history of central China. The leaves emerged, and the tide did eventually turn in the city of Wuhan. 

Columban Fr. Dan Troy lives and works in China.



The Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang

Hope for Freedom and Equality

Justice for All

By Michael Javier

“Sir, are you aware of what is happening to our country?” That was the question put to me by my students in Bhamo, my mission place in Myanmar (formerly Burma).

On the first of February this year I woke up and was soon wondering. When I turned on my mobile phone to check the time and messages, there was no network signal. I wondered if there was something wrong with my SIM card. However, when I heard from my companions that they also experienced the same problem, although we had different network subscriptions, there was a growing sense that something was going on, and we wondered what was the real reason behind the “malfunctions” of the communication system.

A local priest was able to clarify all that soon. The military had started a

coup because they did not accept the results of the national elections, and they had declared a year-long state of emergency. On that day they declared martial law and prevented all means of contact and information transmission including a news blackout.

In response to this the people of Myanmar organized a huge nationwide protest. Uniformed military personnel were visible in most corners of the towns to stop and to arrest people, but it did not stop the people from fighting for what was right for their countrymen. What the citizens of Myanmar want is for the military to respect their vote in favor of the Democratic party.

The youth were the most active in the protests, and some of them were my students. There were times they asked me “Sir, are you aware of what

is happening to our country?” “Yes, I am aware,” I answered. “But why are you not joining us in our fight?” they added. I simply told them, “Even though I would like to join you in your fight, it is not practical for me because I am a foreigner; however I can give you my support in other ways.” I felt that they understood. It was one of the most frustrating moments in my life that I could not extend my full support to them. I planned to continue to offer help in the best way that I could through social media. The protests continued and there was violence and some killings, and many young people were arrested.

Since we were unclear about what was happening we invited the bishop for a lunch meeting at our lay missionary house, and he accepted




it. During the meal we asked about the current situation and about the status of foreigners in the country. He told us, “Most of the foreigners have left already, especially those who live in the big cities because their safety is threatened and because they were slowly losing their businesses, and in your case I think you should go home for a while.” He mentioned that more than once, and he explained that the situation could get worse and it was hard to be certain about what might happen if we waited for the circumstances to improve.

After our meal with the bishop, we informed the Columban Myanmar Mission Unit Coordinator and the Central Leadership Team about the bishop’s suggestion, and they supported it. The next day we registered ourselves with

the Philippine Consulate for a repatriation flight which had been offered to us. Getting to Yangon International Airport was a big challenge for us because all domestic flights were cancelled and there were roadblocks with several checkpoints for those travelling by land. Fortunately the bishop was able to arrange safe passage for us.

From Yangon we caught the repatriation flight home to the Philippines but we arrived with heavy hearts and mixed emotions. It was not easy to say goodbye to the people whom we worked with. We had built up good relationships, and we felt we had abandoned them in their time of difficulty. However, despite all the chaos, they are also hopeful that this time will pass and better days will come soon.

Now I have finished my holidays in my hometown, and I am showing my support to the Myanmar people by shouting their sentiments and the ongoing news of their country through social media. This really means a lot for them, because it was their only request to me. They asked me to be participate through my post as soon as I arrived in the Philippines.

I think that the whole world knows already the struggles of Myanmar, and we still need to continue praying that their cry for freedom be heard and that there will be justice for the victims. 

Currently, Columban lay missionary Michael Javier is helping in the ministries in Barra Sub-Parish in Opol, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, where lay missionaries from Fiji and the Kingdom of Tonga are serving. He is also helping with the activities of the Mission Promotion Team in the region.

Meeting Mother Teresa

The Drive of a Lifetime

By Fr. Donal McIlraith

In the late 1980s I was finishing my studies in Rome. I was not able to engage full time in pastoral work, as I would like, so I worked two hours a week with the Missionaries of Charity. They ran a shelter for homeless men near the main station in Rome.

One evening when I arrived, the Indian Sister in charge said, "Father, Mother is in town. Would you like to meet her?" Sister then instructed me on how to cross Rome to the convent attached to the old Church of St. Gregory the Great. It was from this church that St. Augustine set out to evangelize England.

The Sister who admitted me said, "Mother is at supper with the Sisters, please wait here" and led me to a small parlor. Perhaps a half an hour later, Mother arrived and sat down with me and chatted with me for about fifteen minutes. Looking back now, I realize

what a grace it is to have been given fifteen minutes of the life of a great saint. She told me how the order had been founded and about its spread. Recently the communist government in Russia had invited her to open a home for the elderly, I think, in Moscow. She said when they showed her the house, they pointed out the various rooms and their functions. When they came to a certain room they said, "This will be for Him" — the chapel. She had been invited to start two convents in South Africa, one for white Sisters and one for black. She refused. "When it becomes possible," she said, "I will start a convent with my whitest and blackest Sisters together!" Her great hope was to open a convent in China. She said that back in 1964 she brought in the hour of adoration before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament every day for all the Sisters. This she

said, "was when the congregation really took off."

The minutes went by quickly. I was not overawed, I recall, but felt I was with a person of immense goodness whose very presence wanted you to be and do good. At the end of our meeting she asked me what I was doing. "Mother, I am teaching seminarians." "I have advice for your seminarians. Please tell them to do an hour every day with Jesus before the Blessed Sacrament, go to confession every week, and do some penance." I realized, the next day, she was speaking to me also.

When Mother departed, the superior showed me out. She remarked, "Mother is going back to India tomorrow." Knowing that they depend completely on providence, I asked, "How is she getting to the airport?" "Nothing is arranged yet,"



Columban Fr. Maurice Hogan, Mother Teresa, Ms. McAteer and Columban Fr. Donal McIlraith



Fr. Donal chauffeuring Mother Teresa

The Catechism of the Catholic Church Prayer

Merciful and loving Father, we give you thanks for the new Catechism.
We accept it as an instrument for these times to strengthen our faith, hope and love.
Give us your Spirit to be with us as we receive this gift from the Church for our study and use.
May the Spirit root the word firmly in our hearts so that we may have faith in your Son, our Saviour.
Through your Spirit, may we have a stable and educated Faith.
Through your Spirit, may we share in the fruits of our redemption through the sacraments.
Through your Spirit, bend our minds and hearts to your commands.
Through your Spirit, teach us how to pray.
Give us the joy of loving that comes from the true faith.
May we proclaim the Good News to the Poor through our love and action.
By the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Saints Peter and Paul and all the Apostles, may we
experience a new Pentecost to confirm our faith and love so that we may be your Church,
your People, the body of your Son.
This we ask through Christ, your Son our Lord. Amen

was the reply. I offered to drive her to Da Vinci Airport, and my offer was accepted. Next morning, I arrived in the Columban car to collect her and the two Sisters who accompanied her. Some friends were in Rome, Columban Fr. Maurice Hogan and the McAteers from Derry. I surprised them by suggesting they come with me and meet Mother Teresa with the proviso that they must find their own way home. They were delighted.

I arrived the next day to collect Mother. I asked Mother if we could take some photos. She agreed, but I could sense she was not happy. Just last year when I shared this story with the Missionaries of Charity in Blarney, Cork, an elderly Indian sister

explained. "Mother," she said, "hated photos. She finally agreed with Jesus that she would allow some but He had to release a soul from purgatory for every photo." I figure I have made a few people happy in heaven.

The journey to Leonardo Da Vinci Airport was an amazing experience for me. Mother was quite tiny but all the way along people spotted her and cheered. And most of the cars we passed also hooted. We chatted all the way there. It was at that time that the new Catechism of the Catholic Church was announced. Mother was delighted at the prospect. I mentioned that I had read there was opposition from some quarters of the Church. Mother then asked me to write a prayer for

the reception of the new catechism. I objected that I was not used to writing prayers but she insisted. We got to the airport safely, and I said goodbye.

It is not every day that Mother Teresa asks you to do something. I wrestled with the prayer and got some help. About a year later, Mother was back in Rome, and I brought the prayer to her. She was interviewing novices and dealing with me in between the novices. In no time all she made a beautiful prayer out of my poor efforts. I include it here.

Mother asked me to send her some copies. I was then posted to Fiji and eventually sent a good number of prayer cards to her in India. In the back I put the image of our Lady of

Guadalupe which was the catechism of South America. Mother wrote to me twice from their convent in 54a, A.J.C. Bose Rd. in Calcutta, and I conclude with her words to me.

“Dear Fr McIlraith,

I am very happy to know that you are involved with the formation of priests and brothers and that you teach the New Testament to them. The enclosed prayer is very good and I am sure much good fruit will be produced through the new Catechism.

Yes, in these present days when faith is very much lacking and questioned, we ought to be careful how we present the Truth. There should be no compromise but be like Jesus when He told His Apostles “Will you also go away?”

Let us pray very fervently especially for the youth that they may grow in the one true Faith and that we get many vocations for Religious life and the priesthood.

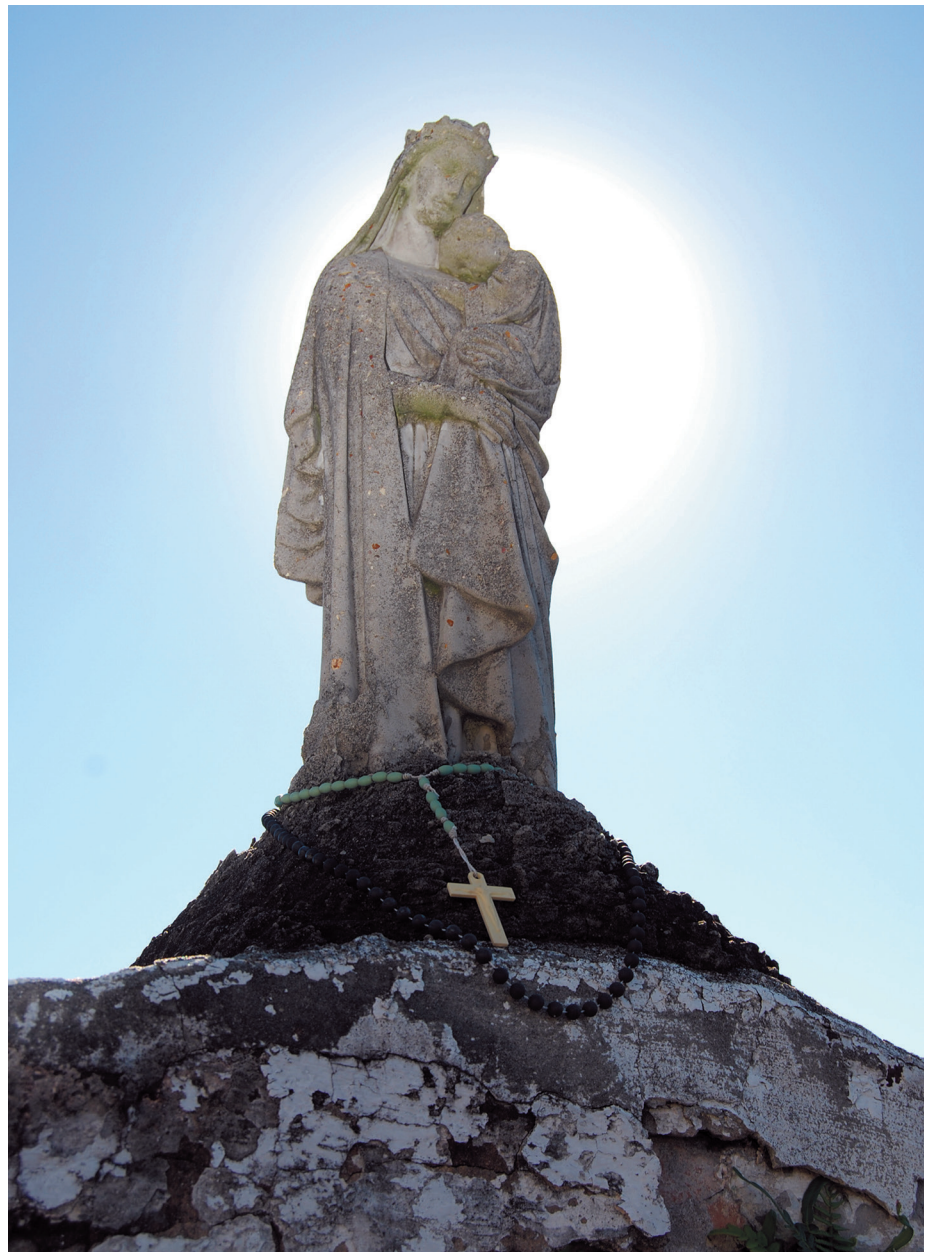
Please continue to pray for us and our poor. God bless you. (20.4.90)”

When I sent the cards to Mother she wrote again and sent me a prayer:

“Thank you for your kind letter of 7th May and for the copies of the beautiful prayer you wrote for the reception of the new Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Through this prayer may the Lord open the hearts of many to His saving truth and love. Our sisters too are also doing a prayerful and regular study of the truths of our Faith and it is a great help in the pursuit of holiness. I trust that the new Catechism will bear fruits of great holiness in the lives of God’s children.

I shall look forward to receiving the shipment of these prayer cards which you have so kindly sent. When they come, I will be sure to distribute them to the sisters.



“Mary, Mother of Jesus, give me your heart, so beautiful, so pure, so immaculate so full of love and humility that I may be able to receive Jesus in the bread of life, love him as you loved him and serve him in the distressing disguise of the Poorest of the Poor.”


— MOTHER TERESA

Keep the joy of loving Jesus in your heart and share that joy with all you meet. God bless you.

M Teresa mc. (27 May 1994)”

Mother enclosed a prayer of her own for me:

“Mary, Mother of Jesus, give me your heart, so beautiful, so pure, so

immaculate so full of love and humility that I may be able to receive Jesus in the bread of life, love him as you loved him and serve him in the distressing disguise of the Poorest of the Poor.” 

Columban Fr. Donal McIlraith lives and works in Fiji.



Help Future Generations with a Donation Today

Your gift helps make possible livelihood programs like the Embroidery Project started by Columban Fr. Bill Morton and Columban lay missionaries in Mexico to help female migrants provide for their families.



The Embroidery Project goes beyond a business, it is a humanitarian project. It serves as a network of support and solidarity. It is a space to weave the pain, the memories of their country of origin and to be able to express their emotions, feelings and stories through art, and to be able to weave a hopeful future.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Committed to Serve

To Keep Helping

By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala

I met John Paul when I first arrived in Myitkyina, a diocese in the northern part of Myanmar (formerly Burma). Together with his committee, he helped me to organize the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina, the pastoral ministry of the diocese to students in the different government institutions. The first two years before the pandemic and the coup we were very active organizing different programs for Catholic students. Then we also reached out to the University Christian Fellowship, an organization organized by different Christian students mostly led by the Kachin Baptist Convention. We also reach out to non-Christian youths and organized interfaith youth camps to provide safe places for young students from different faith backgrounds to meet and build friendships. Youth ministry is about empowering young people to become change agents in their own communities. One of these change agents is John Paul. Here he tells us how about his work from being a youth leader to now the program coordinator of the Student Learning Resources Center (SLRC).

My name is John Paul Nhkum Htoi Awng, and I am currently working for a newly created education center named Students Learning Resources Center (SLRC) as a program coordinator. Our small center is located in Shatapru quarter, Myitkyina city, Kachin state, Myanmar. I want to tell a brief history about our center. The Student Learning Resources Center (SLRC) was founded by Fr. Kurt Zion Pala from the Philippines, and he is a Columban missionary priest.

I met Fr. Kurt when I was youth president of the Myitkyina Diocesan

Youth Commission (DYC). He was invited to lead the Catholic students of the diocese by then Bishop Francis Daw Tang. He had the idea to form a Catholic student organization. In fact, there was a Catholic student organization before, but it disappeared because of many reasons. So, we needed to form a new Catholic student organization.

There are 24 parishes in Myitkyina Diocese. Every parish has a youth committee to lead youth activities and programs. We have a huge number of young people and also have strong communication between parishes. The Myitkyina Diocesan Youth Commission is leading every parish's youth committee. There are seven universities and colleges in Myitkyina Diocese. Five are in Myitkyina city and two are in Mohnyin City.

We visited all the universities and explained all about our plans to the students. After three months of planning and preparation we could hold the first meeting with the students. Finally, on February 10, 2019, we successfully formed the Catholic student organization of diocese which was named Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM) at the second University Students' Gathering, organized by Myitkyina Diocesan Youth Commission. Under the leadership of Fr. Kurt, the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM) became one of the most active youth organizations in Myitkyina.

The Covid-19 pandemic started spreading all around the world. The universities were closed, and the youth movements were also stopped for two years in Kachin State. Then the coup happened and things got worse in

Myanmar. Most of the students decided to stop going to the schools, universities and join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). But there are also some problems besides being involved in CDM. Most of the youths are not employed because of the lack of skills and certification. Most of the jobs are asking for the graduates who must have experiences in related fields and ask for certificates of the courses. After four years of volunteering as youth president in DYC, I stepped down on January 30, 2021. I was studying English as a major in Myitkyina University, but I decided to join CDM and stopped going to university.

I stayed in my house for almost a year. I struggled and didn't know how to keep going. I completely lost my way. I was born in Phakant where there are many jade mines. My father does jade selling and trading. My father wanted me to work for my uncle's jade company, but my ambition is not to become a jade seller and trader. So, I refused and waited for other chances. After one year of struggling, Fr. Kurt told me that he is planning to open a student resources center. I decided to join and help him.

The parish priest Fr. Peter Hka Aung Tu allowed us to use a compound with a small house. We prepared to open the center for about three months. We finally opened the center on August 15, 2022, the feast of the Assumption. The name of our center is Student Learning Resources Center (SLRC). Our center is mainly sponsored by the Columban benefactors, and we collect some amount of funding from the donors locally. The center is collaborating with Pinnya Thagar Academy, Confide



Fr. Kurt with the SLRC staff

Psychological Services and Advance Accountancy Institute. There were seven staff in the beginning. Most of the staff are university students who joined the civil disobedience movement.

We are currently running three programs. The programs are Positive Youth Development Program (PYDP), English Elementary Class, Pre-Intermediate class and Information Technology and Communication (ICT). We only offered PYDP in the first semester. Positive Youth Development Program (PYDP) is a nine month program and especially for the youths who are trying to get employed. There were twenty-four students in the first semester of the first batch of PYDP. The specific courses that we offered to the PYDP students in the first semester are Basic English, Basic Computer, Accounting, Work Skills & Life skills and Mental Health Care. In the second semester, we replaced some special topics and internship preparation programs as the replacement of the accounting subject. The number of students also reduced from twenty-four to thirteen. Now, we are currently in the third semester and

running English Elementary, English Pre-Intermediate and ICT with PYDP. We teach the seminar topics instead of special topics to the PYDP students. We also offer them various topics on relevant issues like gender sensitivity, human rights and entrepreneurship.

Even though I am working as a program coordinator in SLRC, I really do not have a good education background. I was volunteering in the Catholic youth ministry for about ten years. Most of the things I have done before are related to social work and church activities. So, I still have many challenges to face and overcome. I have been learning and challenging myself each day since the center was founded. I have strong communication with each of the staff, so I do not have many difficulties in the office. Every staff member has the same commitment to make success for the center.


Most of the young people from Kachin state have to move to other cities like Yangon and Mandalay to find educational opportunities. Although some youth can get support from the family, most of the youths cannot get support from their families. Most of the youths had to do physical work for their



John Paul speaking before students

education and livelihood. Some of the youth have to work in the mines such as jade, gold and rare earth. Those that work in the mines are also facing drug problems and other diseases like HIV/AIDS.

Things are getting worse now after the pandemic and military coup. The civil war is still happening in Kachin state. Many people are dying every day. Crime rates are increasing each day, and there is no way to stop them. Young people are no longer educated. Many young people no longer see any hope for them if they stay in this state and in this country. So, I believe SLRC can be a very big help for the young people in Kachin state.

SLRC is just newly formed but the director Fr. Kurt and the staff have the same goal and commitment to succeed and to help the youth. So, I believe that SLRC will be a very important resource center for the youth. As for me, I am committed to working for the youth, and I made up my mind to keep helping the youth of my country. 

Originally from the Philippines, Columban Fr. Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar (formerly Burma).



The Yatsushiro Martyrs

Seeds of Faith

Columban Missionaries in Japan

On Sept 8, 1993, in Beppu City on the Island of Kyushu, Our Lady prophesied through Fr. Stefano Gobbi that soon Japan will be a Christian country. She called it a miracle. That will be some miracle as at the moment there are only about 400,000 Japanese Catholics. Along with foreigners and the different Protestant denominations one can say that there

are just over one million Christians in Japan today. That is a small group in a population of 125 million.

The great Jesuit missionary St. Francis Xavier landed in Kagoshima on August 15, 1550, the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady with three other Jesuits and a Japanese interpreter. He spent just two years travelling the country but had great difficulty with

the language. Yet, in just 50 years I believe that Japan was well on its way to becoming a Christian Country.

At that time one of the great centers of activity was the area around Yatsushiro in the southern part of Kumamoto Prefecture on the island of Kyushu. This was due mainly to the fact that the Lord of the area, Augustine Konishi Yukinaga, was a Christian. There were a number of lords in Kyushu like Konishi who welcomed the priests and gave them every help and encouragement. In 1599 the population of Yatsushiro town was about 30,000. It is thought that many of them were Christians and at least fourteen churches had been built. Today there is just one church and about 150 Christians!

That year of 1599 witnessed an extraordinary miracle on April 25. A young Christian lad with a few of his pals were praying before a cross in a cemetery when the cross began to shine with a brilliant light. Great crowds visited the cross which continued to shine for three months as a result of which many more people were baptized. The miracle of the shining cross was surely a presage of the great storm that was approaching.

The battle of Sekigahara, October 21, 1600, was a decisive moment in Japanese history. There was a civil war largely fought between forces from eastern and western Japan. Konishi fought with the western forces but as a result of many betrayals the battle was lost. Being a losing general it would have been normal for him to have taken his own life but being a Christian, he would not do that. Subsequently he was captured and executed. His lands and castles were forfeited and given to Lord Kato Kiyomasa, an eastern general who began the serious persecution of the Christians.

Many of Konishi's retainers fled to other clans. Some became retainers of Lord Kato. The priests and many

Christians went south to Kagoshima. However, two of his Christian Samurai refused the order to reject their faith or leave Yatsushiro. Their names were John Minami and Simon Takeda. Lord Kato was furious and ordered that they both be beheaded and their families crucified.

At that time there was a very interesting apostolate active in every community known as the “Jihi Yaku” which means “ministry of mercy.” They were laymen who visited the families, teaching, praying, encouraging and preparing people for death. There were three such men in Yatsushiro: the mercy men were Michael Mitsuishi, John Hattori and Joachim Watanabe.

Because John Minami was so influential in Yatsushiro he was taken to Kumamoto for execution. He had said his farewells to his wife Magdalene and his adopted son Louis reminding them that they would all be united shortly in Heaven. Having reached Kumamoto he informed Lord Kato that one’s loyalty must always be first to the Lord of Lords (like St. John Fisher and St. Thomas Moore), and he was beheaded on December 8, the first martyr from Yatsushiro. He was 35.

Simon Takeda’s non-Christian friends suggested he just pretend to give up the faith. He refused. They tried to get his mother Johanna to

reason with him, but she replied that “it is a glorious thing to die for the faith!” He bade farewell to his family and called on the services of the mercy men to prepare spiritually, asking them also to see to things after his death. He went to the garden, probably his own, where preparations had been made and became the second martyr from Kumamoto before dawn on December 9. He was 33. Johanna kneeling beside his body said “how blessed you are my son and how well you offered your life to our Lord! How blessed am I to be the mother of a martyr!” His head was sent to Kumamoto and joined John Minami’s, displayed as a spectacle and a warning on the main road into the town.

Their families were to be crucified the same day. They accepted their fate with great joy and prepared. Together they said the “confiteor” before a holy statue. When many people gathered to console them, the officials became alarmed and tried to hurry them up. However, the women, John’s wife Magdalene and Simon Takeda’s wife Agnes and mother Johanna informed them that as they were about to go before their Lord such preparations could not be rushed! Shortly afterwards they cheerfully called “let’s go!”

Because they were samurai families it was decided that they should be

carried to the place of execution by palanquin. Agnes however requested that she be allowed to walk to her crucifixion like her Lord, but the request was denied. Johanna was the first to be tied roughly to her cross and from its lofty height proceeded to address the large crowd. “I assure you there is no salvation apart from the way of the Christians.” She called on people to seek baptism, on those who had left the faith to return and on those faithful to continue to be so. The executioner dispatched her with two stabs of his bamboo spear. She was 55. Next was Magdalene and her adopted son. Looking at his mother the lad repeated the names of Jesus and Mary as they had both been doing along their way of the cross. They died quickly. Louis was 8, and his mother was 33. Agnes was the last but at this stage the executioners were in tears, shaking, unable and unwilling to continue. Finally, a man came forward and took the spear. But he was so inept that he had to stab Agnes many times before she died. She was 30.

All through their ordeal the three mercy men were close by praying with and encouraging them. People came to dip cloths in the blood or to take away the blood-soaked earth. The bodies were to remain on the crosses as a spectacle for a year. The mercy men



Depiction of the martyrs



Memorial to the martyrs

kept watch all the time and when the bones finally dropped to the ground they gathered them up and carried them off for burial to Nagasaki.

There were still many Christians in the town and the demands of the local officials to recant became more strident. As the missionaries were not allowed into the area it became the task of the mercy men to encourage the brethren and keep the flame burning. This they did to such good affect that there was a great sense of unity and the numbers began to grow again. In fact, even the man who had executed Simon Takeda became a Christian. The officials consulted with Lord Kato about the situation, and he ordered that the three mercy men be imprisoned until they die and their properties confiscated. On January 20, 1605, the three were imprisoned. They were put into a small stockade inside the first wall of the castle. They had no shelter from the elements and nothing but the ground to sit or lie on.

When the castle gates were opened in the morning anybody could enter and speak with the prisoners. As time went on the harsh treatment began to take its toll on the men, especially on Joachim Watanabe who was 55. When the word spread a Fr. Louis from Nagasaki, disguised as a farmer came and sat down on the low wall at the stockade to rest with his load of produce on his back and heard the confessions of the three. I've no doubt he often took a rest there over the following months.

Joachim died on August, 26, 1606, from the harsh treatment and was buried. But three days later the Christians brought his body to Nagasaki and buried him beside John Minami.

At Christmas many Christians gathered at the stockade and with great joy, prayers, scripture readings and song celebrated the birth of Christ. It was like a small church. When Lord Kato got word of this he was incensed and ordered that they be executed along

*"It is a glorious thing to die
for the faith."*

— JOHANNA TAKEDA

with their families. He was persuaded to let the wives live, but the two men joyfully prepared for death. Great crowds gathered. Officials hastened to their homes to bring their two children. Michael Mitsuishi's son Thomas was playing when they came for him. He stopped his game, gave whatever he had to his pals, dressed himself in his best clothes and without shedding a tear bade farewell to his grandfather. He was slightly handicapped so the official carried him on his back. The three with heads bent in prayer were beheaded in turn with one flash of the sword. Thomas was 13, his father Michael was 50 and John Hattori was 39.


John's son Peter had not yet arrived as his house was some distance away. Finally, an official carried him into that shocking scene; three bodies parted from their heads in a sea of blood. But the child stood there unflinching, loosened the upper part of his kimono, knelt down beside his father's body and presented his neck to the executioner. The three executioners were in tears seeing the manliness of this child and refused to carry out the execution. However, a man from the crowd stepped forward and took the sword and dispatched Peter. He was 6.

The remains were gathered up and buried in the community grave but later were secretly brought to Nagasaki. Later all the Yatsushiro martyr's remains were brought to Macao for safety when the missionaries were expelled in 1612. There they were placed in the Church of St. Francis Xavier. In Japan it is unusual to have martyrs' relics as the officials took great pains to make sure there would be none.

In 1995 the relics of the Yatsushiro martyrs were returned to Nagasaki.

On November 24, 2008, these eleven were among the 187 Japanese martyrs declared blessed in a great ceremony in Nagasaki which began with the relics being carried in procession to the altar. When I was appointed to Yatsushiro parish I wondered why those relics were not preserved here in Yatsushiro. The reason is that they were mixed with some other martyrs' relics, and it's not possible to distinguish one from the other. All one can say is that among this small collection of bones are the relics of some of the Yatsushiro martyrs. They are on display in the Jesuit Twenty-six Martyrs Museum on Nishizaka Hill where at least 650 Christians have been martyred.

To commemorate their beatification the Bishop of this Diocese bought a fine plot of land near the execution ground. It has been undeveloped up to the present with no prospect of that happening for the lack of funds. However, as the Columban Fathers celebrated the 100th anniversary of their founding and as Columbans had been working in this area for almost 70 of those years the Society generously agreed to fund that development. In 2018 that work was completed in time for the Martyrs' Festival the following year when Bishop Miyahara, Fr. Leo Schumacher the Columban Superior of Japan, all the priests of the area with a large number of Christians turned up for a special Mass and blessing of what turned out to be a beautiful park, worthy of the martyrs' memory.

I have heard it said that the blood of martyrs is the seed of faith. It is our hope that when the Yatsushiro's martyrs' blood really comes on stream its impact on the many people who visit the park might play a part in the miracle that will see Japan become a Christian country and a prophecy fulfilled! 

Columban missionaries in Japan wrote this article.



Help Spread the Light of Christ

with a Gift that Costs Nothing During Your Lifetime

You can show your personal compassion and set an example for others by remembering the Missionary Society of St. Columban in your will, trust or other planned gift. No gift has a more lasting impact.



Columban Fr. John Boles was very distressed and worried when the coronavirus pandemic struck Peru. For the already poor, the pandemic was a dual catastrophe. With Peru's vaccination program being painfully slow, they were the ones most at risk from infection and the ones with the greatest responsibility to self-isolate when necessary. However, this meant they couldn't go out onto the streets and earn their meagre living resulting in hunger for them and their families. For many, the reality became "Die from Covid or die from hunger. Not much of a choice." However, with the support of Columban benefactors, miracles like the "kitchens in the sky," communal kitchens serving the poor and hungry, happened to help those most in need.

A planned gift helps the Missionary Society of St. Columban continue God's mission in the poorest areas of the world. And, financially and prayerfully supporting the Missionary Society of St. Columban is an excellent way to participate in the missionary activity of the Church.

With thoughtful planning, you can choose which ways to support work best for you and your loved ones and make sure your gifts are made in a way that will maximize their total value while minimizing their after tax-cost. There are many planned giving options, including some you may not have considered before. Planned gifts provide a major impact in our missions, and we offer the following suggestions to aid selection of the best giving option for your stage of life.

- Donor Advised Fund Gifts
- Direct Gifts of Cash and/or Securities
- Charitable Remainder Unitrust Gifts
- Charitable Bequest Gifts
- Gifts of Life Insurance Policies

The U.S. Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Regulations encourage charitable giving by allowing generous tax savings for individuals who make gifts in accordance with approved giving programs. A planned gift also offers you many potential advantages: the opportunity to increase spendable income, the elimination or reduction of capital gain taxes and possibly federal and state estate tax savings.

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

A Compassionate Heart

A Privileged Friendship

By Fr. Barry Cairns

Sister Hilary's message, given to me many years ago, still influences me. That influence comes alive when I read, or relate, the scene in the Gospels where Jesus meets the leper. As the evangelist Mark puts it: "Jesus felt deep compassion on seeing the leper." (Mark 1:40)

Sister Hilary Ross, a Daughter of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, was stationed for 37 years at the Hospital for Hansen's Disease (leprosy), at Carville, Louisiana. Sister Hilary told me that a far deeper wound than the outer devastation of Hansen's disease, was the much deeper inner heart wound of loneliness, rejection and discrimination. This too was what Jesus saw and felt and so moved Him to deep compassion. In homilies and to the class preparing for Baptism I tell them this, using Sister Hilary's experience: The miracle of healing was special to that era for the founding of the Kingdom. However, the compassion behind the miracle we can taste today. The Gospels have an eternal present tense and the deep compassion of Jesus for each of us is alive today. Jesus is "the same yesterday (i.e. 2000 years ago), today (for us) and forever." (Hebrews 13:8).

In the Greek texts in which the Gospels were written, the word used for



The Gospels have an eternal present tense and the deep compassion of Jesus for each of us is alive today.


deep compassion is a very special and rare verb meaning being moved to the very inner depths of one's being. It is used only fifteen times in the Gospels, twelve of those times applied to how Jesus felt. It was used once for the Father towards his returning prodigal son (Luke 15:20), once for the Good Samaritan seeing the wounded man lying on the roadside (Luke 10:33), and once for the master forgiving his

indebted servant. (Matt. 18:33)

Sister Hilary Ross joined the Daughters of Charity at Emmitsburg, Maryland. After pronouncing her vows, she was appointed to Carville in 1926 as a chemist. Later Sister set up a laboratory and became the hospital's first bio-chemist. Sister's special field was immunology and the effect of the then recent drug to combat Hansen's disease, sulphide. Sister's many papers were published worldwide.

In 1958 she received the prestigious recognition of the Damien-Dutton Award for studies in Hansen's Disease.

After 37 years at Carville, at the age of 66, Sister Hilary came to Wakayama, Japan. In Wakayama City Sister, was on the staff of a hospital for crippled children staffed by the Daughters

of Charity. I too was stationed in Wakayama at the time and met Sister. Sister Hilary had an inventive mind and was delightfully outspoken. Sister died in Wakayama in 1982. It was my privilege to know her. Thank you, Sister Hilary. You too had a compassionate heart. 

Columban Fr. Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.

Compassionate Listening

As a minister and pastoral agent of the Church, I am often placed in an awkward position when someone approaches me with a request in which, at least in that given moment, I cannot grant due to their irregular situation. For example, many years ago in Chile, I worked in a small rural parish. The 32 country chapels of the parish celebrated Eucharist once a month. One Sunday, I arrived at a particular chapel and was informed that there will be a baptism in the Mass. The catechist presented the parents and future godparents of the child. However, there was a problem. The prospective godparents were not married in the Church. Therefore, I privately pulled the parents and prospective godparents aside and asked the parents why they chose the couple as the godparents. They said because of their friendship and the couple's loving commitment to one another for nearly 40 years. I asked the prospective godparents if they were married civilly. Yes, they responded. I asked if they were Catholic. Yes, they responded. I asked if they had been married to another person before either civilly or sacramentally. No, they responded. I asked if they had any problem in getting married in the Church. No, they responded. Therefore, I proposed the following to the parents and prospective godparents: we will not celebrate the baptism this month. Instead the prospective godparents will present all the proper paperwork in the parish office to have their sacramental marriage processed. In the following month, we will celebrate the sacrament of marriage of the prospective godparents. This will be followed by the celebration of baptism with the newlywed couple as godparents.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Chris Saenz



I asked if they were all in agreement and they said yes. In the following month we had a joyous celebration.

This experience is the fruit of my personal trial and error to develop a pastoral application of Church teachings and guidelines in which people feel that they are heard and respected even in if their request is denied. The following are guidelines I suggest for any minister, lay or ordained, in a pastoral setting.

1. Human dignity is central. As a minister you must continually hold before you the image of a fragile

child of God who requests to be heard. Recognize that they came to you for help which required a great effort of humility on their part. Like Jesus who respectfully accompanied sinners such as prostitutes, try to be present and respectful avoiding attitudes that can stigmatize. You are creating a safe space for compassionate listening. Providing an objective, compassionate ear may be all they need.

2. Know the backstory. As they say, never judge a book by its cover. Initially, their situation may appear to be straightforward and obvious. Nevertheless, do not immediately assume as to what they seek or what is the solution. Generally, most are not forthcoming with all the details. A simple question such as, "how did you get to this situation?" invites the person to unfold their story giving more background. There can be hidden details that can give you, the minister, more options to work with. Also, it shows your interest in wanting to help.

3. Go beyond the "NO." If you cannot comply with what the person requests, do not say "no, I can't" and close the door. Take time to explain the Church's guidelines and teachings. Misconceptions and lack of formation are common, and, as a minister, you should try to remedy this. And, if you do not feel confident in providing an adequate explanation, do not hesitate to say, "I will get back to you with more information," and seek an expert's advice in the area. Or, refer them to someone who can better assist. Recognize your own limitations.

4. Always move forward. After explaining why they cannot receive what they seek, you can explore alternative pastoral responses that can satisfy the person's needs, albeit temporarily, while still respecting Church guidelines. Or, suggest how they can work towards obtaining what they seek. It may not happen overnight but giving them a hopeful path forward is better than a flat rejection.

This pastoral approach holds sacred the other's dignity and story. It allows the person to be heard and, consequently, be ministered to with respect. Even if you cannot comply with their request, your time and effort of walking them through the process will be greatly appreciated and reduce feelings of rejection. As Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned" (Luke 6: 36-37).

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Fr. Chris Saenz". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light blue background.

COLUMBAN FATHERS
1902 N. CALHOUN ST.
ST. COLUMBANS, NE 68056-2000

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
COLUMBAN
FATHERS

**Transform the Lives
of Others...Enrich the
World...Give Hope**

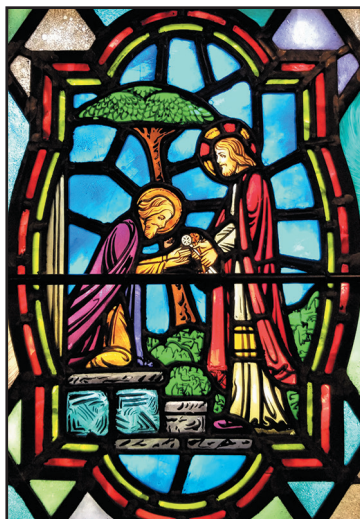
Columban Mission magazine is published eight times each year and tells the stories of our missionaries and the people they are called to serve. Columban missionaries live in solidarity with their people and, together, they move forward to improve their social, economic and spiritual lives, always with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

For a \$15 donation or more, you or a friend or loved one can share in our baptismal call to mission and the Columban Fathers' mission work around the world through *Columban Mission* magazine.

To begin receiving your *Columban Mission* magazine or to provide a gift to a loved one, simply visit our website at www.columban.org, call our toll-free number 877/299-1920 or write to us at:



**Missionary Society
of St. Columban**
1902 N. Calhoun St.
St. Columbans, NE
68056-2000



"But who do you say that I am?"
– St. Matthew 16:15

Faith is indeed a gift from God, but this gift is transmitted from one faith-filled person to another down to our own day. We too are called and empowered to give witness to our belief that Jesus is the Son of the Living God.

**We invite you to join this new generation by becoming
a Columban Father or Columban Sister.**

*If you are interested in the missionary
priesthood, write or call...*

Fr. Bill Morton
National Vocation Director
Columban Fathers
St. Columbans, NE 68056
877/299-1920

Email: vocations@columban.org
Website: www.columban.org

*If you are interested in becoming a
Columban Sister, write or call...*

Sr. Carmen Maldonado
National Vocation Director
Columban Sisters
2546 Lake Rd.
Silver Creek, NY 14136
716/934-4515

Email: sscusvocations@yahoo.com
Websites: www.columbansisters.org
www.columbansistersusa.com

Japan + Korea + Peru + Hong Kong + Philippines + Pakistan + Chile + Fiji + Taiwan + North America