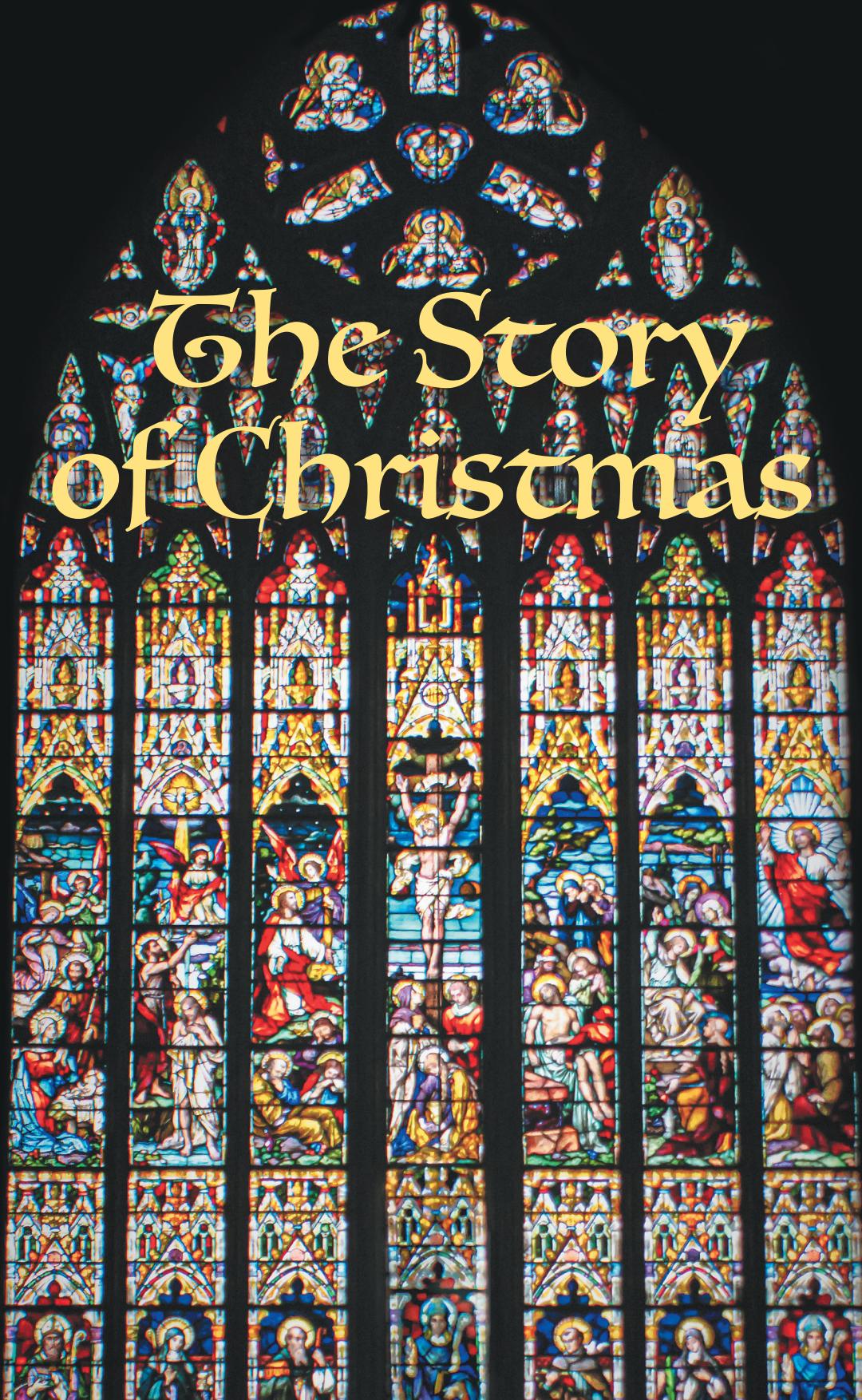


Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

December 2021

The Story of Christmas



CONTENTS

Issue Theme – The Story of Christmas



THE WORLD THAT GOD So LOVES 12

4 CHEAP CHRISTMAS

Behind the Glitter

6 A LONG WAIT

Reflections on a COVID Christmas

8 LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS

Trusting in the Lord

10 MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM PREDA

An Update from 2020

14 A CONVERSION STORY

A New Family

15 A CHRISTMAS VISIT

Good Work Done

18 CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Pakistan 2020

20 POSADA

Listen and Feel

22 CHRISTMAS AWAY FROM HOME

In This Time of Pandemic

DEPARTMENTS

3 IN SO MANY WORDS

23 FROM THE DIRECTOR



THE CHALLENGE OF GIFT GIVING 16

Volume 105 - Number 8 - December 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.

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 © 2021, The Columban Fathers (Legal Title)

PUBLISHER

REV. JOHN BURGER, SSC
DIRECTORUSA@COLUMBAN.ORG

EDITOR

KATE KENNY
KKENNY@COLUMBAN.ORG

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

MARCI ANDERSON
MANDERSON@COLUMBAN.ORG

RENEA STEELE

RSTEEL@COLUMBAN.ORG

DYANNE WENDLING

DWENDLING@COLUMBAN.ORG

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

KRISTIN ASHLEY

EDITORIAL BOARD

DAN EMINGER
KATE KENNY
ERNIE MAY
REV. JOHN BURGER, SSC
JEFF NORTON
SCOTT WRIGHT

The Missionary Society of St. Columban was founded in 1918 to proclaim and witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Society seeks to establish the Catholic Church where the Gospel has not been preached, help local churches evangelize their laity, promote dialogue with other faiths, and foster among all baptized people an awareness of their missionary responsibility.

In So Many Words

By Fr. Trevor Trotter

Christmas Lights

I like Christmas lights. In many suburbs of Australia there are marvelous displays of Christmas lights. In the northern hemisphere I enjoyed the lights with the snow and the cold. They bring a wonderful feel to the whole season. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." Is this our experience? When we see all the confusion and darkness of our world, do we think of Jesus as being the light? What could He mean?

There is the darkness of ignorance, of oppression by others and depression suffered by many. There are many people who have no hope and ask whether they should keep going on with life. Many also suffer with the tedium of the regular routines of life. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the light of the world, when we think about the many dark things of life?

One thought that comes to me is that light helps us to see what is already there. With the coming of Jesus, we can see what is already there. Jesus came to tell us and show us what is true about God. The story of Jesus casts light on the truth of God's wonderful love for each and every one of us.

The early followers of Jesus came to see the truth that God is intertwined with the whole universe. God's ongoing creating of us, of the trees, the animals, the earth and everything we can think of, is an amazing truth that is wonderful for us to take in. The message of Jesus brings light to a solely scientific understanding of the world. Christ is the light that helps us to see that God's love embraces and sustains the whole of creation. To ponder this truth helps us to know more deeply the power of love.

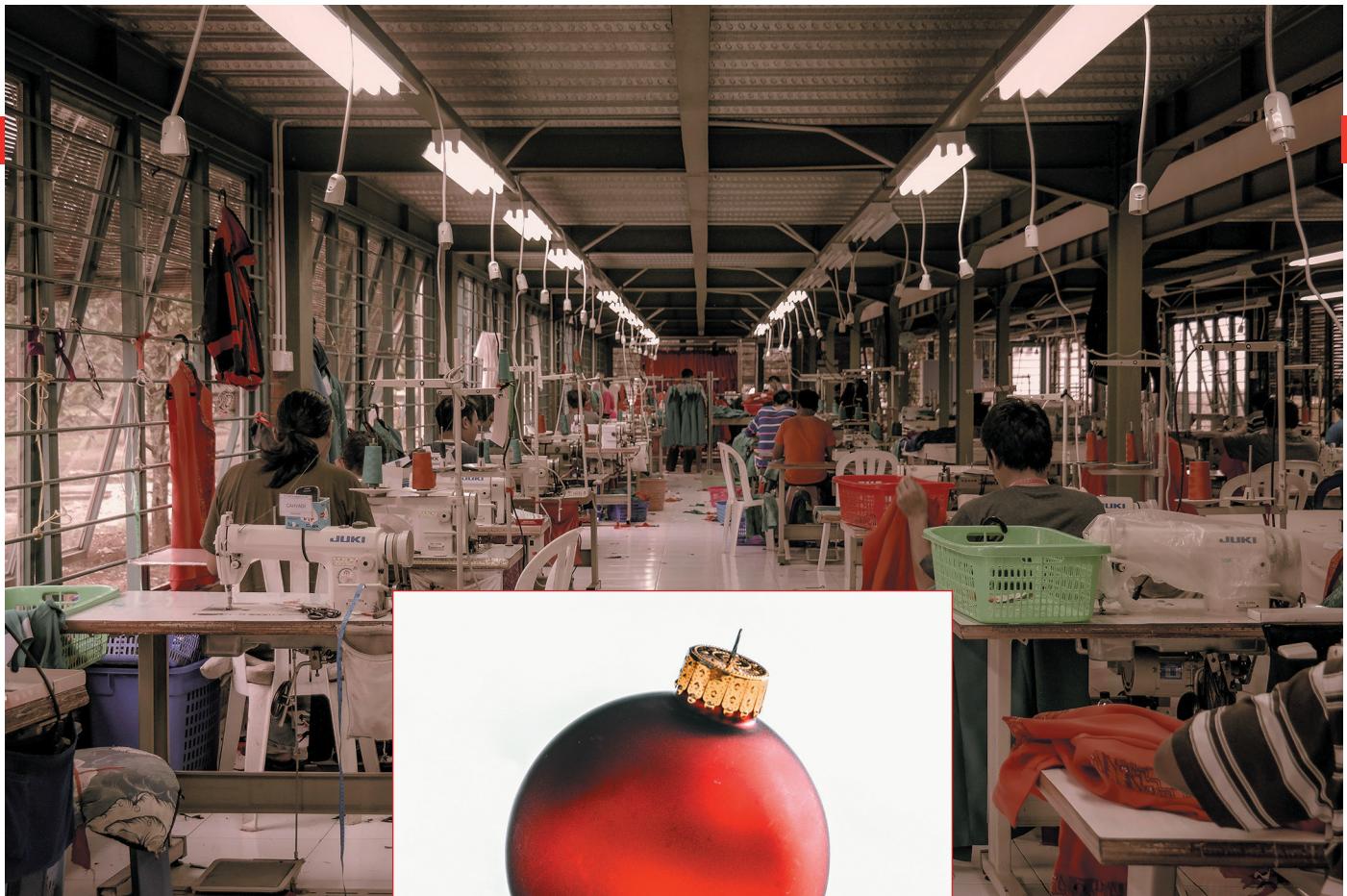
Jesus is the light, but he also spoke of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has been at work since the very beginning of time. The Spirit hovers over the chaos of our world and brings forth form and beauty, but would we have come to know this if Jesus had not been the one to reveal the truth of God and the universe? If Jesus had not been the light, we would be much poorer.

We Christians belong to a strong and vibrant tradition. We heard the story of Jesus from family, from teachers and preachers. We read books and discussed our questions among ourselves. Jesus is the light of our world. Jesus is the light of each of our worlds. We do not understand everything that is happening to us, but we now trust that Jesus will support us and lead us even though parts of our world are still unknown to us.

This is the missionary impulse. We want others to see what we see. Like our Columban friends and supporters, we missionaries have also seen that Christ is the light that overcomes the darkness. As we celebrate and remember that baby in Bethlehem, the light of the world, we remember all those who are still searching for the light wherever they may be. Let us pray for them. Let us continue our missionary effort. In this way we continue the work of God the Father who sent his only Son, the light of the world.

The story of Jesus casts light on the truth of God's wonderful love for each and every one of us.





Cheap Christmas

Behind the Glitter

By Fr. Jim Mulroney

"Ask about the labor, not the label," Australian troubadour, Dermot Dorgan, says in his award-winning song on responsible consumerism.

The same question can also well apply to the tinsel and flashing lights we buy to put on Christmas trees, or the Santa costume that the jolly bearer of gifts dons while doing his rounds.

But while "Christmas comes but once a year" may sum up the festive season in most parts of the world, the village of Yiwu in China has made it an all year-round affair.

Sixty percent of all the world's Christmas decorations are made in what has been dubbed the Chinese Christmas Village, as are 90 percent

of all those that bear the Made in China label. However, while the elves laboring in Santa's North Pole workshop may be a happy lot, for the hapless laborers in China's Christmas village, it is quite a different story.

Photographs show Chinese migrant workers sweating it out in harsh conditions producing cheap



decorations for a festival that they know nothing about.

Two of the busiest months of the year are April and September. In April, representatives of foreign importers flock to Yiwu to inspect the latest offerings at a giant wholesale industrial estate—measuring almost one mile in area—and make their orders.

Then September is the deadline for exports to leave the village and head for the shipping ports of Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Xiamen.

Business heats up again in October as the domestic orders begin to come in, stretching the peak season right up to December 25. There is then a bit of slack in the schedule until preparations for the following year begin.

One young worker told a foreign reporter that he does know that Christmas is some kind of western festival and even though he does not know what it is all about, he will celebrate anyway.

The reporter says, "At first glance, the Chinese Christmas Village seems to be a place full of Christmas celebration; but in fact, it is a place that only regards Christmas as a business to celebrate."

She adds that the people do not really care what Christmas means. "They just know that Christmas will bring them financial profit and thus it is about an industry, the production of related products and earning commercial profit."



"Every person ought to have the awareness that purchasing is always a moral—and not simply an economic act," the Pope says.

However, a long production line separates the giant wholesale estate from the raw material. Families labor at home designing and producing items big and small for little profit, while others spend long days in often makeshift factories churning out Santas, lights, cards and even mangers.

The reporter notes, "In Yiwu, faith lags far behind the speed of the market; a godly holiday has suddenly turned into a money-making opportunity. Unfortunately, this mood is not confined to the small commercial street in Yiwu; it has flooded the entire society."

In his message for the World Day of Peace 2015, Pope Francis talks about the responsibility of consumers in the market.

In Australia, restaurants, shopping malls, churches and even our homes are littered with cheap and junky tinsel, shiny balls and glittering lights, most of which have a short life span before finding a permanent home in the rubbish bin.

With China being such a big supplier, it is a fair bet that most of our Christmas decorations come from the village of Yiwu, where they are made under sweatshop conditions. And, if they bear the label Made in China, it is almost a certainty.

"Every person ought to have the awareness that purchasing is always a moral—and not simply an economic act," the Pope says.

Not only that, he adds that organizations, the Church included, have the task of awakening consciences and promoting whatever steps are necessary for combating and uprooting the culture of enslavement.

The next time you are after a bit of cheap, junky tinsel or a few lights to brighten up your life, it may well be worth at least asking about the labor and, even if you cannot find the label, at least question yourself as to why they are so cheap! It can be part of making Christmas holy. **CM**

Columban Fr. Jim Mulroney resides in Essendon, Australia.



A Long Wait

Reflections on a COVID Christmas

By Nathalie Marytsch

We are about to enter the Advent season. This is a unique time of waiting, a time of preparation, much as it would have been for Mary carrying a baby in her womb. This is a beautiful and joyful season, not only for Christians around the world who await the birth of Jesus, but also for many others, for whom this is a special time for family reunions and festive celebrations. Colorful lights, ornately decorated trees and carols help create a festive atmosphere. Yet, this year Advent and Christmas will be somehow different.

Since early 2020, the whole world has been affected, in one way or another, by a global pandemic. We have become accustomed to signs and posters in church buildings, mobile billboards and government briefings telling us to keep a social distance, not to mix with other households, to wear face coverings, etc. We have seen arrows painted on the floor showing people which direction to follow in order to prevent close contact with others, and thereby to stop the spread of the virus. Sometimes, even when you are out and about walking, you can see people stepping off the curb when they see a stranger approaching in the "wrong" direction. Education and employment have suffered huge disruptions. Churches also had to close their doors and for several

This time of Advent is an invitation to wait in hope for the birth of Jesus Christ, when we hold on tighter to God's promise of journeying with humankind always.

months Masses were not allowed to be celebrated with congregations. The virus has thrown a spanner into our daily routines!

In the United Kingdom, the economy has shrunk, and unemployment has hit record highs. Concerns about domestic violence and mental health issues are frequently raised by experts. Families have endured the pain of burying loved

ones with very limited support due to restrictions. Likewise, wedding celebrations have had their numbers limited, and many have had to be cancelled or postponed.

So how can we remain hopeful? How can we get into the festive spirit of Christmas amid this gloomy backdrop? As Advent approaches I think of Mary, a young woman carrying a baby, yet having to confront many challenges at that time. Heavily pregnant she fled to Egypt in order to find safety from Herod's hands. She experienced rejection and uncertainty. In a way, her experience reminds us of the struggles the world is facing today. We are sailing through uncharted waters, we are going through days filled with anxieties and being socially distanced from our loved ones. Days in which we no longer have full control of our lives.

This time of Advent is an invitation to wait in hope for the birth of Jesus Christ, when we hold on tighter to God's promise of journeying with humankind always. The same promise that the young woman from Nazareth kept in her heart when she faced troubling times. Life may be different from the normal we knew before, but is yet, a life full of hope that we are yet to discover. **CM**

Columban lay missionary Nathalie Marytsch lives and works in Britain.



Stations of the Resurrection



Station 1
Jesus Rises from the Dead



Station 2
The Disciples Discover
the Empty Tomb



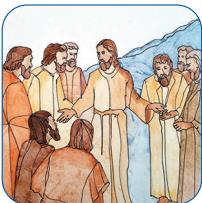
Station 3
The Risen Lord Appears to Mary
Magdalene, Apostle to the Apostles



Station 4
The Risen Lord Appears on
the Road to Emmaus



Station 5
The Risen Lord is Recognized
in the Breaking of the Bread



Station 6
The Risen Lord Appears to the
Community of Disciples



Station 7
The Risen Lord Breathes Peace
and Gives the Power to Forgive



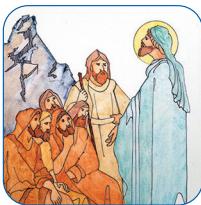
Station 8
The Risen Lord Strengthens
the Faith of Thomas



Station 9
The Risen Lord Eats with the
Disciples on the Shore of Tiberias



Station 10
The Risen Lord Forgives Peter and
Entrusts Him to Feed His Sheep



Station 11
The Risen Lord Sends the
Disciples into the World



Station 12
The Risen Lord Ascends
into Heaven



Station 13
Mary and the Disciples Keep Vigil in
the Upper Room for the Spirit's Advent



Station 14
The Risen Lord Sends
the Holy Spirit

A heartfelt apology to our faithful benefactors...

While we do our best to avoid mistakes in all of our print materials, occasionally one gets past us. Clearly, our failing to correctly label many of the Stations of the Resurrection in our 2022 Columban Mission Calendar was just such an error. And one that should have been caught by both us and our proofreader(s). It is actually reassuring that many benefactors took the time to let us know about our mistake!

I sincerely apologize for any distress this has caused, as we would never want any such error to distract from our intended purpose – sharing the glorious events in the life of Jesus through these Stations. To help clear up any confusion, pictures of the individual Stations and their respective captions are shown on this page.

Thank you very much – for sharing your proofreading skills, your gentle honesty and for your boundless generosity. Be assured of our constant prayers for you and yours now and throughout 2022.

The revised, corrected calendar can be viewed at www.columban.org, and a new calendar may be ordered by emailing us at mission@columban.org or calling us at 877.299.1920.



Gratefully yours in Christ,

Fr. John

Fr. John Burger, Director, U.S. Region

Love Bears All Things

Trusting in the Lord

By Mavic Mercene



Editor's Note: The following article was written prior to Christmas 2020.

As I write this, it is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. A few days from now would already be Christmas day. This is the most holy and meaningful occasion of the year when families gather and celebrate together.

This year will be my first Christmas outside my native Baguio in the Philippines. Those Christmases in Baguio were always happy and special because I was with my family. Then there is the bonus and excitement of having other relatives, friends and classmates with whom I would reunite, reconnect and celebrate kinship and friendship, spend time with my daughter and listen to her many dreams and aspirations, or simply find peace and solace in my mother's garden. This year will be different.

Christmas 2020 will be different simply because our family will not be together physically. My twin boys and I will be in Quezon City, my husband in Mindoro and my daughter in Baguio City. I am happy with the advantages of social media which will allow us to FaceTime with them but it is always better to be with them.

But the magic of Christmas lives on. Celebrations, while simple, will continue. I feel that despite what has been, we still have so much to thank God for. This most wonderful and meaningful time of the year will be celebrated with my whole family together in spirit.

Early this year we were astounded by the coronavirus pandemic. Then quarantine ensued. Suddenly, everything came to a standstill. Ordinary things like securing food became a mental exercise. Should I go

I feel that despite what has been, we still have so much to thank God for. This most wonderful and meaningful time of the year will be celebrated with my whole family together in spirit.

out to get our food in the market or should I have it delivered? If I go to the market, what is the best time to go? Is my regular 6:00 am market time when most people are still getting out of bed still safe, or should I go midday when people are trying to avoid the heat from the midday sun? If I go to

the market at all, will my feet endure the walk? If I have food delivered, will my budget suffice, because apart from the delivery fee, the food itself is more expensive.

As the weeks passed, many intense emotions like loneliness and anxiety which were a bit paralyzing, emerged and overwhelmed me. As I dealt with my own anxiety, I also worried for my adult twin boys' mental health. I tried to engage them in conversation and household chores, but it was difficult to know what was going on in their minds. I thought it would help to be more creative with the food I serve them. This way they have something to wake up and get up to. And so I did just that. From YouTube, I learned to cook the food my husband used to indulge them with and which they enjoy and added few more from my favorite food vlogger (video blogger) recipes.

In addition, I agonized over my mother's high blood pressure attacks and her heart palpitating at a faster rate, both of which were getting more frequent. I would video call her until she was better because I know that she only needed someone to talk to, to listen how her day went or simply hear her woes and small triumphs. I am glad



that my daughter has always been vocal about her feelings and opinions that I knew she was okay. While it is difficult to get hold of my husband for regular call or FaceTime due to the poor signal where he is, I always trust that he is also coping well, being alone on the farm and with our family's physical separation. In our 23 years of marriage, I have seen his resilience when faced with any challenge. We may be separated physically but our lives are but one. 1 Corinthians 13:7 says "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

In July, I reported back to the office on a rather regular basis and was scheduled to go to the Bureau of Immigration on July 21. At home, we had to rethink our way of interacting with each other especially since cases were rising by the thousands each day. Normally, we would use only the air conditioning in one room to save on electricity. This time we decided that the boys will use one bedroom each, and I chose to set up camp in the living room where there was a sofa bed. We observed strict physical distance from each other. We agreed that I will use the common bathroom, and they will use the bathroom in the air conditioned room. They ate at the

dining table, and I used the coffee table beside my sofa bed. I assigned separate toothpaste, bath soap, and dining utensils for each.

At first, I found all these accommodations cumbersome, but these are necessary. As the weeks and months followed, I found the physical distance from my twin boys agonizing. Likewise, I found myself very lonely and a little desperate and asking the universe when can I see my husband and daughter again, and hug my twin boys again. For three days in

We may be separated physically but our lives are but one. 1 Corinthians 13:7 says "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

September, my tears fell uncontrollably at missing my family. It was a painfully sad time. Thankfully, on these days my twin boys regularly checked on me when I was at home.

On the first week of October, I just could not restrain myself any longer, and I embraced my sons so

tight as if it was the end of the world. My sons embraced me back. I was happy but was shocked at what I did. All the restrictions we set ourselves are now down the drain with just one embrace.

During these times when I felt so low and a little depressed, I was grateful to my Columban lay mission family for allowing me my own space of quiet when I was in the Columban lay mission house, for listening to me without judgment when I was ready to share, and they made me feel they were there for me. With them, I did not feel alone.

The pandemic is not yet over, the road to COVID-19 freedom is long, and the end is not yet in sight. However, I continue to have a heart and spirit of gratitude even for what 2020 has been, to seek refuge and strength in HIM for 2021. I remain to trust the Lord's love for us, the love that assures us of his mantle of protection, the love that promises us of His gentle calm and peace when we are overwhelmed with worries. I trust that the Lord's love will see us through this ordeal. CM

Columban lay missionary Mavic Mercene lives and works in the Philippines.

Merry Christmas from Preda

An Update from 2020

By Fr. Shay Cullen

We are sharing with you some of the highlights of the work of Preda Foundation and wish you all a blessed Christmas.

Many Children Saved

As many as 100 children have been saved and recovered at the five Preda homes for abused children in 2020, a happy record of healing and empowerment. One of the important highlights during 2020 is that all the children and the staff have thankfully remained free of Covid-19. The protective measures implemented and strictly maintained has made this possible. During the last year, we were able to receive in our homes 41 girls, rescued and saved from sex abusers, human traffickers and from sex slavery. At present, there are 43 children in the homes for girls. The youngest is

three years old. They were welcomed, given affirmation, support and all their personal needs as soon as they arrived. This year, several were reintegrated into their families.

Healing and Empowerment

Grace, 13 years old, was raped by her biological father. Her mother held her down while she was raped, a horrific heinous crime. She was threatened to stay silent, but she bravely told her sister who told a neighbor. It got to the police, and she was rescued and referred to the Preda home. She is now safe and has begun to heal and recover from the trauma she experienced. With the other children, Grace joined many activities and volunteered to take Emotional Release Therapy. In the padded therapy room, she cried and shouted out her pain and anger at her abusive parents. The children slowly

emerge from their fear and trauma, feeling free and begin to smile for the first time in years.

Many Convictions

Legal action by the healing and empowered children in Preda homes has been very successful in 2020 despite the lockdown and closure of the courts for several months. In 2020 the children, assisted by Preda, succeeded in winning sixteen convictions against their rapists and traffickers. In one major case, a young trafficker and pimp that sold two young girls to a foreign pedophile received two life sentences. In 2019, the children won 20 convictions, and most of the convicted received life sentences so they will not be able to rape any more children. There are many more cases filed by Preda children pending to be resolved by the prosecutors and others are stuck in the court judicial system waiting for a court hearing, some since 2014. For the first time in our history, the children participated in court hearings online, a more child-friendly way than appearing in the court room with the abuser present.

Saving Boys from Sub-human Jails

The Preda Foundation has two homes for male children in conflict with the law (CICL), one in Zambales and one in Cebu. We rescue the boys from filthy, abusive and subhuman government detention centers and jails. They are frequently subjected to abuse and even torture by older inmates and abusive guards. In 2020, Preda rescued more than 30 boys and brought them to start a new life in the Preda home



for boys in conflict with the law in Zambales. In Cebu, we rescued fifteen boys, and they are recovering in the Preda New Dawn Home in Liloan.

Commission on Human Rights

In Preda, the children, some as young as 10 years old, told their stories of torture and abuse in government detention jails. Preda reported it to the Philippine Commission on Human Rights and with help from international supporters, the Philippine CHR was encouraged to open an investigation. The investigators confirmed and verified the torture, and they are taking measures to monitor and prevent more such torture.

Preda contributed to the drafting of a new anti-trafficking ordinance in Olongapo City and conducted the first rescue of eighteen trafficked women, among them four minors, at a beach resort in Barangay Barretto. The minors were referred to the Preda home for healing.

Preventing Changes in Law

In 2020, Preda Foundation continued and increased its lobbying with other NGOs to stop the changing of the child protection law to reduce the age of criminal liability to twelve years old and succeeded to maintain it at fifteen years of age. Then, we campaigned during the pandemic for the release of children from detention centers, and as many as 350 children were released by the authorities to their parents. Some children were rescued by Preda social workers. However, many more minors with pending cases remain in jails.

Helping Indigenous Children

In December 2020, the Preda Foundation turned over six laptops and installed a full CCTV system in the St. Francis Learning Center in Subic town for the use of indigenous Aeta children of Zambales.

The learning center is an excellent boarding and day school exclusively for indigenous children run by the Franciscan Sisters that gives them a peaceful environment to learn together without the discrimination, bullying, racist remarks, teasing and exclusion that some lowland children inflict on the indigenous children.

Buying Mangos and Sharing Food

Preda has worked with 361 Aeta subsistence farmers in Zambales and provided them with relief food packages consisting of ten kilos of rice and mixed groceries four times in 2020. Also, similar food relief packages were distributed to 320 poor families and snacks, candies and toys for their children in Olongapo City area three times in 2020.

Preda bought at higher fair-trade prices the internationally organic-certified Pico 21 tons and Indian mangos 35.50 tons from the 77 Aeta families out of ten communities that have mango crops this year. Preda Fairtrade shared out bonus payments of \$2,767 U.S. to the Aeta families. The mangos are made into organically-certified mango puree.

Mango Sapling Distribution

Also, with the help of the Columban Fathers and Merry Year Foundation in South Korea, we provided the Aeta with 2,000 mango saplings. The Aeta families planted them over the mountains of Zambales to help them reforest and strengthen their claim to their ancestral lands and prevent mining companies and grabbers stealing their lands. In Mindanao, Preda bought 659 tons of fair trade mangos from the members of our small farmers fair trade association. The mangos are all for export as dried mangos and conventional purees to World Shops in Germany and the UK.

Preda Accreditation

The Preda Foundation is a DSWD-licensed and accredited social welfare and development agency, founded in 1974. It is accredited by local government and it has now reached the highest status and standard of excellence. It has been accredited in 2020 by the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) and as a result it has been certified by the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) as a "Donee Institution" since November 2020. Philippine donors are exempted from paying the 30 percent donor's tax. All donations will go to the children, none to administration.

New Partnership with UN Agencies

The United Nations Anti-trafficking and Anti-slavery agencies have recognized Preda as a high standard organization for helping trafficked, enslaved and abused children and has granted partial funding for 2020 and 2021.

Awards

In November 2020, Preda marked the anniversary of the awarding of the prestigious International Martin Buber Plaque Prize for defending children's rights. In January 2021 Preda marked its fourth nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. Preda was nominated by the German Human Rights Commissioner Dr. Barbel Koeferl. It was endorsed by several members of the German Parliament. That makes seventeen international awards for defending human rights. Despite the spread of the Covid-19, lockdowns and economic downturn the work of the Foundation has succeeded and will continue in the years ahead with your support and help.

It is with gratitude that we thank you for your support and wish you a Merry Christmas. **CM**

Columban Fr. Shay Cullen lives and works in the Philippines.

The World that God So Loves

Celebrating with Christmas Cards

By Fr. Vincent Busch

The Subanens are an indigenous people whose ancestral habitat is the highlands of Western Mindanao in the Philippines. Guided by the Columban Sisters who had been living and working with the Subanens since 1983 I began working with the Subanens in the year 2000. I came to see how their traditional way of life helped keep their habitat healthy, and, how, in turn, their habitat provided their daily food. I also came to see how the beauty of their habitat evoked in them an awareness of the spiritual dimension in the natural world, and I came to appreciate how they communicated with that dimension through music, ritual, and dance.

The Subanen way of life had a long crafting tradition. They developed, for example, clever ways to shape rattan, bamboo, grasses, and palm leaves into baskets, tools, furniture, mats, hats, musical instruments and even the walls and roofs of their homes. Attracted by their crafting tradition I worked with Subanens to form a project called Subanen Crafts. Each year, as part of that project, we create Christmas cards whose images celebrate ordinary, thoughtful ways that Joseph and Mary cared for each other. In this article I'll share stories about how their cards celebrate Christmas, their habitat, and the ordinary but profound acts of caring people.

The process we used to design our cards began with listing ordinary, thoughtful ways that the Subanen people cared for each other. From that list we then selected activities that Joseph and Mary might possibly do

while living in a stable. My job was to create card-sized drawings of Mary and Joseph doing those activities.

This first drawing is an example of what the cards look like before and after they are hand-colored and inlaid with colored paper. In this card Mary holds Jesus securely in a Subanen-style sling while Joseph repairs the manger. Subanens constantly have to repair their tools, belongings and homes, so it was natural that we would have Joseph using his carpenter skills to repair the manger.

Instead of a stable I drew Mary and Joseph within an image of our planet – the temporary shelter of all God's creatures. Above Mary and Joseph I drew the mountainous homeland of the Subanens whose climate, forest, rivers, and soil provide them with a safe and bountiful habitat. The Subanen people know that just as Joseph made the manger a safe place for Jesus they need to make their habitat a safe and healthy place or their children.

This next card shows Joseph giving Mary some food. Subanens make nutritious soups using leaves, vegetables and root crops from their small garden plots. To cook these ingredients they need water and firewood which are readily available if their forest and its streams are healthy.

This card calls to mind the words in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." The words in that prayer and in that phrase that make it a prayer for the common good are "Us" and "Our." How limited that prayer would sound if it said, "Give me my daily bread."

In the Philippines economic policies that many thought would

enhance the nation's progress and development turned out to be hostile to the common good. These policies allowed extractive industries to make quick profits at the long-term cost of polluting and degrading the nation's seas, rivers, forests, air and farmland.

For example, from 1950 to 1990 logging companies deforested huge areas of the Subanens' homeland. These companies made huge profits which allowed their owners, shareholders, and a few workers to acquire the food that they prayerfully asked God to give them but in the process they caused permanent damage to the food-producing forest and soil of the Subanens.

The damage went beyond the Subanens' homeland. Without forest cover monsoon rains quickly became torrents of muddy water that cascaded down the mountains clogging irrigation systems and smothering coastal reefs and fisheries. In the aftermath of this deforestation many Subanens left their homeland to seek work in cities and towns as servants and menial laborers. In our small way the Subanen crafters are working with programs of the Columban Sisters that are restoring their God-given habitat so that its ecosystems might continually provide a better life for all into the future.

The next card shows a thoughtful shepherd bringing some kindling wood to Mary and Joseph as fuel for their warming fire. This image has a meaningful background story. I once saw a Subanen man carrying a huge bundle of kindling wood down a steep mountain trail. I learned later that this man regularly hiked 10 kilometers,

or about 7 miles, to the town so he could sell his burden for a few coins – enough to buy a few handfuls of rice for his family. The Subanens belong to families who supported each other through such ordinary but profound acts of love. This card honors one such act and, in doing so, helps us see the deep love that the Christ child will experience with his parents.

In this next card we show Joseph sweeping the stable while of Mary spreads a blanket over the manger. It looks like Joseph has stopped his sweeping to look at Mary and Jesus. I can imagine him experiencing the bond parents have with their children. Mary and Joseph will deeply feel the joys and sufferings of Jesus throughout their lives.

The Bible points to this parent-child bond as an example of God's enduring love for His people: "Can a woman forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child of her womb? Though she may forget I will not forget you." (Isaiah 49:15) Jesus expands the embrace of God's

love to include all creation: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." (Mark 16: 15) In our cards the globe represents the whole of creation that God so loves.

In this last card we show Joseph pouring water into a basin while Mary puts fresh straw in the manger. For the Subanens, fetching water often involves a steep downhill hike to a forest-fed stream. The Subanens can easily imagine Joseph needing to go some distance to get the water he is pouring.

As deserts spread throughout our over-heated planet thousands of people, mostly women, have to walk ever greater distances to get water for their families. Jesus praises those who give drink to the thirsty (Matthew 25: 37-40) so it makes sense that he would praise people who, through their work and their way of life, enhance the ecosystems that provide that water.

As Joseph pours water he watches as Mary prepares a safe and comfortable resting place for Jesus. While I was drawing Mary I thought

to myself, "What if Mary saved that handful of straw she was placing in the manger and somehow it was passed down to this day as relic of the place where Jesus was born?" Such a relic would be venerated in all our churches. No doubt, when Mary and Joseph fled Bethlehem to escape Herod's soldiers the straw remained as animal feed and, once eaten, would be recycled as dung to fertilize the soil, and there it would become, yet again, a nurturing resting place – this time as fertile soil for plants and trees. In the vastness of the universe the Earth is but a tiny, fragile "stable" for all God's creatures. God so loved the world that He sent His Son to be born in that stable. In a wee corner of that stable I have come to know many Subanens who are nurturing their life-giving habitat. Their Christmas cards celebrate the ordinary yet profound ways that they care for each other and for the world that God so loves. CM

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



1. Initial drawing prior to adding color and shapes



1. Joseph repairs the manger



2. Joseph gives food to Mary



3. Shepherd arrives with kindling



4. Joseph cleans the stable



5. Joseph pours the water

A Conversion Story

A New Family

By Fr. Patrick Colgan

Atil Kumar Singh (aka Bobby) is an Indo-Fijian carpenter who lives beside a Fijian village called Natunuku, in the parish of Christ the King, Ba. He was a Hindu and married an Indian woman, a relationship which produced one son but broke up after a couple of years. He then married an ethnic Fijian woman from Natunuku, who is the sister of our parish catechist there, Mr. Savenaca Nakuturi. They also broke up, after the sad death of their child. In this sadness, it was the support of the Fijian Catholic community and their persistent invitations to Bobby to come to church and their social gatherings, which kept him sane and kindled an interest in him to consider leaving the religion of his parents and become a Christian. For fifteen years, he came to church, barely understanding the words of the liturgy spoken in standard Fijian. He speaks Hindi and the Ba dialect of Fijian. He also does not read or write well so couldn't follow the texts easily. But he hung in and on my arrival in the parish in June 2020, and noticing the unusual sight of an Indo Fijian attending our village liturgies, I invited him to consider joining the RCIA program to be baptized. He accepted and with the help of an Indo Fijian school teacher, Mr. Bernard Saverio, we were able to teach Bobby the basics of the faith. What he might not know through book learning, he more than makes up for by faith and enthusiasm for his new family and church.

This is what Bernard said of their classes together: "This was an enlightening experience. I have never met such a candidate before. He was so eager and made my teaching enjoyable.



Bernard, Fr. Pat and Bobby



The church before the baptism

It was never a burden, in fact I looked forward to every class."

The village catechist, his brother-in-law said: "After Bobby's divorce with my sister, he was very lonely. We kept inviting him home and to church. We are close. He was coming to Mass for fifteen years, but only in the last year, got really enthusiastic about it."

The final word goes to Bobby himself: "I am so happy today. This has been a blessing. My *tavale* (brother-

in-law) and Master have taught me everything. As long as I live, I will follow this Church. This is my family now."

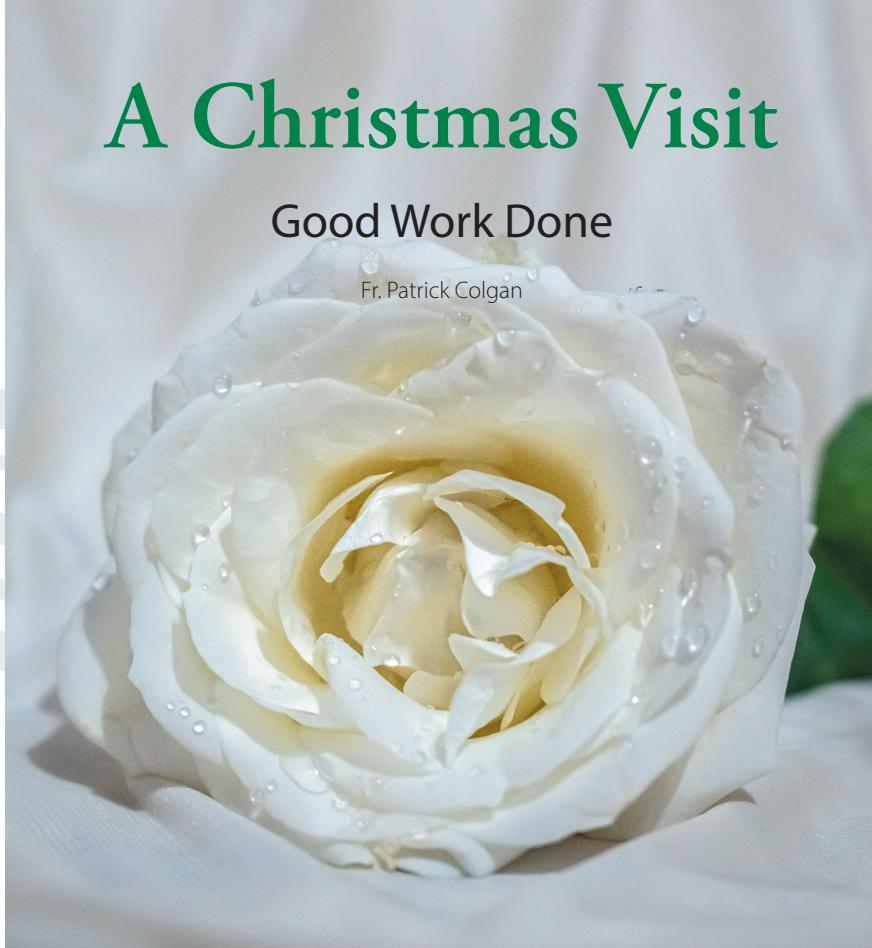
Atil Singh Kumar (aka Bobby) was baptised, confirmed and received into full communion of the Catholic Church on the Feast of the Holy Family, December 27, 2020, by Columban Fr. Patrick Colgan. **CM**

Columban Fr. Patrick Colgan lives and works in Fiji.

A Christmas Visit

Good Work Done

Fr. Patrick Colgan



On December 19, 2020, 29 years and three days after his burial in Lautoka, Fiji, a small group went from Ba parish to investigate the condition of Fr. Keelan's grave, and pay him a Christmas visit. The group was Columban Fr. Teakare Betero, assistant parish priest, along with Paul Qalo and his son Isaac. Armed with knives normally used for cutting the sugar cane for which Fiji is famous, as well as a kerosene powered brush cutter, they located the grave with the help of the prisons department (who normally dig our graves here in Fiji) and set to cutting adjacent grass and washing it.

Paul, who remembered his father-in-law, would often reminisce about the late night, motorbike-chugging visits of Fr. Keelan, was determined to return and paint the grave, to protect it further from the extreme heat and frequent monsoon rains

that batter this part of the island. They also spotted the grave of Sr. Loyola Grehan and cleaned it too. A chance for further work came the following Wednesday when Paul and the parish priest of Ba, Columban Fr. Patrick Colgan, went with oil based white gloss and brushes. The sunny but cool conditions were perfect. We met prisoner officers supervising more grave digging and one of them, a Catholic, proudly remarked that he too would sometimes visit the graves of the Irish missionaries buried there. Fr. Keelan was born in Dublin in 1935 and died of a sudden heart attack while working the parish of Lautoka in 1991. He was a Clongowes Wood and Boston College graduate, and taught at the Columban school of Xavier College for 20 years. He was famous for his encyclopedic knowledge of English literature, his fluency in many languages including Spanish, Fijian

and Hindi, and his nightly ritual of kava drinking accompanied by a fixed succession of tobacco products – Benson and Hedges, *sukhi* (local tobacco wrapped in newspaper), pipe and finally one Cuban cigar per night. And of course, his noisy motorbike! In contrast, Sr. Loyola was born on December 27, 1918, in Drummore West, Co Sligo, a month after the end of World War One. From 1947 to 1962 she taught in New Zealand and Australia. In 1962 she came to Fiji and taught at Loreto High School and then at Saint John's College, Levuka. It is remembered that she taught with passion and an expectation of only the best from her students, both in the classroom and out of it. She died at the age of 100 on July 31, 2019. May they both rest in peace. **CM**

Columban Fr. Patrick Colgan lives and works in Fiji.

The Challenge of Gift Giving

Undreamed of Fruit

By Fr. Jim Mulroney

Ping-pong played an instrumental part in thawing the freeze between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America in the 1970s. While far from being the cause, as friction with Russia was already pivoting Beijing towards Washington, a simple gesture of welcome from Zhuang Zedong, a member of the Chinese Table Tennis Team at the Nagoya World Championships, towards a stranded American rival proved an important catalyst to the thaw.

Zhuang overcame a lifetime of anti-American education to give a small gift to Glenn Cowan, who was hitching a ride on the Chinese team bus after missing his own. The gift of a cheap screen painting of a mountain scene in his home country may have been small, but it was the best Zhuang could find in his bag.

The then-chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong, later described Zhuang as having good hands for table tennis, before enthusiastically adding, and a good head for international relations! While a furthering of international relations was the furthest thing from Zhuang's mind at the time, he has gone down in history as a significant player in instigating what today is referred to as Ping-Pong Diplomacy.

And it all began with two agonizing decisions. Firstly, welcoming a stranger from China's number one enemy, and secondly, giving the lone American some memento of their meeting. Both ran against the grain of his entire life's education.

In any other circumstance, Zhuang's gesture would have passed unnoticed by the world. It was a brave act of giving, but much of its power lay in the graciousness and joy with which Cowan received and cherished the gift.

While naturally there is a lot more to this story, it was the sort of meeting an English monk of some 800 years

Gifts play an important part in our society and Christmas is our biggest season of gift-giving. Some gifts are cherished and a source of great joy; others put aside with little care or even passed onto others.

ago described as a combination of belief in the other, harmony in the soul, deep respect and a hefty dose of goodwill, which, he noted, can bear undreamed of fruit.

Gifts play an important part in our society and Christmas is our biggest season of gift-giving. Some gifts are cherished and a source of great joy; others put aside with little care or even passed onto others. Perhaps it is true it is the thought that counts, but the single, well-considered thought can be worth a thousand cast in haste.

There are occasions that society mores dictate giving. Little is



expected. The simple remembrance may be appreciated, but equally regarded with scorn. Ignoring the occasion can also be a source of hurt. It's a sort of Catch 22.

There are many dimensions to gift giving, and Advent is a good time to think about them. Our purchases have an economic impact, so we can think about where we source them. We can choose to support big, conglomerate companies or small business enterprises. And, most importantly, we can ask about the condition of the labor that went into the manufacture, rather than the glamor attached to the maker's label.



M E R R Y

C H R I S T M A S

There are some things we can make ourselves, which can touch the recipient deeply. Others can relate to an important occasion in a relationship. We can give an experience, a tour of an historic site or place of importance to the recipient.

Thought and preparation put into the choice of a gift can add to the enjoyment of the giving, as well as the joy of receiving. It does not have to be designer label, but if designed for the person on the receiving end it can be a great boost to the relationship between us.

Not all of our gifts can be as earthshaking as the one from the

Chinese table tennis player, but perhaps a gift given to someone or some enterprise we have been conditioned to believe is our enemy can do wonders to our ability to receive with a graciousness that is truly life-giving.

During Advent, we are preparing our souls to welcome the Christ-Child. We are on the receiving end of this gift and that is a challenge.

During Advent, we are preparing our souls to welcome the Christ-Child. We are on the receiving end of this gift and that is a challenge. It is a gift designed for us by God and preparing what we give to others well can help us prepare to receive this most precious of all gifts—the supreme love of God.

Given with love and received with joy, it can truly be a combination of belief in the other, harmony in the soul, deep respect and a hefty dose of goodwill, which can bear undreamed of fruit. CM

Columban Fr. Jim Mulroney resides in Essendon, Australia.

Christmas Greetings

Pakistan 2020

By Fr. Liam O'Callaghan

Christmas greetings to you, and I hope this finds you and your loved ones well and in good health. It is hard to believe that another year is almost over. I would like to share with you some of this year's happenings for me.

2020 has been turned upside down by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has caused such devastation, death and suffering. With further spikes of infections and new variants of the virus emerging, especially in Britain and elsewhere, resulting in fresh lock-downs in many countries, 2021 is going to begin very much as 2020

ended but the arrival of vaccines offer hope to a struggling world, though we are still going to have to be very careful for a while yet.

In Pakistan, the first two cases were confirmed on February 26 in Karachi and quickly spread to all provinces; on April 1, the country was put on a nation-wide lockdown and extended twice until May 9. The lockdown caused much suffering especially to daily wage earners, who became unemployed overnight, and many Christians fell into this category with various church groups and NGOs helping out with food rations, as

well as an economic relief package from the government. As lockdown was lifted, numbers did not grow as much as was feared and people became complacent about wearing face masks, etc. If it spread like in other countries, the consequences could have been disastrous, how it did not—different strain of virus? immunity?—can only be guessed at. On November 26, the government announced “smart” lockdowns and closed all educational institutions until January 11, as cases began to rise. The official figures for Pakistan [for year end 2020] were 469,482 infections and 9,816 deaths though the actual figure is likely to be much higher.

Once the lockdown started, so much of what is considered normal was put on hold with schools, churches and normal activities closed or postponed for later. The means of communication were now Zoom calls, and it helped the Columban group here stay in touch. A number of meetings were held this way as we are scattered in four different cities around Sindh province. We are nine in total in Pakistan—two lay missionaries and seven ordained – from four different countries, namely, New Zealand, Fiji, Philippines and Ireland. Our priority areas of work are tribal ministry, justice and peace, ecological work and inter-faith relations.

I am based in an apartment in a Muslim community in Hyderabad city, population 1.73 million, the second biggest city in Sindh province after Karachi. I am working full-time in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) and Interreligious dialogue (IRD) issues in the diocese





of Hyderabad with Columban co-worker, Danish Yakoob. Pakistan is the fifth most vulnerable country in the world to climate change for the 20-year period from 1999-2018 according to Germanwatch Climate Risk Index 2020, which has led directly to 10,000 deaths through extreme weather events in that period. Our environmental project this year had to be cancelled; and with their agreement, the unspent funding was diverted to our Covid-19 response efforts.

Politically, Pakistan is struggling once again. In July 2018, the general election took place which brought former cricket World cup winning captain, Imran Khan, and his PTI party to power. However, he failed to get an overall majority and had to enter into a fragile coalition. However, as the government continues to struggle, there have been three cabinet reshuffles, two of them in 2020 (April and December). The Covid-19 pandemic is having a severe effect on the political situation in 2020 as the government struggles to cope with the on-going crisis. In September, a coalition of eleven opposition parties, the Pakistan Democratic Movement, was formed with the aim of replacing

the Imran Khan regime. They held big gatherings in a number of cities in recent weeks and plan a “long march” to Islamabad in January. The political climate of great uncertainty is sure to continue in the New Year.

Economically, the country is struggling very badly with a high level of indebtedness. According to the IMF, Government debt rose to 76.7% of GDP, Pakistan already owes the IMF \$5.8 billion from past bailouts, and has only once completed its past programs. Due largely to the Covid-19 pandemic, economic growth is expected to slow to -1.5% in 2020 and pick up to 2% in 2021. A weaker rupee resulted in an inflation rate of 6.7% in 2019, and it is expected to peak at 11.1% in 2020 (according to the World Economic Outlook, IMF).

The Human Rights Watch 2020 report makes for sobering reading. Although Prime Minister Imran Khan pledged to make social justice a priority after taking office in July 2018, his administration has increased restrictions on media, the political opposition, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Women, religious minorities, and transgender people continued to face violence,

discrimination, and persecution, with authorities often failing to provide adequate protection or hold perpetrators accountable. Pakistani law enforcement agencies were responsible for human rights violations, including detention without charge and extrajudicial killings.

There continues to be a high level of fear among religious minorities and the continued abuse of the so-called blasphemy laws leads to much of this fear. The Pakistani government did not amend or repeal blasphemy law provisions that provide a pretext for violence against religious minorities, as well as arbitrary arrests and prosecution. Hundreds have been arrested over blasphemy allegations, most of them members of religious minorities. The death penalty is mandatory for blasphemy, and about forty people remain on death row.

Over five million primary school-age children are out of school, most of them girls, for reasons including lack of schools in their areas, child marriage, and gender discrimination. School closures because of the lockdown and many people's limited access to online facilities means that this school year will be severely affected for many children and may have to be repeated. Pakistan still has a lot to do according to the report to create a fairer society, and there is not a lot to indicate it will happen any time soon.

I wish you all the blessings you and your loved ones need at this time and that the celebration of the birth of Emmanuel, God-with-us, will assure us all that God is with us in the ups and downs of daily life. I especially pray that the newborn prince of peace be a source of good news, love and peace for you this Christmas and throughout the New Year. ☺

Columban Fr. Liam O'Callaghan lives and works in Pakistan.

Posada

Listen and Feel

By Sainaina Tamatawale

Nine days before Christmas, the Christian community where I live takes part in what they call the “*Posada*.” It’s an annual tradition of faith practice among the Mexican people here, remembering the time when Joseph and Mary went looking for an inn where she could give birth to Jesus Christ.

During those nine days I usually participated with our parishioners for the Posada in the Corpus Christi parish, in Rancho Anapra, Juarez, Mexico. I was really touched by the words of the song sung during the ceremony. We travel to one house each night over nine nights. At each house, one group was outside holding the “*Peregrino*” which is the statue of Mary on the donkey with St. Joseph. The group inside responded to their request singing a song, and the pair are recognized and allowed to enter.

When the people sang: “*Mi esposa es Maria, es la Reina del cielo y Madre va a ser del Divino Verbo*” (“My Wife is Maria, she is the Queen of Heaven and Mother of the Divine Word”) I was really touched, that these were the words that St. Joseph spoke while searching for a place where Jesus would be born. I learned to see and honor St. Joseph for being the guardian of the Word.

On the eighth day of the Posada, the people asked me to hold the peregrine statue and lead the group to knock at the door. I saw the crowd following me. I looked at the peregrine statue I was holding, and I was reminded that this is the way I am invited to journey with the people here in Rancho Anapra, to be open, to be part of their family and to journey with them, placing the holy family as the center of our lives and our families.



My journey with the people is joyful and life giving. I feel the peace to be able to look beyond my little faith.

In silence I prayed that in our journey of faith together, we will open our hearts to allow Jesus to lead our lives always. I believe that it is when we really feel the inner peace within us, then we will be able to share the peace of the Lord Jesus to one another. This beautiful faith tradition of the Posada has become for me, a way of entrusting to the Holy Family the protection of all the people and their beloved families, especially the migrants who are fleeing from their countries because of violence, war, injustice, discrimination, and poverty. It is the reality we live in today.

In reflecting on this symbolic faith journey with the Mexican people, I came to a deeper awareness that within me is a space where the Lord Jesus

wants to dwell. I asked myself then, how often do I open my heart to listen and feel Jesus’ presence in me, in the innermost depth of my being?

After several years working in Mexico, Columban lay missionary Sainaina Tamatawale recently accepted an appointment to the Columban Lay Mission leadership team in Hong Kong.

The Meaning of Posada

Posada is a Spanish word meaning lodging, or accommodations, which in this case refers to the inn from the Nativity story. It uses the plural form as the celebration lasts for a nine-day interval (called the *novena*) during the Christmas season, which represents the nine-month pregnancy of Mary, the mother of Christ Jesus.



LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

1% of Your Estate Continues the Mission Work

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

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

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

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



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

www.columban.org
toll-free: 877/299-1920
donorrelations@columban.org

Christmas Away from Home

In this Time of Pandemic

By Latai Muller

Christmas is a time of peace and happiness within the family, but Christmas 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic had some disruptive twists resulting in a unique but significant Christmas experience not just for me but for all of us. The added twist for me was that it was my first Christmas on mission, far from my home in Tonga. The restrictions on gatherings, the nighttime curfew, the limited church attendance, the wearing of face masks and face shields and social distancing – all of these have added to the “strangeness” of Christmas.

Problems do not stop us from celebrating Christmas—be it a pandemic or typhoons, we Filipinos manage to recover.

The thought of living with restrictions over Christmas on account of the pandemic could easily cause many to feel anxious, angry, or helpless, and I too, could resonate with those feelings. Christmas under these restrictive circumstances invoked feelings of sadness within me because not only am I missing my family, but also the thought of not being able to celebrate it the conventional way added insult to injury.

However, I needed to transcend above the things that are beyond my control. This brought me to a place to reflect deeply on the reason why I am here on mission. I found the words of Pope Francis about Christmas to

be very comforting—God never gives someone a gift they are not capable of receiving. If he gives us the gift of Christmas, it is because we all have the ability to understand and receive it. These words made me realize that there are still many ways for me to search and encounter God to make my Christmas more meaningful.

The Christmas celebrations I have experienced in Cagayan de Oro have given me an insight into the spirituality of the Filipinos which is expressed in so many ways. I have experienced some of them, like the *Simbang gabi*, a Novena Mass for nine consecutive nights before Christmas or dawn Mass, which I fully attended. I have witnessed families attending Mass together and the Noche Buena where most families would stay awake during Christmas Eve. I saw the Filipino love for singing karaoke; their lavish food preparation; tangible gift giving, all of which took place while being conscious of the pandemic restrictions. I believe these are just a few of the many customs and practices among the Filipinos, but they leave me with the impression that they can maintain a positive spirit even in the midst of a pandemic.

I once asked a taxi driver “Kuya,” (older brother) “how do you feel about Christmas this year?” I was surprised with his answer. He said, “I am happy and still thankful because my family is complete. Problems do not stop us from celebrating Christmas—be it a pandemic or typhoons, we Filipinos manage to recover.” His answer really touched me, and awakened in me a



realization that God’s work manifests in different ways. Even during a global pandemic while I was celebrating my first Christmas away from home, I still managed to recover my Christmas spirit by spending time with people I have met along the way in mission.

Nevertheless, I have accepted that Christmas in a new place would never be the same as the one we celebrate in Tonga. Having acknowledged my initial feelings of sadness and having been guided to transcend above that sadness, made my first Christmas on mission enjoyable and meaningful, even if it was during a pandemic.

Being able to experience the newness of everything, new companions, new places, new experiences, new traditions has been the most precious gift I have ever received for Christmas. I had a Blessed Christmas after all. **CM**

Originally from Tonga, Columban lay missionary Latai Muller lives and works in the Philippines.

Truly Something Special

In the midst of all the busyness that encumbers the days leading up to Christmas there is a desperate need for a moment of silent wonder as we are invited into the mystery that changes everything, the mystery of the incarnation. In our soul we know this mystery needs to be celebrated by more than wrapping presents and overeating!

We want to see and touch and be seen and touched by the Divine child. We long to experience and share in the hope and joy this holy night promises. The angels appeared to shepherds: "Do not be afraid...A savior is born for all people...and here is the sign...you will find a child lying in a manger." In our worldly view we might quibble, "What do you mean 'lying in a manger'...in a stable?" What kind of savior is born in a stable?" Yet centuries of prophesies, the hopes of tribes and peoples are fulfilled in a baby in a stable in Bethlehem.

What is the significance of all this? God, who is beyond our comprehension, became a vulnerable baby so that we might connect with Him. Have you ever been able not to smile at a baby? He is born, not in a palace, but in a stable. The mystic, Thomas Merton pointed out, "Christ always seeks the straw of the most desolate cribs to make his Bethlehem." Jesus came to save me from those desolate parts of my life, the sins I do not want to acknowledge. This December it is still possible to let Him come close and touch those wounds and heal that pain. Are you carrying resentments and hurts? Surrender them to



FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. John Burger

the infant Jesus. Let the trusting poor shepherd within you emerge from behind your mask of toughness and sophistication.

The child is placed in a manger, a feeding trough for animals, reminding us that the altar, the communion table, becomes a place of nourishment every time we come to the Eucharist. It is the place where we come to eat and drink the body of the Lord so that Christ becomes part of us and we become that which we eat. The savior became small and vulnerable to make our



hearts more tender. May we all be filled with a deep joy in knowing that because of this night everything is transformed, made new.

Do not be surprised that those who have the least trouble accepting this message are the ragged, even the rejected poor. The Good News is bad news for those who cannot surrender to it. They will reject and even persecute those who bear witness to it.

God is with us, not as some frightening judge, but as a baby who needs and wants human warmth. He is with us when we are caught in an impossible situation, or face

God, who is beyond our comprehension, became a vulnerable baby so that we might connect with Him.

illness, or when we laugh with our friends, or when we tear up over the death of a loved one.

Because of the birth of this child nothing human remains outside the presence of God. Let's return that love by accepting our mission. The late great Anglican theologian, Max Warren put it this way:

*Jesus himself is the great commission.
He is the one who is sent.
He himself is the message.
In his life and through his teaching and actions,
In his dying and in his death,
And by his resurrection,
He is the proclamation of his Message.
He is its herald.*

This fundamental affirmation is the theme for the New Testament.

A handwritten signature of Fr. John Burger.

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



*"If you knew the gift of God and
who it is who is saying
to you 'give me a drink,' you
would have asked and he would
have given you living water."*
— JOHN 4:10

If you feel a thirst to spread the word of Jesus, we would love to discuss missionary life with you.

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 Road

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