



# Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

March/April 2026

## Spiritual Journey of Missionaries

# C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Spiritual Journey of Missionaries



## CITY OF HOPE

12



## ENCOUNTERING THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN EVERYDAY LIFE

14

### 4 LIFE ON A PLATTER

Pastry-Making Leads to a Sweeter Life for All

### 5 FROM PARTICIPANTS TO GROUP LEADERS

Sharing the Journey

### 6 CLEAR NEW DAWN

A Blessing in Disguise

### 8 PARISH MISSION

Enlightening and Engaging

### 10 "GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT YOURSELVES!" (LUKE 9,13)

Wonderful Apostolate

### 16 THE SEVEN MILLION MIRACLE

Celebrating the Prayer Trust

### 18 THE BURNING BUSH

Opportunity for Renewal

### 20 PRAYER IN THE CITY

Connecting Nature and Prayer

### 22 MIGRANT CARE

Ocean of Hope

## DEPARTMENTS

### 3 IN SO MANY WORDS

### 23 FROM THE DIRECTOR

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# Columban Mission

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

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



# In So Many Words

By Gertrudes C. Samson

## God of New Beginnings

**A**fter I finished my term as Columban Lay Mission Coordinator in Britain, I asked God: “What do you want me to do next, Lord? Which former ministry would you like me to go back to?” When I said yes to the leadership ministry, I left behind outreach ministries that I truly loved.

God made me realize His response was different. He spoke wisdom into my heart, instructing me to find something new. This guidance grew stronger as the days went by.

Suddenly, I remembered this Bible verse: “I am beginning something new, do you not perceive it?” from Isaiah 43:19.

God is indeed a God of new beginnings, leading me to a new ministry called Community Research. I felt incredibly happy and excited when I was invited to join the Community Research Team, which was organized by the Baobab Women’s Project and the University of Birmingham in 2024.

As a Columban lay missionary assigned to Birmingham since 2010, serving for many years in various charities that assist migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, I have become aware of their issues and struggles. I always pray for them and their concerns. But as we journey together, a question keeps coming back in my heart: “What else could be done to help improve their lives for the better?”

Part of the answers came through my involvement in Community Research.

I gained practical research experience at the University of Birmingham and the Baobab Women’s Project. This provided me with another chance to contribute positively—by recording real-life stories of migrants behind the numbers, including their struggles, concerns, and pleas, while keeping their identities confidential.

Community Research enables me to share my knowledge and insights with students pursuing Master’s degrees in Migration Studies about the challenges faced by migrant communities. As a team and in consultation with the people involved, we regularly suggest suitable solutions and advocate for policy changes to enhance lives.

I am now fourteen years into my mission, and I will finish my term on April 1, 2026. God is calling me to another new beginning with my fiancé Kush, to build our life together for the long-term future.

The Columbans have been God’s key instruments in many of these new beginnings. My heart is filled with gratitude for the years I have served as a Columban lay missionary and for the lessons I’ve learned along the way, which will guide me in the next stage of my life. Kush and I are very grateful.

I will always feel connected to the Columbans in spirit because their values and priorities in mission will stay close to my heart. The Columbans will remain like family to me, as I have grown with them here in Britain during my service.

As our Regional Director, Fr. John Boles, mentioned in his reply to the letter I wrote to him: “Be assured that, beyond April 2026, you will always have a place in our hearts and be regarded as a cherished member of the extended – if no longer immediate—Columban family.” That message really touched my heart. I realized that the end of my term doesn’t mean goodbye, but a new way of relating.

You are indeed, God of new beginnings!

*Gertrudes Samson will end her term as a Columban lay missionary in April 2026.*

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*God made me realize His response was different.  
He spoke wisdom into my heart, instructing me to  
find something new.*

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# Life on a Platter

## Pastry-Making Leads to a Sweeter Life for All

By Fr. Timothy Mulroy

Among the seventeen women who had come to live in the city of Lima, Peru, several were migrants from Ecuador, while others had arrived from Venezuela. Some were Peruvians who had traveled from remote towns or villages to the capital city in search of a better life for themselves and their families. And one was a Peruvian who, after spending eight years in Mexico, now felt like a foreigner back in her home country.

Almost all of them felt overwhelmed by the frantic pace of city life, and though they were surrounded by over eleven million people, frequently felt isolated and lonely without the support of their extended family, neighbors and friends.

Since more than one quarter of the people of Lima live in poverty, it is a major challenge for new arrivals to find suitable accommodation and regular employment. Besides, many of those women struggled to find work due to their low level of formal education, or were unable to take on certain kinds of jobs due to family commitments.

They came together, therefore, at the Columban Mission Center in Lima to attend a series of ten workshops on making pastries, in the hope of equipping themselves to start a small business in their own home, which would enable them to provide additional financial support for their families.



Participants celebrate at the conclusion of the pastry-making workshop.

“However, the pastry-making workshops were intended not just to enable those seventeen women to support their families, but also to grow as persons in their new surroundings,” emphasizes Marisol Rojas, the Coordinator of the Columban Mission Center.

Elaborating on this broader vision, she explains, “The sessions, which took place twice a week, were led by Elena, an experienced confectioner, so the participants learned the craft of pastry making and explored their own creativity by experimenting with new recipes. At the same time, they grew in trust and in friendship with one another. Over the course of ten weeks, they gradually found the courage to talk with one another about their personal struggles in this huge city, developed the ability to laugh about their mistakes around the oven, and discovered the confidence to share about their dreams for themselves and their families. Moreover, as they listened to one another, they affirmed each other’s courage and resilience. And the gratitude they felt for the ongoing nurturing of their skills and spirits frequently found expression in their spontaneous prayers at the beginning of each session.”

Reflecting on his experience of supporting Marisol Rojas and accompanying another group of women who had participated in a similar workshop series at the Columban Mission Center some months previously, Fr. Dylan Tabaco, a Columban missionary from the Philippines, said, “Creating and baking, learning and relating together enabled the women from various backgrounds to understand and respect each other. Since all of them had experienced the prejudice and pain of being an outsider, they understood the importance of stretching one’s mind and heart to go beyond superficial perceptions and come to know one another at a deeper level. The pastry-making workshops provided them with opportunities to make new friends, gave them confidence and skills to explore new ways to support their families, and deepened their faith in God who accompanies them through all the ups and downs of life.”

While none of the women who have participated in the pastry-making workshops envisage their future as “life on a platter,” all of them have discovered how a platter of delicious pastries nurtures their taste buds, their spirits and their dreams. **CM**

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Columban Fr. Timothy Mulroy lives and works in Britain.

# From Participants to Group Leaders

## Sharing the Journey

Marisol Rojas

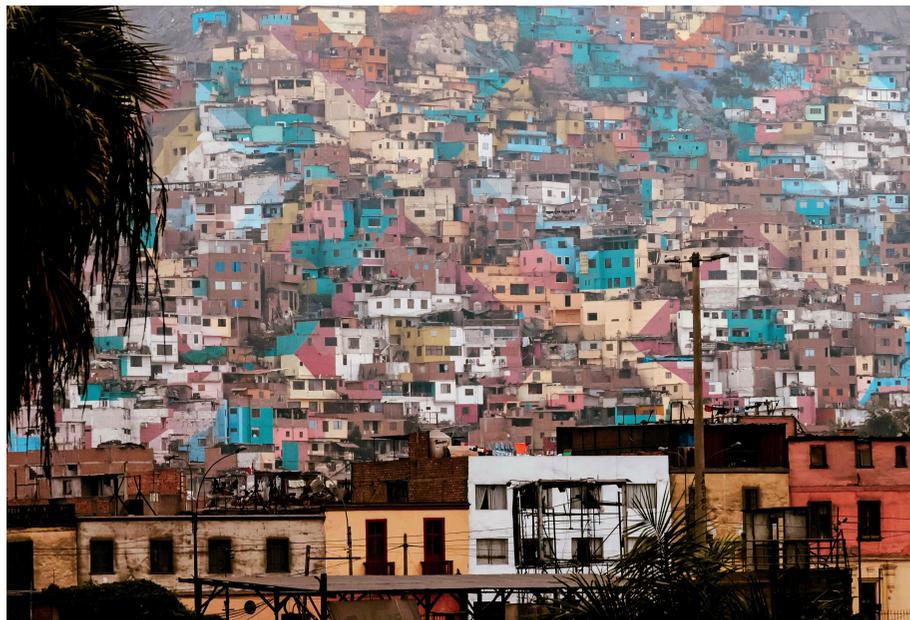
Just a few weeks ago, we embarked on a new adventure--our participants from various migrant nationalities, who participated in our pastry cooking workshops at CCEM, have now become the leaders of our new outreach plan to reach other areas.

For those who are unaware, CCEM is the Columban Centre for Missionary Studies here in Lima, Peru. We organized the workshops to help migrant women grow in self esteem and self confidence and to be able to earn some much needed income for their families.

After concluding the pastry workshop with our second group of migrants, we felt inspired to spread what we had learned in a different way. I've always been eager to take our activities beyond the walls of CCEM, and during our final evaluation—a meeting with both the organizing team and participants—the idea suddenly came to me.

I proposed forming small groups with the same women who had completed the workshops, bringing this shared work to different areas. These are places where people might not have access to such activities, but where we knew they would be welcomed.

At first, I felt insecure, even doubtful, about asking for extra time from these incredible volunteers on their weekends. But to my surprise, every single one of the women accepted. They showed immediate interest and a deep commitment to sharing with people in other communities. I remember one of them saying, “What an honor.” That simple phrase filled me with such pride; it was clear that our simple actions had touched their hearts, fostering a



genuine sense of respect and solidarity.

And so, we began.

Our first visit was to “Tunales,” a community still part of the Columban parish. There, a “soup kitchen” serves lunch from Monday to Friday at a very low cost. The people in this area are wonderfully humble, a mix of migrants from Venezuela and Colombia, as well as locals from various provinces of Peru.

We found a mixed group of participants, young and old, their eyes shining with happiness and curiosity. They were more than ready to join. It was amazing to see people helping each other; though many had likely just met, they encouraged one another effortlessly. Despite the small space, every participant learned how to prepare three short recipes.

More importantly, we created a space to talk about our gifts—the talents given to us by God. We reflected on how we are often unaware of these gifts, living in such a hurry to accomplish daily tasks that we rarely stop to see ourselves as the important, gifted creatures we are.

Sometimes, our life experiences lead us to believe that we are not enough—

that we do not deserve more, cannot learn more, or should simply remain in admiration of others' gifts. We look at what others have and, thinking we lack the same, conclude that we are not as precious.

However, we need not compare ourselves to anyone else. Instead, we are called to be open to God's grace, which manifests His love through countless events in our lives. Our task is to learn to recognize our own God-given value, from the smallest daily blessing to the greatest achievement we reach.

This is an invitation: an invitation to open our eyes and our hearts to embrace our uniqueness as children of God. We were not created to be the same as everyone else. We were created to respect our differences and to share this journey of life together.

As we continue to visit other areas beside Tunales, our mission continues to spread hope and to help one another see the beautiful things that persist, even amidst the weight of our heavy lives. **EM**

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Columban lay missionary Marisol Rojas lives and works in Peru.

# Clear New Dawn

## A Blessing in Disguise

By Fr. John Boles

**W**ater is a significant symbol in many cultures. We cannot live without water.

Water is life. Indeed, in the Catholic and Christian Churches, we enter into new, everlasting life through water baptism. But water can also be a curse. Too little of it can have dire consequences. Too much of it can drown you. However, sometimes, the blessing comes through what appears to be a curse. Let me tell you a story that might illustrate this.

Some years ago, I and took a cheap flight to Marrakesh in Morocco, North Africa, intending to do a 14-day trek from hostel to hostel, from the Mediterranean coast, over the Atlas Mountains, to the Sahara Desert. The hostels were set up by the French during colonial times. Everything was going perfectly until I passed the watershed and entered a very arid region.

One day, as the sun bore down relentlessly, I was desperate for relief—some water—and God answered my prayers. It began to rain. I refreshed myself, filled my canteen, and marched on with renewed vigor. But the rain kept coming, growing heavier. I started to pray, “Thank you, God, that’s enough. Don’t overdo it—enough is enough.” Yet, God didn’t seem to listen to my prayers.

Finally, I reached the river I needed to cross—supposedly via steppingstones. But the stones were completely submerged, and the stream had turned into a raging torrent. There was no way to cross. I waited as night fell and dusk approached. I thought, “What am I going to do?”

The only refuge I could find was a sheepfold—a small compound where



sheep were kept. I had no choice but to hunker down under a small awning that offered some protection from the rain, surrounded by sheep. Soon, who should appear at the end of the sheepfold, but a shepherd dressed in traditional North African mountain robes. It was like stepping into a story from the Book of Genesis. He was surprised to see me, and I was surprised to see him.

Communication was difficult. I did not speak Arabic or Berber. He spoke no English, but with sign language and some broken French, we managed to understand each other. I explained my problem. He beckoned me to follow him downhill and pointed to a building across the river—obviously his home.

I thought, “That’s wonderful,” but realized we were both stranded on this side of the river; we might have to sleep with the sheep tonight. Then he beckoned me further down, and from beneath a pile of stones, he drew out a plank. He had clearly prepared for this situation before. We used it as a makeshift bridge to cross the raging torrent.

I tried to continue my journey, but he kept signaling and then led me to

his house. There, he introduced me to his wife and sat me down on the floor. After a while, his wife brought a meal, which was delicious. Later, he showed me to an alcove with a blanket and invited me to spend the night in his home.

The next morning, the sun was shining. We had breakfast, and he saw me off with heartfelt gratitude. I also expressed my thanks—both to him and to God—because I had completed the tasks set before me by the Columban missionaries. I had engaged in cross-cultural mission work, operated on the margins, participated in interfaith dialogue, and the Good Shepherd had been with me—the Lamb of God

So, you see, what initially seemed to be a curse of water turned out to be a blessing. I see this as a metaphor for life. Many times, we feel like we’re walking through a valley of darkness or torrential rain, but we must keep faith because who knows? Out of that darkness and rain, God may send a shepherd, build a bridge, offer hospitality, and lead us into a bright, clear new dawn. **CM**

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Columban Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.



# Help Future Generations with a Donation Today

Your gift helps people break the chains of addiction through Columban programs like the Rebirth Rehabilitation Center in Myanmar (formerly Burma).



***Thanks to the generosity of the Columban donors we were able to complete and open the first residential center in the country for women suffering from addiction. In addition, the program provides vocational education training to help young men obtain jobs. We hope to expand this program and offer the men and women who come here a path productive employment and ongoing recovery.***

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

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

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

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- Help further the work and mission of our organization

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



# Parish Mission

## Enlightening and Engaging

By Fr. Al Utzig

I recently finished as pastor of St. Mary's Church in Fontana, California, after thirteen years. It was a great experience for me with 93% of the people there being Hispanic, different generations, from different Spanish-speaking countries, and different backgrounds. I loved it. I was interested when some people from our "Amor y Fe" (Love and Faith) ministry came to me and said they had contact with some Sisters from Colombia who worked in Guatemala. The Sisters were asking for some of us from the U.S. to come down to visit them. I know there are a number of people from Guatemala in the U.S. doing the

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*For me, it was a beautiful experience of meeting people who were not really "poor" but rather living very "simply."*

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dirty, dangerous, difficult jobs that Americans don't really want to do, so I thought we could go down to see the other side of the migration issue—those left behind while their loved ones find work to support their families back home.

The Sisters are a team of three working in the town of Livingston on

the East Coast. One is a pharmacist, the nearest thing they have to a doctor for many miles around. One is a catechist working with thousands of people, children and adults, and the other works with the dozens of parish groups. They told us the parishioners are Garifuna (descendants of African slaves from the 1600s who still speak their own language), Spanish-speaking mestizos, and people who belong to one of the many Mayan groups very common in Guatemala, who also speak their own language.

We didn't want to go empty-handed, so we raised money at St. Mary's by selling tacos and asking for donations.

It was, after all, a “parish mission.” Our people were very generous, some donating \$100. We raised about \$15,000 for this trip. Seven of us went as representatives of St. Mary’s, paying our own way. We used the money collected to rent a van from the capital to the coast, a six-hour drive, then to buy hundreds of pounds of rice, beans, sugar, flour, powdered milk, toilet paper, and many other things. We distributed these items to 400 families in four areas. What a job to repack everything into smaller bags, about 30 pounds each! It took a whole day with about 15 people sweating profusely.



chickens running around everywhere. There are no roads to their plots, so they walk great distances and use boats to get to the town. However, they need money to buy gas and pay for simple needs so often the men have to leave to find paying work. If the work is in the U.S., the paperwork is very complicated and takes years to get a visa if they can even get the visa. The education level is very low so they need someone, a lawyer, to help them, which is very costly and difficult. So, these are some of the “criminals” who come here without papers.

It breaks my heart to see them treated so poorly. The legal process is just too complicated

and costly and time-consuming. They feel they have no other options.

I write this little article of my experience so that our readers might be able to put a personal, human face on those who come to the U.S. without papers. They are simple, good people who just want to provide for their family, where money is so scarce. Our immigration system is very difficult to maneuver in, and inefficient. It is broken and needs to be redone in an understanding, humane way that works for everybody. I don’t have the solution, but it is worth asking the question: “What would Jesus do?” As His disciples, all we can do is respond: “Lord, I will go with you.” Jesus sees people before He sees “criminals” or “sinners.” We must do the same. 

Fr. Al was ordained in 1983, spent 20 years in Korea, 13 years in Fontana, California, and is now Regional Director in Omaha.

After a welcoming Mass using all three languages, with the local Guatemalan pastor and a full church, we distributed 180 bags to those who were in most need in the town —elderly, handicapped, women with children, etc., at the church. Then we packed a truck and headed for the pier to take a boat across a bay and up a river to the first of the Mayan villages.

We did this three times during our days there. Beautiful bay and river with steep forests on both sides. People from the villages met us and helped carry our supplies to their villages in the woods. There were lots of women and beautiful children.

One of the Sisters explained in Spanish who we were and why we came, which was just to say “we see you and know you are our brothers and sisters forming one body of Christ, the Mystical Body.”

I also greeted everyone in the name of St. Mary’s Parish in Spanish. A

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*I don’t have the solution, but it is worth asking the question: “What would Jesus do?” As His disciples, all we can do is respond: “Lord, I will go with you.”*

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local person interpreted into the local language for us. The children sang songs and a member of each family came to receive two bags of the things we brought. Then we had some rooster soup and tortillas that the women had prepared for us in the communal kitchens. We sat around, talked a while, and left.

For me, it was a beautiful experience of meeting people who were not really “poor” but rather living very “simply.” They have village plots of slash-and-burn corn as their staple and

# “Give them something to eat yourselves!” (Luke 9,13)

## Wonderful Apostolate

By Fr. Genovio Cho

**M**y name is Zenobius Cho, and I was born and raised in South Korea. I did not become a Catholic until I was an adult. Of course, my spiritual journey did not end with my entry into the Church. As an adult Catholic, I took seriously the Lord’s command: “As the Father sent me, I also send you.” (John, chapter 18)

I began to search for ways to share my faith even beyond the boundaries of my own country. My missionary journey began when I entered the Columban Fathers Lay Mission Program. After completing the formation training for Columban lay missionaries, I was sent to Chile in 2008. My original plan was to spend three years on mission in Chile and then return to South Korea. I was assigned to the parish of San Matías

(St. Matthias) on the outskirts of the city of Santiago. Like every missionary, I struggled to learn a new language and to adapt to a culture that is very different from my own. However, I found the Chilean people to be friendly and supportive. Gradually, I began to feel at home. I lived alone in a small, rented house which had been used by the Columban Sisters. Across the “pasaje” (passageway) lived my neighbors, a married couple, Juan Vidal and Gladys Carcamo. Juan and Gladys have no children, so I soon became their “adopted son.” I couldn’t complain because Gladys was a great cook and so I became a regular guest at the dining table.

Gladys and Juan were very active in the chapel of *Sagrada Familia* (Holy Family), where I regularly participated

in the celebration of the Eucharist. *Sagrada Familia* has a very active group of lay apostles who are involved in many pastoral activities. I noticed that in addition to the parishioners who lived in the area, every Sunday a different group of couples would come to Mass. After Mass, they did not head home but moved next door to the chapel’s meeting room and kitchen. I learned that the couples belonged to a Catholic movement of married couples called “Sagrada Familia de Nazaret” (Holy Family of Nazareth). Each Sunday, a different community of the movement would come to our chapel and prepare a meal for anyone who needed to be fed. These couples brought the food and prepared it. The guests, each Sunday, included families, the elderly, the unemployed and the homeless. I was invited to sit at the table as were the local priests of the parish. I realized how important sharing a meal together is for building community.

In 2011, I left Chile and returned to South Korea, but my missionary journey was not finished. The years I had spent in Chile helped me to discern that the Lord was calling me to the priesthood. I entered the Columban seminary in Korea and began my preparation for the missionary priesthood. With the grace of God, I was ordained in 2019. I asked the good Lord to let me return to Chile. He heard my prayers, and in 2020, I was assigned to Chile. However, my return to Chile was delayed because of the pandemic. I





returned to Chile in January 2021. Once again, my prayers were heard, and I was assigned to the Parish of San Matias, where I had lived and worked as a lay missionary. Now, I am called to serve God's people as Padre Genovio; that's what the people call me.

I was happy to see that the small communities of married couples continued their apostolate of feeding the hungry on Sundays in the Sagrada Familia chapel. The parish of San Matias has nine chapels in a densely populated sector of the municipality of Puente Alto. As a priest, I had to share the responsibility of providing the sacraments with the pastor, Fr. John Greene and two of our married deacons. I soon discovered that there were a lot more families and individuals who needed food assistance. All the chapels try to provide food packages to those who need it in their sector. That assistance is critical, especially in the winter. When Fr. Greene returned to Ireland, I was appointed pastor.

One of my favorite passages in the Gospel is the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. When the disciples wanted to send away the crowd, Jesus told them, "Give them something to eat yourselves." (Luke 9, 13) If some of my parishioners were going hungry, I would have to do something about it. I hoped that we could do more and I floated the idea of opening a "comedor" (soup kitchen) during the winter months of June, July and August. I wanted the soup kitchen to be open as much as possible and not limited to Sundays. I consulted the parish council, and they agreed. However, they told me that while there would be no problem in getting volunteers to operate the "comedor," they doubted that we could keep it open five days a week. As a parish, we did not have the resources to do that. I told our Columban superior, Fr. Mike Howe, about our project and he promised to get in contact with Columban benefactors in the United States. Once again, our generous

Columban benefactors came through. With their help, we set up the parish comedor in Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza (Our Lady of Hope) chapel.

Our parish comedor has been a great success, feeding between between 80 and 100 people five days a week. The "comensales" (those who share the table) include families with young children, the unemployed, the sick, the elderly and the homeless. Senora Gloria is a senior citizen who comes regularly because the food is good and well prepared. Senora Jordana is a single mother with three children, and she struggles to make ends meet. The comedor helps her to make sure that her children can eat every day. Senorita Carolina has serious health problems, but she is happy to come to the comedor, not only because she is fed, but also because of the friendly way she is treated. Senor Carlos works in construction, but right now he is unemployed. His strong faith brought him to the comedor so that Jesus could feed him. Senorita Maria is a volunteer cook in the comedor, and she feels happy and proud to serve those who are in need. Sister Rosa belongs to the Holy Family Sisters and admits that she did not know how to cook but she is happy to learn. Her only suggestion is that we need a bigger dining room so that no one must wait outside to get a place at the table.

As a lay missionary, I knew the joy of being invited to sit at the table of my parishioners. They taught me that sharing a meal is not just a matter of necessity but a way to build communion and fraternity. I am grateful that now, as a missionary priest, I can share the table with those who are in need and give them something to eat, as Jesus would tell me. I also want to express my gratitude to our Columban benefactors who make this wonderful apostolate possible. **CM**

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Columban Fr. Zenobius Cho (Padre Genovio) lives and works in Chile.

# City of Hope

## No Longer a Dirty Old Town

By Columban Fr. John Boles

“I smelled the Spring on the smoky wind, dirty old town, dirty old town.”

These words from Salford songwriter Ewan MacColl’s classic 1949 ballad “Dirty Old Town” sum up the image of Salford in popular culture. Many see Salford as having been the perfect example of a Victorian mill town, with all the associated urban squalor, disease and pollution.

How fitting, then, that the Columban missionaries and the local diocese should choose Salford as the venue for their combined, day-long pilgrimage bringing “Hope for our Common Home.”

Poor old Salford. It seems to have suffered “the worst of both worlds” – sharing the grimy historical

reputation of nearby Manchester without any of the sporting or cultural glamour of its more famous neighbor. Multiple artistic works have reinforced the image. Local author Walter Greenwood’s 1933 “Love on the Dole,” set in the Salford slum area of Hanky Park, is perhaps the defining British novel of the Great Depression. Salford artist L. S. Lowry immortalized the city with his distinctive mid-20<sup>th</sup> century pictures. In the 1960’s, many “kitchen sink” dramas of stage and screen were inspired by life in Salford, most notably the long-running soap opera “Coronation Street.”

Of course, much has changed—the textile mills gone, the slums demolished, parkland extended, the state-of-the-art commercial and media complex of Salford Quays constructed. Nevertheless, problems of poverty and pollution



On the towpath of the Bridgewater Canal

remain, added to by inter-ethnic tensions and some much-publicized outbreaks of racist violence. Hence, it felt so appropriate to make a statement of our Catholic values here, standing up for social justice and environmental protection—the two pillars that support our “common home.”

On a gloriously bright autumn day, we, some 40 pilgrims, assembled on the outskirts of Salford’s built-up area in the grounds of the diocesan Laudato Si Center, which takes its name from Pope Francis’s ground-breaking 2015 encyclical. This ecological and retreat center has been developed under the





The banner reads "Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor"



The pilgrims arrive at Salford, the "city of hope"



Pilgrims preparing for the walk

gaze of Salford's Bishop John Arnold, lead bishop for the environment in England and Wales. We then set a course for Salford Cathedral in the city center, passing through a whole range of landscapes, from suburban housing and industrial estates to parks and woodlands. We followed a reclaimed railway walk and the towpath of the Bridgewater Canal, the world's oldest, built by James Brindley in 1761.

We crossed motorways, negotiated underpasses and threaded our way through shopping centers.

The pilgrims were as varied as the surroundings. We included Columban priests, lay missionaries, co-workers and volunteers, Emily from the Laudato Si Center, Maltese Sr. Mary Anne, parishioners and Columban supporters from across the diocese, teachers and pupils of different religious and ethnic backgrounds from three high schools. One man walked with a stick, calmly informing us he was shortly to do a seven-day pilgrimage terminating in Rome. A lady accompanied us the whole way, pushing her elderly mother in a wheelchair! We had frequent "prayer stops," two of them in Catholic churches hosted by their respective parish priests. Along the way, we exchanged experiences and life stories.

I felt we were making the perfect statement of faith, hope, care for Creation and unity in diversity.

Disturbingly, we couldn't help but notice occasional flags of St. George draped over bridges or dangling from lamp posts. Apparently, these had nothing to do with support for English soccer or rugby teams, even less with

St. George. Rather, they were evidence of ultra-nationalistic intolerance.

During the closing Mass in Salford Cathedral, presided by Bishop John, we gave thanks for a marvellous day but also reflected on how, just as with Jesus and His disciples on the lake, the boat that is our world is facing stormy waters. When the president of the most powerful nation on Earth calls climate change "a con," when Muslims and Jews are attacked in our cities, when migrants are routinely condemned as "the enemy," when populist zealots seek to co-opt national and religious symbols, then we know that gestures such as the "Hope for our Common Home" pilgrimage are going to become ever more necessary.

Jesus guided His disciples towards calmer waters. We trust and pray that He'll do likewise with us. I was heartened by a phrase from one of the prayers we stopped to share during the pilgrimage.

"Creator God, let the sunrise remind us of your faithful promises, lifting our hearts to hope in your everlasting light." CM

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Columban Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.



# Encountering the Presence of God in Everyday Life

## Returning to the Philippines

By Columban lay missionary Anna Noh Hyein

Taize Prayer with the Malate Parish volunteers

A small bird flew in through the sunlit window. It rested for a moment near the ceiling above the altar, then flew away again. Seeing this little creature during Mass reminded me deeply that I have truly returned to the Philippines. Attending Mass with birds flying around is one of my favorite things about this country. In that moment, I felt the presence of life and of God.

In 2025 I returned to the Philippines after leaving in 2018. I recall vividly my arrival here in 2011. Everything felt new, exciting, and a little scary. Coming back now, the Philippines feels both familiar and unfamiliar. I'm slowly adjusting again,

standing between the memories of the past and the reality of today. The Tagalog language used to flow easily from my mouth, but now it feels distant. So much has changed—bike lanes, delivery apps, online banking, etc. But some things remain the same: Columban colleagues and friends who welcome me, the sound of jeepneys and car horns, the rhythm of the rain, fresh coconut juice and Betamax (grilled coagulated pork blood, a typical Filipino street food), and the women from the candle-making livelihood project with whom I used to work. There are fewer of them now, but their presence still comforts me. As time passes, the Tagalog

words I had buried deep in memory slowly return. Through all this, I feel myself reconnecting with the people, the culture, and creation in the Philippines.

After finishing a 10-week Tagalog refresher course, I started my new assignment at Malate Catholic Church at the end of August 2025. This new mission is opening a fresh chapter in my missionary journey. I now work alongside ordained Columban missionaries, in a community that is familiar with the presence of missionaries. Before, I worked in non-Columban parishes in the Novaliches Diocese. In the parish, I participate in various activities and feel the



Anna (center) with Parish Volunteers, 2025 International Coastal Cleanup



Volunteers of the Feeding Program



The Remedios Garden

Holy Spirit at work in my daily life. I help prepare and serve food to the beneficiaries at the parish feeding program, visit mission areas to meet people, participate in Bible sharing, and pray with other volunteers and youth during the Rosary and Taizé Prayer. In these moments, I feel the Spirit deeply—something that is hard to explain in words.

I'm still adjusting and exploring what I can do here. I'm thinking about how to bring the Society's priorities—supporting migrants and refugees and protecting biodiversity—into parish life. After praying for a young girl who jumped from a hotel in Malate (her parents were both overseas

foreign workers, OFW), I joined a forum called "Parental Migration and Family Welfare." It helped me understand more deeply the pain of OFW families and listen more closely to the "cry of the poor." During the Season of Creation, I joined the Walk for Creation and International Coastal Cleanup at Manila Bay, helped care for the church garden, and sorted donated items for resale for fundraising with the volunteers. These small actions are my way of responding to the "cry of the earth."

Life reveals itself in everyday movements. A tree may look still, but it draws nutrients through its roots and sends life through its veins. A river

flows endlessly toward the sea. My days move like that, too. In this flow, I feel alive. To be alive is not to be still, but to move. And in that movement, there is life. That life leads me to encounter God. It is God's presence that sustains me here and now.

As I live each moment, I want to listen more deeply to the "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." This is how I meet God in my daily life and respond to life with love. I will continue this missionary journey, walking with others and with creation, one day at a time. **CM**

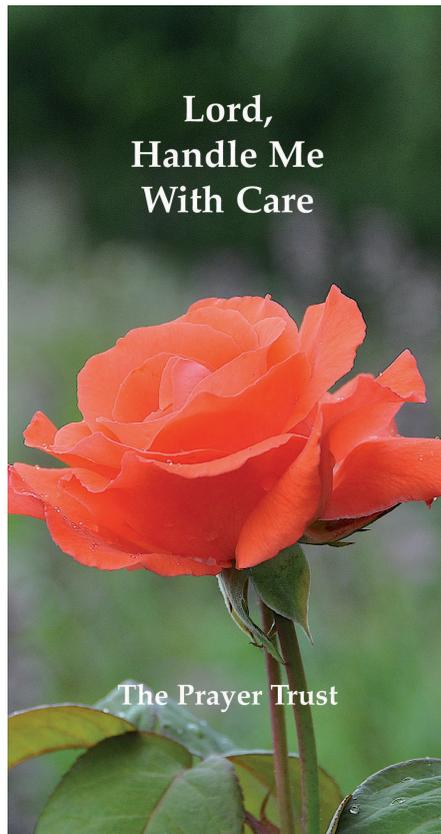
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Columban lay missionary Anna Noh Hyein lives and works in the Philippines.

# The Seven Million Miracle

## Celebrating the Prayer Trust

By Columban Fr. John Boles



**T**ime has flown for Carol Beck, Co-founder of The Prayer Trust, one of the most enduring—and endearing—features of Columban mission ever to come out of Britain.

“Twenty-five years...and it seems only like yesterday since we started,” says Carol. For a quarter of a century, its prolific output of publications—over 150 titles to date—has brought consolation, inspiration and enrichment to thousands.

Translated into various languages, booklets have appeared in Britain, France, Ireland, Australia and the U.S. and as far afield as China and India.

They’ve touched the lives of young and old “parishioners, patients, pilgrims and prisoners, people in

all walks of life and in all situations. Altogether, it is estimated that the number of individual copies produced has surpassed the seven million mark.

Yet the whole enterprise had very humble beginnings.

Born in Yorkshire, by the early 1990’s Carol was settled with her family in the quiet West Midlands village of Balsall Common, close to the Columban central house in Solihull. Her local parish had a somewhat unusual patron, being dedicated to a certain Blessed Robert Grissold—the only church in the country to bear that name. Robert Grissold had been a Catholic layman from the area who, during Reformation times, had joined with Fr. John Sugar in secretly keeping the faith alive. They proved to be

an effective underground team, and Robert stuck with Fr. John through thick and thin.

Maintaining the tradition of Robert Grissold, Carol was soon to find herself as a lay volunteer who teams up with a Catholic priest in a missionary enterprise and stays with it through all the resultant “ups and downs.”

Columban Fr. Pat Sayles had returned home to England after having done parish work in Peru and served as “Far East” editor in Ireland. He’d got involved in home visiting but quickly realized there was a limit to the number of homes he could reach on his own and so hit on the idea of producing little prayer pamphlets. He recalls the moment it occurred to him that, if one person “had a little prayer book and could hand it to a neighbor and so on, it would be a wonderful way to spread the Gospel.” It would jump-start a kind of “spiritual multiplier.”

He knew he’d need help with the project and thought of Carol, whom he’d come to know while serving as a supply priest in her parish. The way her three altar boys sons, “trooped onto the altar one after another to serve Mass,” had brought a smile to his face. For her part, she immediately took to the style and content of Pat’s early booklets. “They were simple, straightforward, with no jargon,” she explains. “They could mean a lot to people going through all sorts of problems: bereavement, illness—even cancer.” She’d read a book Fr. Pat had written for his 25<sup>th</sup> ordination anniversary in 1998—“Lord, Inflammé our Hearts with your Spirit”—and felt that “for the first time, I realized who the Holy Spirit was.” She began

**Jesus, My Friend**  
prayer rhymes for children



by The Prayer Trust  
Illustrated by Julie Stainton

**Lord, Send Me  
Your Spirit**



Patrick Sayles

**Lord, Inspire Me  
With Your Love**



The Prayer Trust

helping him prepare his booklets and accompanying cassettes (the peak of technology at the time).

Fr. Pat saw he needed a base. In 1999, they took on a nearby parish in the delightfully named hamlet of Wootton Wawen and began publishing in earnest. Carol drove over every day. In 2000, they decided to organize themselves as a formal charity, choosing as a name “The Prayer Trust” (influenced by Fr. Pat’s membership of “The National Trust,” which administers sites of historic and scenic interest in England and Wales).

The program thrived from the outset. The idea was to distribute one booklet and, with the returns from it, publish the next, and build the project up accordingly. “In the first year, we sold 125,000 booklets,” remembers Fr. Pat. Demand soared. Some twenty friends volunteered to help. Three containers were brought in to store the material. Bookmarks and the occasional full-length book were added to their portfolio. Soon

they were not just delivering to homes and parishes but to schools, prisons and hospitals. They diversified the range of topics and devised themes for children, Christmas and Easter, First Communion, Harvest Festival and so on.

So far, Carol and Fr. Pat were mirroring the success of the seventeenth-century lay/priest team of Robert Grissold and Fr. John Sugar. Unfortunately, Robert and Fr. John’s careers met disaster in 1603 when they were caught by Crown forces as they were returning from celebrating a clandestine Mass and taken as prisoners to Warwick, where they were tried and condemned to death.

Similarly, the team of Carol and Fr. Pat was to undergo a trial, albeit of a more prosaic, 21<sup>st</sup>-century. century type. In 2008, they were coming back from Worcester after taking photographs for a new booklet when an out-of-control vehicle hit them head-on. Both were injured and hospitalized. They could have died.

Blessed Robert Grissold and Saint John Sugar were executed in 1604. However, Carol Beck and Fr. Pat Sayles survived and recovered. It seemed like a miracle. It was only later that they realized how great a miracle it had been, when they suddenly recalled that their great escape had occurred on July 17—the Feast of Blessed Robert Grissold!

They returned to work and The Prayer Trust continued to grow. In 2016, it moved premises, taking over part of the office extension and old stable block at the Columbans’ Solihull house. It flourishes to this day, celebrating its Silver Jubilee with Carol and Fr. Pat still at the helm and those seven million copies under its belt.

Carol and Fr. Pat even went on to complete the booklet they’d been preparing before the crash. Fittingly, it was called “In Joyful Hope.” A miracle indeed. A seven-million miracle. 

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Columban Fr. John Boles lives and works in Britain.

# The Burning Bush

## Opportunity for Renewal

By Fr. Iowane Naio

It has been ten months now since I arrived in Pakistan. I have just completed formal language studies, which took around eight months, and now I am waiting for my pastoral placement.

While waiting for the final arrangements to be carried out at my new pastoral placement, I am helping out in Badin Parish, where Columban Frs. Pat Visanti and Elbert Balbastro are serving with Kim Jinwook, a Columban seminarian from Korea who is here for his First Mission Assignment program. I am pretty sure that these pastoral experiences in Badin parish will serve as a good orientation program for me as I prepare to formally begin my ministry in one part of Kotri parish, located just on the outskirts of Hyderabad city.

It's indeed a blessing to witness my Columban brothers fully and sincerely engaged in the mission of God's love, despite the difficulties and uncertainties they encounter.

My initial missionary experiences here are like Moses' encounter with God in Exodus 3, where he encountered God in the burning bush. I see the fire of missionary zeal in my fellow Columbans and other missionaries who are trying their best to accompany the faithful here.

As I move closer to this burning bush by gradually immersing myself in various ministries in Badin parish, I see flames of humility, openness, love, understanding, patience and perseverance in my fellow missionaries. Indeed, every fire produces heat and smoke, so in these experiences, I see the faith of my fellow missionaries as the heat produced by the fire and their

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*It's indeed a blessing to witness my Columban brothers fully and sincerely engaged in the mission of God's love, despite the difficulties and uncertainties they encounter.*

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hopefulness as the smoke that rises from it.

The journey of the Catholic Church has never been without difficulties and struggles, even persecution, something like the journey of the Israelites, who tried their best to live according to the laws of God from the beginning; it was never easy. So, it's indeed difficult to imagine a Church without struggles and difficulties, both internal and external challenges. But as I compare my initial missionary experiences here with those in other countries, the challenges of mission in Pakistan are immense and quite unique, and at times overwhelming.

As I observe and listen to my fellow Columbans and other missionaries who have been here for a while, I get the sense that their faithfulness to God and their love for His beloved people have kept them hopeful and optimistic in this challenging mission context. Their insights have helped me to realize that if we are humble, open and flexible enough, these challenges and struggles can bring out the best in us. It can help us grow stronger in faith, to trust more in God than in ourselves, to trust in His continuous presence among the faithful, and to continue His mission of love with great joy despite all the struggles.

As I continue to observe the burning bush with curiosity and anxiety, I was surprised to notice that the tree, which has many branches, namely, poverty, school dropouts, unemployment, addiction, malnutrition, discrimination, suppression, abuse by the wealthy landowners and many more, was not being consumed by the fire. Initially, it was very discouraging and confusing for me knowing that this fire had been burning for a while. The Columbans have been working in this parish for more than 40 years, but it feels like we are just starting our mission. Pessimism began to kick in, and unconsciously I started judging and criticizing every experience, considering my past missionary experiences.

Instead of facing this burning bush with faith, humility, openness, love and understanding, I began negatively perceiving it through the lens of my previous pastoral experiences in Fiji, the Philippines, and Peru.

In my confusion, frustrations and hopelessness, I continued to talk about my initial experiences with my fellow missionaries who have been here for a long time. I ask them questions, and I also throw at them some criticisms that I have towards the way of doing mission here. One common answer I would hear from almost all of them is, "*Yeh Pakistan hei*," which simply means "This is Pakistan." At first, I did not understand what they were trying to communicate. I thought they were just being sarcastic, but as I continued to pray and reflect deeply on my experiences here, I began to realize they were the voice of God to me.



Fr. Iowane Naio celebrates Mass with the Sindhi Bheels community in Pangrio Village.

Just as God spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:5, God was asking me, through these fellow missionaries, to take off my sandals, since the ground where I stood is holy.

This was a moment of awakening because I realized that to be effective and meaningful in ministry, I first need a better understanding of the church in Pakistan. To achieve this, I must be humble and learn from the people. I had to really take off my sandals to empty myself of all the familiar models of the church I had and to open myself up to learning a new way of being a church. With the help of the Holy Spirit, my fellow missionaries and God's beloved people, I am now settling in comfortably.

I want to conclude by sharing some insights from my initial missionary experience here in Pakistan. First, we need to trust that

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*I must be humble and learn from the people. I had to really take off my sandals to empty myself of all the familiar models of the church I had and to open myself up to learning a new way of being a church.*

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God has chosen us to be part of His mission. We know ourselves—how limited we are in many ways—but God still offers us this privilege so that we may have the opportunity to understand His love and faithfulness and to share it with others. Second, be confident in yourself and do not hesitate to analyze, ask questions, or even criticize what you see or experience, because this will help

you grow in your understanding and creativity. Third, be humble enough to ask for advice and help. This practice reminds us that the mission belongs to the Holy Spirit alone, and it also enlightens us to realize that God has blessed us with different gifts and talents, meant to be shared in building up His Kingdom here on earth. Fourth, be open to complaints, criticism, and correction; do not take them personally but see them as the best opportunities for renewal.

Finally, keep praying and continue to offer every experience to God, pleasant and unpleasant alike. God, who has chosen us, is always with us; He is always ready to hear from us, and He is ever ready to help us, but He never forces himself upon us. **CM**

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Columban Fr. Iowane Naio lives and works in Pakistan.

# Prayer in the City

## Connecting Nature and Prayer

By Fr. Barry Cairns

I live in the center of Yokohama, Japan, a city of 3.8 million. I am surrounded by concrete and tall buildings. I see little natural greenery.

But on a window shelf in the sun, I have a container in which I sow seeds. To see the green shoots come up out of the soil touches me. I feel joy, hope, wonder!

God makes things grow. This has a beautiful influence on my prayer.

Over the years I have shared praying with people from many

nations. One Sister from Papua, New Guinea, summed up in her concrete way what many told me. “We pray better after feeling the soil between our toes.” Have we in the West lost that earthly touch that so helps prayer?

The connection between nature and contact with God is deep within the genes of our Japanese people.

Here is a modern hymn that is the most popular in our liturgy. Even in Covid times, it was sung with vigor behind masks!

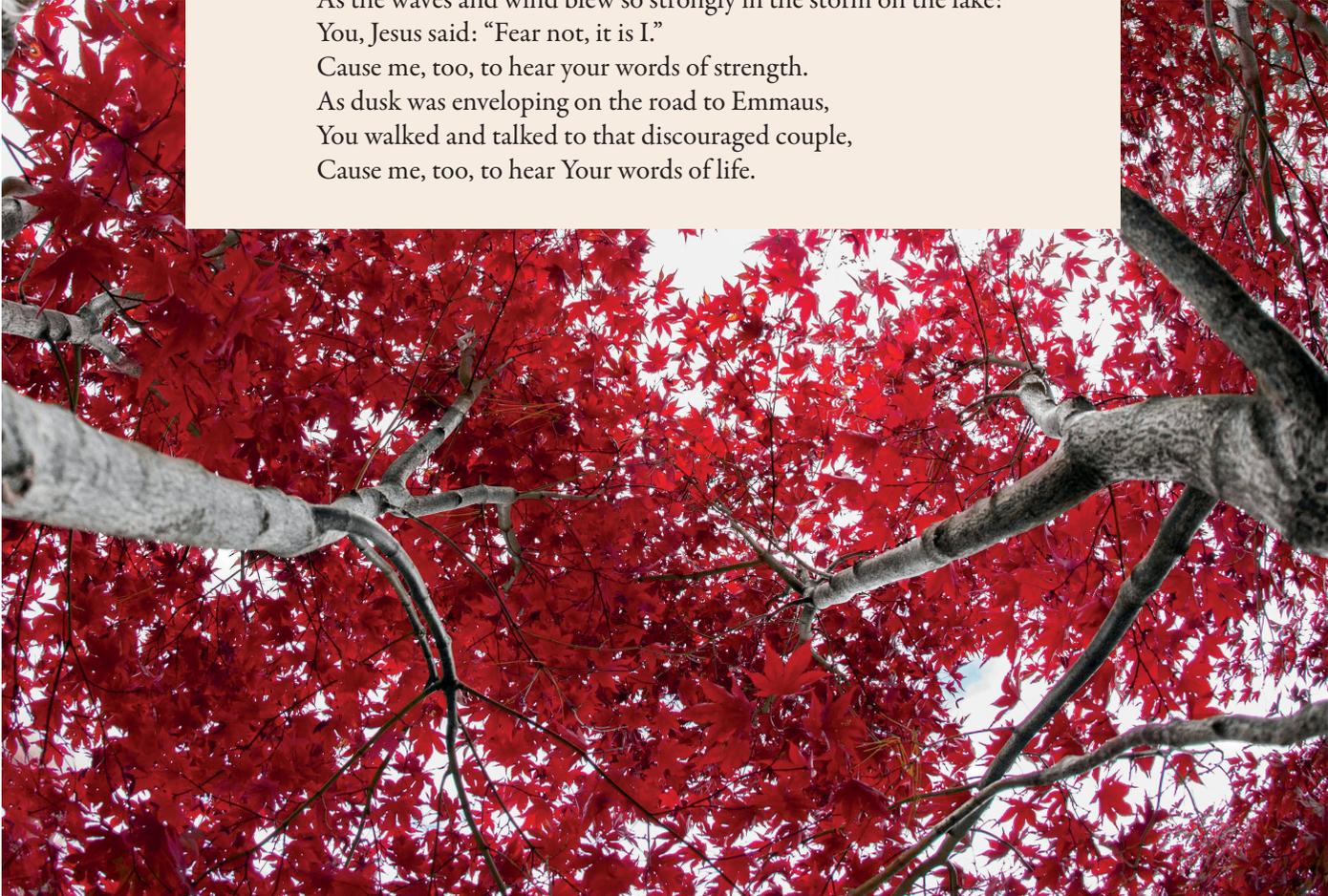
Below is my translation of our hymn. Notice how the first line of the hymn puts the Gospel scene into a context of nature. This hymn has an ecumenical background: the words were written by Protestant Pastor Beppu, and the melody by a Catholic musician, Mr. Takita.

Prayer and God’s created nature are connected. Let’s join the two!

Try it. It works! 

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Columban Fr. Barry Cairns lives and works in Japan.



Just as the fragrant breeze gently blew over the mount in Galilee,  
Cause me, too, to hear Your words of love.  
As the waves and wind blew so strongly in the storm on the lake:  
You, Jesus said: “Fear not, it is I.”  
Cause me, too, to hear your words of strength.  
As dusk was enveloping on the road to Emmaus,  
You walked and talked to that discouraged couple,  
Cause me, too, to hear Your words of life.



# 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.



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

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.

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- Charitable Bequest Gifts
- Gifts of Life Insurance Policies

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

# Migrant Care

## Ocean of Hope

By Fr. Alvaro Martinez

For several months, Columban Fr. Alvaro Martínez has lived in El Paso, Texas, and has had the opportunity to learn about the missionary work that the Columbans carry out in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. This group has chosen to accompany migrants arriving in the city, many hoping to cross into the United States, but all in search of a better future. Despite Juárez's multiple needs, the missionaries affirm that their work is guided by the Spirit of Jesus and is based on the method of pastoral discernment "See, Judge and Act."

This method, originated in the twentieth century by the Belgian priest Joseph Cardijn within the Social Doctrine of the Church, invites us to observe reality objectively (see), analyze it in the light of the Gospel and ethical values (judge), and finally commit ourselves to concrete actions to transform situations of injustice (act). Adopted by various movements after the Second Vatican Council, this approach continues to be relevant in pastoral and social contexts.

Inspired by this method, the Columban missionaries have concentrated their efforts on providing comprehensive care to migrants in Juárez. Since November 2018, they have offered basic medical services. By 2025, with support from the Diocese of Juárez, a small clinic was established near the Cathedral. It provides physical, mental and dental health services, and care for complex chronic diseases.

This work is carried out with the help of volunteer doctors and nurses, as well as social organizations. Currently, the clinic serves more than 40 people each week, mostly migrant women



and children, along with over 68 individuals with chronic diseases from different Latin American countries. They offer medical support, self-care advice, medications, and assistance with clinical studies payments. The clinic also aims to help migrants integrate into the Mexican legal and social systems by improving access to education, health, and food. Although

this effort may seem small given the great need, the missionaries believe that the transformative power of love in solidarity is vital because every act of shared love adds to the ocean of hope that the Gospel embodies for those who migrate. **CM**

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Columban Fr. Alvaro Martinez lives and works in El Paso, Texas.

# Columban Spirituality

What is the “spirituality” of the Columbans? “Spirituality cannot be understood simply as an individual and private relationship to God. Our response to God takes place within the community of faith. . . communal reflection on the word of God, attention to the tradition and teaching of the Church, etc. Spirituality encompasses every facet of our being.” (*Spirituality of our Founders* by Fr. Jim McCaslin.)

Catholic Ireland of 1916 was a world suddenly caught up to look out to the millions of unevangelized in China. In their own suffering, the Irish were certain of the great love that God had for them and their faith in that. Their vision was such that they considered that no sacrifice was too great to win the world for Christ, even as they were fighting for their own independence from England.

The men who founded the Maynooth Mission to China (now known as the Missionary Society of St. Columban) did not see themselves as creators of a new spirituality. They were simply secular priests who came together to form a society for mutual support, the glory of God, their own sanctification, and the salvation of the Chinese people. In the process, they did, in fact, create a new spirituality. Each was devoted to the person and mission of Jesus Christ and the dream that all people everywhere should know, love, and serve Him as they did. They were very diverse and of strong character. Their strengths and weaknesses caused no little misunderstanding and



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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Al Utzig

disagreement among them in those early years. Yet something great and unique and precious in the life of the Church was the end result of their coming together to form this Society of St. Columban, an Irish missionary monk.

Edward Galvin was ordained for his diocese of Cork in 1909, but went to Brooklyn, New York, for three years, where he met a Canadian priest, John Fraser, who had been working in China. He followed him back to China and worked there from 1912 to 1916. He

returned to Ireland with two friends just after the Easter Rising against England. The Irish bishops and Rome gave him tentative approval to found the Society in 1916, and he came to Omaha, Nebraska, to start a house to raise money for support of its work. In 1920, Rome gave final approval and a territory in China to be responsible for. Fr. Galvin led the first group of sixteen Columban missionaries back to Hanyang. In 1927, he became the bishop of Hanyang. After laboring so valiantly for 32 years amid frightful turmoil caused at times by bandits, Communists, floods, refugees, the Japanese war and dire poverty, he was expelled by the Communists in 1952 as “an enemy of the people.” Although terminally ill with leukemia, he spent himself for many months in the U.S. drumming up support to have St. Columban placed on the universal Church calendar. He returned to Ireland in 1954 and died in 1956 in Dalgan.

John Blowick was ordained in 1913 for the diocese of Tuam and was appointed professor of Dogmatic Theology at Maynooth when he was only 26 years old. He was troubled that he wasn’t doing enough to make the Church truly universal and decided to offer himself to China when he was free from personal obligations. When Fr. Galvin came to Ireland, he volunteered to join the new group. Being a professor at Maynooth, he was recognized by the small new group as leader and spokesperson with the bishops of Ireland and Rome. He formed the first seminary for the Columbans in Galway and became the rector. He was elected the first Superior General and went with the first group to China to negotiate the handing over of Hanyang to the Columbans from another congregation. In 1922, he founded the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban and in 1926, the Columban Brothers. He remained in leadership roles until his death in 1972.

Over the ensuing years, 24 Columbans have been martyred because they were faithful to God and their people, in China, in the Philippines, in Korea, in Burma, in Peru. The spirituality of the Columbans is seen in how they live with their God, with their people, with their world, amidst many tears and fears and joys and celebrations, weak sinners, struggling to do the best they can, trusting the Holy Spirit to make it all work out for the Kingdom of God.

Fr. Al

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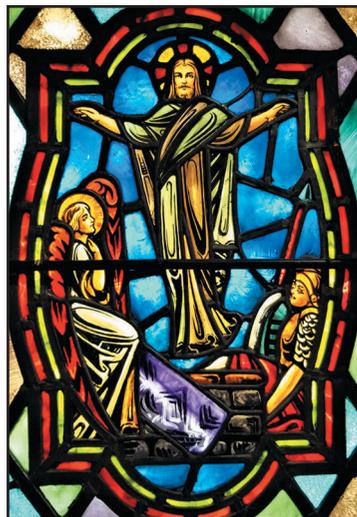
*Columban Mission* magazine is published eight times each year and tells the stories of our missionaries and the people they are called to serve. Columban missionaries live in solidarity with their people and, together, they move forward to improve their social, economic and spiritual lives, always with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

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*“The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”*

– ST. LUKE 24:46-47

And indeed the process continues to this very day. Are you up for the challenge of being part of it?

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