Mothers & Children
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.
The pandemic has shown how unequal our world is, particularly for those suffering with a mental illness. Though mental illness is considered a long-term illness, unfortunately it is often neglected in health care, and it doesn’t get the attention it merits. The sad reality is that in the developing world, psychiatric services are often sidelined.

We are living in a very unjust world, and the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that. While in some countries people are receiving booster doses of the vaccine, millions of people in developing countries haven’t even received their first dose. The pandemic has affected us all in many ways. No one was prepared for it. It has been a time of so much uncertainty and much soul-searching. We were ushered into this situation without wanting it—into a liminal space.

Lately, I have noticed that the number of beggars in Pakistan has increased. I see the faces of children, young people, women, men and older people—as well as the physically and mentally challenged. Recently, I went to the market to buy fruit and some essential things for our house. I was surrounded quickly by more than five people, begging for food and medicine. I could see the desperation in their eyes, their emaciated look—they were in pain and hungry. To start giving the fruit to them would cause ten more to immediately appear.

I felt ashamed and so uncomfortable, carrying away the food and not sharing with them as I wanted to. I was grateful that I was wearing a face mask so as to hide my shame, frustration, and the tears in my eyes. I know that billions of our brothers and sisters have been pushed to the margins, the forgotten, hungry victims of our unjust world. Every one of us has a responsibility to address these disparities. It will take a concerted effort by organizations, humanitarian groups and individuals.

In my own little way, I can only embrace my helplessness, vulnerability and frustration in the light of faith. I trust God to give me the wisdom and the grace to offer love and compassion to those around me who are suffering and in great need. May we continue to be more conscious of how we live and strive to promote life around us knowing how interconnected we all are. Let us live by Mahatma Gandhi’s aphorism: “To live simply so that others may simply live.”

Columban Sr. Anne Carbon lives and works in Pakistan.
Missionary to Pakistan

A Conversation with Fr. Pat Visanti

By Fr. Frank Hoare

Fr. Pat is from Rotuma, a Polynesian island in Fiji. On holiday to Fiji recently he shared some of his experiences. Here are a few stories he told us.

Mistaken Identity
When Pakistani people first meet me wearing a shalwar kamiz (long shirt with loose fitting trousers) they think that I am a Pathan, from the north of Pakistan. A Pathan seller in the market last Christmas was packing stuff for me and he asked, “What place in the north are you from?” I explained to him that I am not Pakistani. We laughed together.

At a military checkpoint a soldier got onto a bus I was travelling on. He began talking to me. I didn’t understand a single word. Realizing that there was a problem he asked for my I.D. He looked at me and said, “So you are not Pakistani!” We both started laughing. I heard then that he had been speaking in Pashto, the language of the Pathans.

Religion
The toughest thing in Pakistan for me is the culture. It is different. It takes a while to learn why they do what they do. If one doesn’t learn to like the culture, forget about working there.

I came to appreciate the Muslim religion. I admire the way Muslims pray five times a day. Sometimes I feel ashamed. They pray when they hear the call to prayer. We struggle to do our prayers. It is a challenge. We can learn good things from each other.

There are three mosques near our church compound. We have a good relationship with the nearest mosque, and their loud speakers are no longer facing in towards us. It can be crazy when they go off. One of the maulvi’s daughters has been teaching at our school for the last 25 years. She attends many of our programs.

Interreligious dialogue is easy where Christians are in the majority. In Pakistan, Muslims are in the majority so you have to do things on their terms. Christian-Muslim dialogue there happens in our daily interactions with people. I found it hard to approach them in the beginning, but as I improved at the language I was able to chat to them. We have Muslim friends with whom we work.

Joys and Frustrations of Parish Work
In our parish of Badin in southern Pakistan we have a tuberculosis (TB) clinic because TB is a big issue in Pakistan — kids as young as one year old suffer from it. The people live in poor conditions; water is not clean and the sewerage system is not good. At the TB clinic we try to educate them about hygiene, etc. About 60 to 70 people come to the clinic every morning from Monday to Saturday. A small fee of about 20 cents is charged so that they feel they are contributing. Two employees do outreach in the villages on Thursdays, following up on patients who have stopped coming to the clinic.

We have an ambulance in the parish which I normally drive. One day I drove the ambulance to bring six sisters to the parish to experience the tribal apostolate. I met them at the train station dressed in overalls. “So you are the driver,” they asked. “Yes, I am
The fare for a patient in the village who needed to go to Karachi. He asked for 22,000 Rupees. We called the patient and were told that his clinic was in one month’s time and he had no knowledge that this fellow was asking for money on his behalf!

But with all that, I really enjoy being in Pakistan. I just love all aspects of life there.

Columban Fr. Frank Hoare lives and works in Fiji.
A Laywoman in the Church

Responding to My Baptismal Call

By Jhoanna Resari

When I joined the Columban Lay Missionaries I was 24 years old. My first mission assignment was to Taiwan, and my ministry was in the field of HIV/AIDS. I journeyed for six years with people living with and affected by this illness in shelters run by a non-profit organization. Afterwards, I worked in the HIV/AIDS education and outreach ministry in the Hsinchu Diocese near Taipei.

My experience in mission has truly been a blessing, because, until I met the Columbans, I had not fully understood my baptismal call to live out God’s mission. Although I was raised a Catholic, which has imbued my way of life with Christian values and traditions, I grew up treating the Church as a place where I can go to get my spiritual needs met, a place where I can expect people of authority, mostly priests, to provide certain services.

At a young age, I also learned not to ask questions about the Bible or religious practices or traditions. I grew up feeling it was my place to simply receive what was offered by the Church, to fulfill my obligations and not question. These are just some of the things ingrained within me that I unconsciously accepted in living out my Catholic faith.

In saying this, I also recognize that many of my faith experiences were necessary for my spiritual growth as a child and on into my youth. However, as I grew into adulthood, the comfort of the familiar and the convenient role of a passive recipient Catholic stagnated my spiritual growth and limited my participation in the life of the Church.

I believe the Holy Spirit was guiding me on my journey while I was growing up, and I am grateful God led me to discover the Columban missionaries. Cross-cultural mission has allowed me to grow in my faith, and own my identity as a member of the Christian community, as well as understand that the Church is much more than a place for the laity to receive spiritual services or replenishment.

With Pope Francis’ decision to move towards a synodal renewal of the Church, the message is clear that “the whole People of God is an agent of the proclamation of the Gospel... every baptised person is called to be a protagonist of mission since we are all missionary disciples” (Synodality in the life and mission of the Church, 53).

We need to create conditions that enable people to recognize and respond to their baptismal call and allow them to own their role as “protagonists” - the principal and active participants in mission. It is important to facilitate and guide people on their journey until individuals are able to truly find their voice in the life and mission in the Church.

If we see ourselves as facilitators, we can bring people together, learn from one another and be enriched by our encounters of different cultures and experiences. This can bring about new possibilities for mission. We need to be creatively and faithfully responsive to the changes brought forth by our journey together, especially when these changes lead us closer to people on the peripheries amidst these challenging and uncertain times.

When I arrived in Taiwan, I recognized how structures within the Columbans invite members — lay and ordained — to live out the values that reinforce and inform their lives, that is, a full participation that fosters partnership, shared responsibility and accountability among ourselves.

I had to make a choice to let go of my past conditioning that influenced my dynamics in dealing with the ordained and my view of my role as a laywoman in our community. It was not easy, but I gradually understood that my opinion and contribution would be received and respected by others.

The encouragement young members received from fellow missionaries helped build our confidence to contribute to discussions, take initiatives and accept responsibilities. Of course, with our diverse cultures, personalities and personal histories, it is to be expected we would experience resistance, tension and conflict. Even though we would rather avoid these, they are part of our reality, and overcoming them is necessary for our growth individually and as a community.

With God’s grace, the environments or conditions like I have experienced can bring about an awakening in an individual, leading to a deeper understanding of their calling and a sense of ownership of shared responsibilities in the community. Synodality is also a call to address clericalism and exclusion in the Church. From what I have witnessed and learned in my ministry about confronting stigma and discrimination, behavioral and attitudinal change is just as critical as finding a cure that would end HIV and the realities brought about by this illness.

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

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

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

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- Charitable Bequest Gifts
- Gifts of Life Insurance Policies

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

For more information, please contact us at donorrelations@columban.org, call us toll-free at (877) 299-1920, or visit www.columban.org. The Missionary Society of St. Columban treasures your support and is committed to the stewardship of your gifts.
I have traveled here in the U.S. on several occasions, but I didn’t get the chance to visit Omaha during those travels due to limited time. I am glad to have been granted a sabbatical here, and so I thought to reconnect with the Columbans in the U.S. will be a good part of my sabbatical year. While arranging my visit to Omaha, I was invited to participate in the donor visitation activities with donor relations officers Angie Determan and Angela Bennett. Below is a short reflection on the experience.

As a lay missionary, a woman and Asian, I had initial reservations to participate in the visits basically because I wasn’t so sure if my status (lay missionary, a woman, and Asian) would be appealing to the donors. I suppose part of my reservation was coming from the “Asian hate” that is much publicized in the U.S. But I must also admit that part of me was excited to experience such activity; the opportunity to see places, a good opportunity “to test the waters,” an opportunity to connect and thank our donors in a personal manner, and an opportunity to share mission experience/stories.

The visits were well coordinated and well-planned. I appreciated the initial preparations done by Angela and Angie from making the appointments and making sure that I had some essential information regarding a particular donor, and of course, sightseeing on the side.

The relationships that are formed and strengthened throughout the years between the Columbans and our donors palpable. The depths of sharing by the donors are genuinely built on trust – this in itself is an indication of the importance of the work. I also observed the mutual and sincere relationship between the donors and our staff. I believe the “Columbanness” is a mutual ground in the development of such relationship.

Having experienced donor visitation, I realized that being a lay missionary, a woman and Asian isn’t a limitation. I realized that I underestimated the generosity of our donors particularly in their capacity to welcome a stranger like me. I felt welcomed, listened to and that our donors are interested in what I do. I felt affirmed in each of the visits. Indeed, I felt blessed to be able to connect and thank our donors in person! I believe our donors do appreciate the visits conducted over the years. They talked about the experience and the joy of having visited by a Columban missionary even if the visit occurred ages ago.

Benefactor visitation is a valuable activity which every Columban Missionary (lay or ordained) must commit to doing. We missionaries are equipped with mission stories. Through their generous and continuous support, our donors deserve to hear our stories. I believe that sharing our stories is good recognition of their participation to mission. Benefactor visitation is a ministry. I am grateful to have been invited to be part of this ministry here in the U.S.
See God everywhere, and we will have a deeper and deeper faith in Him. See Him in the sunrise and sunset, in mountain brooks and the mighty oceans, in storm clouds and rainbows, floods and droughts. Every experience has an impact on our lives.

I regularly visit a community in an isolated barrio in the Philippines known only as Landless, to join a gathering of a Basic Ecclesial Community, a movement inviting bishops, priests, religious and laypeople to come together and reflect on their lives in the context of the gospels.

The group in Landless meets frequently. Everyone knows each other by name and shares the word of God, the Eucharist, and both the material and spiritual concerns of their daily lives. There is a strong sense of belonging and mutual responsibility.

As I arrived on one rather wet day, I found things were in disarray, as the area of the barrio designated for the meeting that day was under water. Our numbers were down because of the havoc caused by the emergency, leaving the conundrum of what to do, postpone or press on.

The determination of the small group to continue as usual despite the disruption surprised me and gave me an insight into the depth of appreciation for the support these gatherings provide for the people that give the community its lifeblood.

Their desire and longing for God to be part of their community life is enormous and even though the only possible place the small group could gather was beside the slush of a busy road, the decision was unanimous: press on as planned.

I was moved when one mother said, “With God, all things are possible.” Despite the limitations imposed by the coronavirus pandemic, something is empowering these people to have faith in God no matter what. Their sharing that day inspired me. The struggle to find jobs or ways of supporting their families during the limitations imposed by the coronavirus pandemic has absorbed the major energy of their lives, but floods were not going to get in the way of the mutual support they receive through their little community gatherings. There were still smiles on their faces.

As I recall that day, I realize I have learned a lot from these people. Sometimes I need to pause and reflect on my faith, because faith is not an option for us as people of God, it is, and must remain, a way of life.

If we believe and trust God, all things are possible, so as we walk the path of our faith, we see not obstacles, but opportunities, ways of allowing our lives to reflect the faith we have in God. The people of Landless are teaching me to fear nothing and pray about everything.
During the pandemic, gatherings are not allowed so as to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. It was difficult for everyone, especially being locked down. There was a limit on movement. There is so much uncertainty about what the future holds that it affects mental health. Yet, the pandemic teaches us to value what is most important. We begin to see our family from a closer perspective and do things together. It becomes an opportunity to be more reflective about what this pandemic has brought us. This time also brought us closer to our God through prayer. It was prayer that kept us going in the face of the pandemic’s uncertainty. Prayer is what helps us survive.

The activity of praying together is the most helpful way for the Chungli Association of Immigrant Families (CAIF) to reach out to people who are going through the same difficulties and challenges. The CAIF is a group of immigrant families. Its members are Filipinos who have married Taiwanese citizens, and some of its members are families who emigrate to Taiwan and find work there together with their relatives. Their movement may have been restricted to the extent that they could not be there physically, but this did not hinder them from being there for one another. With God, everything is possible. Given the technology we have now, the opportunity of meeting through a virtual mode was made possible. It was the virtual rosary that connected them to be united in prayer for everyone who is suffering from being apart from one another. It was praying the rosary that helped them to care for one another.

The rosary gives them the strength to remain hopeful in the face of adversity. This group found each other’s consolation through praying the rosary. It’s inspiring to hear their various stories about how praying the rosary helped them overcome the challenges that COVID-19 threw at them. People are getting closer together through social media. Bringing Jesus into the virtual world to spread the gospel of faith, love, and hope presents a unique challenge for Christians.

The following are some of their stories:

**Janeth and Her Son, Phillip**

Janeth is married to a Taiwanese man and has two kids.

After filling our tummies with a simple yet scrumptious dinner we had
what seemed like a nonstop family sharing of the whole day's happenings that mostly lead to teasing and laughing. My son and I will continue this experience virtually. Yes! “CAIF” meets on a regular basis via Zoom.

The surge of COVID-19 changed the whole world. A new normal is born. Work from home, online classes, on-line Masses, webinars and the like are some of the activities that fit into this new norm of living. Face-to-face interaction is not so common nowadays. It may be a sad reality, but CAIF faced it with grace.

It is now our habit to pray the holy rosary every day. There are times that, due to some avoidable circumstances, I can’t be present, but seeing their screenshots makes me feel so blessed that I belong to CAIF.

Prior to praying the rosary, each of us will state our prayer intentions and petitions. It is truly overwhelming and heart-melting to hear that someone is praying for you, that the supposed personal prayer intention becomes a holistic prayer. Generously, all prayed for each other’s prayers; even the CAIF kids learned to utter their prayers too.

My son Phillip used to ask me the current time because it helped me remember to pray. He is genuinely excited to meet everyone, even if only virtually. He will ask me if Jude and Lindy will also be present, and he is also delighted to see Justine and David join the virtual rosary.

As Phillip faithfully joined the virtual rosary prayer, his reading skills improved. I vividly remember the first time he led one of the rosary mysteries. He was so nervous at first and barely opened his mouth because he was afraid of making a mistake, but after that first experience, he became more confident and always looked forward to his turn.

Joy is the mother of a Filipino family now living in Taiwan.

Joy and Her Family
Joy is the mother of a Filipino family now living in Taiwan.

During these challenging pandemic times in Taiwan, our Friday rosary (now daily) helps us to connect and encourages us to pray for each other as one big family. Our online meetings give us a chance to see everyone and hear about their day as we share our thanksgiving and prayer intentions.

My husband Demy gathers us together at the dining table, and, when it’s time for prayer, he will be there to assist us when there are technical difficulties, while my two kids, Jude and Lindy, cheerfully volunteer to participate and sometimes lead the mysteries of the rosary.

It is my reflection that Mama Mary has always been our intercessor who brings us all to the source of hope, strength, and comfort who is our Lord Jesus Christ. She is our mother who guides us by praying the rosary. We can be closer to our God where we can surrender our fears and concerns. Mama Mary becomes our mother who looks after us wholeheartedly and tirelessly.

All these things make my heart grateful. Praying with my family and with the CAIF community has helped me cope with daily struggles.

Charlotte
Charlotte is an engineer working in Taiwan.

I grew up in a family where praying the rosary every day was a daily ritual. But as we grew older and went to study in Manila, this daily prayer was no longer recited. It was rekindled when I started working here in Taiwan, and while I don’t pray the rosary every day, I try to do so whenever I can.

There was a time when I was asked by Ma’am Joan to join and pray the rosary via Zoom. It was a small group of people having the same devotion as mine, with a great love for praying the rosary and hearts full of compassion and caring for others. This becomes my regimen, like a daily vitamin for my soul.

Each day I look forward to seeing these “prayer warriors,” as I call them. Since it is in these difficult and dark times that we need warriors to combat our fears, negative emotions, pride, ruthlessness, jealousy, temptations, and other things that rob us of receiving the overflowing blessings we are entitled to have.

Each of these prayer warriors possesses an armor that is so great that even the slightest touch of evil trembles and runs away with fear. The spiritual weapon that they have is a gift that was given to us by our Blessed Mother Mary. Her love for us is so great that she gave us...the Holy Rosary.

When I had been diagnosed with Covid-19, there were a lot of discomforts, difficulty in breathing and sleepless nights. I told myself that this is not easy overcoming this health challenge. But with the grace of God and through the prayers of this group I find comfort, strength and confidence that I can overcome it and I did.

This may not appear significant to some because it already becomes normal to be infected with this disease, but if you talk to those who are fighting for their lives or those who lost their loved ones, it will be different.

Our prayers are even more magnified if they are recited with the Holy Rosary. These prayer warriors prove that there is no heavy burden that cannot be lightened by praying the rosary. It is as if we are journeying with Our Blessed Mother every step of our way in our lives.

If everyone knew about how powerful this spiritual weapon is, we could all together extinguish every known evil in this world—but until then we are still in a spiritual battle.

Columban lay missionary Joan Yap lives and works in Taiwan.
Columban Beatlemania

The Spirit of the “Fab Four” Lives On in George Harrison’s Old Parish

By Fr. John Boles

Columban supporters rarely become famous, but they just MIGHT know people who do.

I recently had the good fortune to deliver an appeal on behalf of the Columbans at “Christ the King and Our Lady” in the Liverpool neighborhood of Wavertree, a parish which has blessed us with many Columban benefactors. During the Second World War it was also the home parish of Harold and Louise Harrison. Harold worked as a ship’s steward on the transatlantic White Star Line, while Louise was an Irish shop assistant who loved to sing (to the point of “making the windows rattle,”) so legend has it.

On March 14, 1943, Harold and Louise went to church to baptize the last of their four children. They gave the name of their three-week-old baby boy as, “George.”

Young George Harrison would go on to be lead guitarist in the world’s greatest-ever rock group – The Beatles. In a long and illustrious musical career, both with The Beatles and as a solo artist, he’d compose such classics as “Norwegian Wood,” “Here Comes the Sun,” “Something,” and “While my Guitar Gently Weeps” before his untimely death from cancer in 2001 at the age of 58.

Robert Kidd works as parish administrator and his family knew the Harrisons. He took me on my very own “Magical Mystery Tour,” first to the church of “Our Lady of Good Help” where George’s baptism took place. The church building is now sadly disused, but the primary school next door still functions. This is where Robert’s Auntie Eileen studied alongside George’s sister, Louise.

Robert recalls how his aunt was never a great pop fan during the time of “Beatlemania,” whereas his Mum, Katherine, certainly was: “Probably one of those screaming girls,” he reflects.

Next, we went around the corner to the Harrisons’ former residence. No. 12, Arnold Grove is a small terraced house which in George’s day was a “two-up, two-down” affair with a single coal fire, an outside toilet and a tiny back yard where the family kept chickens.

In 1950 the household moved to the district of Speke. George attended the local primary school, where another pupil was a certain John Lennon. He then went on to study at the “Inny” — the Liverpool Institute — where he came across fellow music enthusiast Paul McCartney. By 1958 the three friends were in a group John had formed called The Quarrymen with George apparently having been auditioned on the top floor of a double-decker Liverpool bus. They changed to the “catchier” name of The Beatles two years later. When, in 1962, they acquired a new drummer, Richard (“Ringo Starr”) Starkey, and a new manager, Brian Epstein, the formula for global fame was well and truly established.

My own wanderings down Fab Four memory lane took me from the parish of Wavertree over the boundary to Allerton, an area bursting with Beatles connections. On Menlove Avenue I paused to observe the
Meanwhile, it was time for me to head back to the parish. I had one last Mass to celebrate. Robert apologized, saying they would have to change things about fairly quickly after Mass because the church was to be used for a musical presentation by “Tongues of Fire.” “What are they,” I asked, “a church choir?” “No,” came the reply, “a rock band.”

It was true. George Harrison may no longer be with us, but his tradition lives on.

Fr. John Boles is Regional Director of the Columban Missionaries in Britain.
Sisiila Sigatabu, born on August 16, 1942, began life at a settlement at Nadarivatu (the deep interior of Fiji) because her father Valerio was a carpenter there. She was baptized two years later by the French Marist Fathers at Varoka, Ba. She did her primary schooling at Votua Catholic School (the coastal area of Ba parish) for Classes 1-3, and then, when her father was invited by the newly arrived Columbans to be caretaker at Varoka, she completed Classes 4-8 at St. Teresa’s School. In fact, her father and uncles had largely built the St. Peter Chanel Parish Church there, from timber donated by Sr. Hugh Ragg OBE.

Seeing the difficulty that village children had in completing their primary education, the Columbans opened a boarding hostel at Varoka, at which the girls were monitored by the Marist Sisters (mostly Irish) and the boys by the Columban priests. Sisi and her sisters boarded at the hostel.

Valerio died in 1958, and although Sisi had passed “Secondary Entrance,” her family could not afford the fees, so Columban Fr. Dermot Hurley stepped in financially and sent her to Loreto High School on the island of Levuka.

Unfortunately, she failed her “Cambridge Senior” (whose results took three months to arrive on the slow boat from England!), so another Columban, Fr. Seamus O’Connor stepped to send Sisi back to Loreto to repeat the exams. However, Sisi refused to go, and Fr. O’Connor got her a job at Morris Hedstrom store in Ba instead as a docket clerk.

It was there that Sisi fell in love with Mr. Asipeli Moce (a Methodist) and in time eloped with him to the Sugar Mill compound quarters in Ba. This was a daring move in those days (and not in line with Church teaching). Despite that, Fr. O’Connor visited them and persuaded them to get married in the Catholic Church, which happened on September 29, 1962. Fr. O’Connor had taken the role of Sisi’s father (who was deceased) as the one to receive the traditional gifts of apology for elopement (nai bulubulu) and promptly helped Sisi’s mother pay for the wedding meal.

After the birth of her first three children, Sisi resigned from her work at the store, staying home. But the new parish priest of Ba, Fr. John Doyle, asked her to volunteer for the position of “licensed teacher,” which then became “Emergency Trained Teacher,” both of which the colonial government had introduced due to the extreme shortage of teachers in the colony.

In 1969 she became a civil servant, with the grand weekly pay of 8 Fijian dollars! She was appointed to St. Teresa’s School, where she remained until 1985, being then sent as Assistant Head Teacher of Votua Catholic School. When the Marist Sisters decided to leave St. Teresa’s in 1995, they invited her back to town to take up their legacy as the first lay Head Teacher. She remained at St. Teresa’s until 1998, when, turning 60, she had to take compulsory retirement.

In 1999, Br. George of Xavier College (founded by the Columbans, but now in the hands of the Brothers of St. Gabriel of Monfort from Kerala,
Children, “Sisi, don’t think of staying there at weekends — you must come help your husband.” Sisi admits this advice probably saved her marriage.

She also appreciated Fr Frank Hoare’s book on “Intercultural Exercises in the Classroom” which she used frequently in Xavier College at a time when relations between Fijians and Indians were rather tense. She also remembers that 20 years before the Archdiocese adopted the “Small Christian Community” concept at the heart of its pastoral plan, Columban parishes were already advocating scripture sharing in small groups.

Sisi believes that her spiritual life over the last 70 years has been totally molded by the Columbans and Marist Sisters. After all, from the age of 10, her life has been entwined with theirs.

Although she is about to celebrate her physical birthday, she regards her “real” birthday as December 18, 1944, the day she was baptised a Catholic. It was finding this date out that drove her to make sure that all her own children were baptized promptly (all but one by a Columban Father.) Also, by Fr. Paul Tierney’s invitation, she became a baptism instructor in the parish, as well as a founding member of the Columban Companions in Mission.

Happy birthday, Bubu Sisi! May you have many more, and thank you for walking with us, being patient with our shortcomings and so unstinting in your praise for the few things we got right!

Columban Fr. Patrick Colgan lives and works in Fiji.
The Catholic Church has, over the last 100 years, undergone a complex shift in its population distribution, and consequently its institutional identity and place in the world. This shift, largely driven by the institution’s response to mission and its understanding of Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19), has created a Church which is not only young, culturally diverse, and dynamic, but also far from the traditional centers of imperial power and finance.

These complex and dramatic population shifts are one important key to understanding Pope Francis’ call to synodality, a process which is both as old as the Tradition (Acts 3, 10,15) and as new as the ecclesial reality of our day. Indeed, understanding these shifts will help, “[k]eep us from becoming a ‘museum church’, beautiful but mute, with much past and little future.” (Pope Francis, October 10, 2021)

In percentage terms, the global Catholic population has, over the last 100 years, remained at about 17% (about one in every six) of the world’s population. These numbers easily support the claim that the Church is the single oldest and largest institution in the world. A reality which Peter and his companions could not possibly have imagined when they first tentatively walked down the stairs on that first Pentecost Sunday. (Acts 2)

Nevertheless, behind these percentages lies a remarkable phenomenon: namely, the dramatic shift in the geographical distribution of the Catholic population: waning in Europe but exploding throughout sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. For example: the Philippines is now the third largest national Catholic population in the world, and there are more Christians (Catholic and Protestant) attending church on Sunday in China than in the whole of Europe.

In 1910, 65% of all Catholics lived in Europe. Currently, Europeans account for less than 24% of believers worldwide. Today, nearly 70% of Catholics live in what is often called the Global South and of those, approximately 60% live on two continents south of the equator. Sub-Saharan Africa now has the world’s third largest Catholic population (21%), after Central and Latin America (39%) and Europe (24%). In contrast, the geographically vast, ethnically and linguistically diverse region of Oceania represents less than 1% of the global Catholic population.

The African story is even more impressive. By some estimates, the number of believers in sub-Saharan Africa have grown by 6,000% in the last 100 years! In the year 2018-2019, the number of Catholics in Africa increased by 8.3 million people. Currently, more than 170 million (about one-in-five, 21%) sub-Saharan Africans are Catholic – a figure which is projected to double by 2050. As an interesting footnote, the Democratic Republic of Congo, with an estimated 31 million believers (47.3% of its total population) edges out Pope Francis’ home country, Argentina, in being the 10th largest Catholic population in the world.

In launching the Synod process, Pope Francis emphasised that “there is no need to create another church, but to create a different church.” (October 2021) Indeed, that different church is already reflected in the population shifts which have emerged because of missionary activity over the last 100 years. Not only contrary to the pessimism of secularity and generally outside the vision of the traditional hierarchical structure which tends to be fixated with issues surfacing in the traditional centre (Europe and latterly, North America), our Church, as an organization, is not only very big but vibrant, culturally diverse, and successful as well. Just imagine, for example, if Bishops’ conferences around the world were actively leading their flocks to live and act in solidarity with their brothers and sisters living on small Pacific Islands who are increasingly vulnerable to an unrelenting rise in sea levels.

It is no accident that the first pope from the southern hemisphere holds different agendas from some of his predecessors. Pope Francis invites the Church to listen to, not lecture, those on the periphery and reach out to the poor and marginalized. Francis calls this listening the “art of encounter,” a process ultimately guided by the Holy Spirit.

In its original Greek, the word, synod, means “walking together.” Savoring the vibrant diversity of the people of God is a crucial part of not only that encounter. Knowing who we are walking beside is an important part of renewing our ecclesial vision and sense of mission.
Your gift helps make possible livelihood programs like the Embroidery Project started by Columban Fr. Bill Morton and Columban lay missionaries in Mexico to help female migrants provide for their families.

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

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

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

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

- Avoid taxes on transfers of up to $100,000 from your IRA to our organization
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- Reduce your taxable income, even if you do not itemize deductions
- Make a gift that is not subject to the deduction limits on charitable gifts
- Help further the work and mission of our organization

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

For more information, please contact us at donorrelations@columban.org, call us toll-free at (877) 299-1920, or visit www.columban.org. The Missionary Society of St. Columban treasures your support and is committed to the stewardship of your gifts.
Two years ago, I was invited by the staff of the Al Jia Development Center to help prepare two students to receive the Sacrament of Baptism. Although they also have baptism preparation in the parish, I accepted the invitation without hesitation, knowing that it would be both a challenging and an interesting journey.

This would be my first time, and I would do it in Mandarin. It would be very special because my students were a mother and daughter with mental disabilities. The daughter is very smart and able to learn, as is the mother, however the mother can only understand Taiwanese language. Even then, I was eager to give it a try, trusting in the Holy Spirit to empower me with wisdom and knowledge to make it through. I only needed to trust myself and ask the God of my journey to grant me the graces that I needed most in responding to this call.

We started our class by reading Gospel stories about baptism, with instruction on the Catholic faith, and later on studied the basic Catholic prayers. We used different methods such as artworks, watching Gospel video clips, singing songs, reading and writing. Every week we had a one-hour catechism class but before that I needed enough time to prepare my lesson plans. I would humbly ask my Mandarin teacher for help so that the
Mandarin language I used would be simple and humble.

Our weekly catechism classes went well. My students participated well and showed their eagerness to learn about the Catholic faith. Most of the time I asked my younger student to translate for her mom what we were talking about, and she did it well. It was a big help for me. For my part, I needed patience and gentleness in dealing with them. I gave them an assignment to pray every day, especially when they woke up in the morning and before going to sleep. In addition, the daughter had her own daily routine of reading the Gospel of the day and writing it in her notebook which she had been doing even before we had our catechism classes. Obviously, she knew a lot about the Gospel stories. I remember that many times I asked them if they really wanted to be baptized as Catholics and they kept on answering yes. The preparation took six months, and they never gave up. That inspired me also to keep going.

During Christmas 2020, they finally received the Sacrament of Baptism and were joyfully welcomed into the Catholic parish community. I felt very happy and fulfilled seeing them baptized and accepted by the Catholic community. I was touched when they responded to the priest “Amen” with a firm voice during the baptismal ceremony. This made me realize how mysterious the works of the Holy Spirit were within the three of us during our spiritual journey together.

After the Mass, they happily showed me the necklace with a cross that they wore, a baptism gift they received. I saw a profound joy in their eyes that they had received the sacrament, the sense of belongingness in the one Catholic community of faith. There was a big celebration afterwards in our community Al Jia Development Center where some of their classmates, teachers and staff members who witnessed their baptismal ceremony stayed up until late at night. I remember the daughter received a special gift when she answered the questions about the Gospel during the Mass. That made me so proud of her. Indeed, it was a merry and memorable Christmas for us all.

Pope Francis in his message for persons with disabilities during the 2020 International Day of Celebration for Persons with Disabilities said: “I strongly reaffirm the right of persons with disabilities to receive the sacraments, like all other members of the Church. All liturgical celebrations in the parish should be accessible to them, so that, together with their brothers and sisters, each of them can deepen, celebrate, and live their faith. Special attention should be paid to people with disabilities who have not yet received the sacraments of Christian initiation: they should be welcomed and included in programmes of catechesis in preparation for these sacraments. No one should be excluded from the grace of these sacraments.”

Both of my students attended Sunday Mass until the covid 19 pandemic surged in Taiwan and there was a need to observe restrictions. We were fortunate enough that our catechism class continued. We also studied altar serving, which led us to help as altar servers during the regular Masses of the Center. We also finished studying the basic Catholic prayers, the rosary, and every Thursday afternoon the younger student led our regular rosary prayer. I was amazed at how they offered prayers for their family, friends, classmates and their families, the teachers and staff of the center, the concerns of the community, and other intentions. I observed how much their prayers were sincere, focused, pure and from the heart. I remember Pope Francis said in his message during 2021 International Day for Persons with Disabilities “Prayer is a mission, a mission accessible to everyone, and I would like to entrust that mission in a particular way to you.”

My simple yes to the invitation led me to become a catechist for persons with disabilities, and it became a great privilege and source of blessings that I received in my missionary life. It has been a one-of-a-kind experience of how God works with me and my students in our spiritual journey. It broadened my understanding of my own baptismal call to be a missionary in the way God wanted me to be, to fully participate in His plan. My experience made me realize that spiritual care is the most important part in this life’s journey. Yes, I felt contentment doing my ministry with those who are mentally and physically challenged, to be of help in giving care for our brethren in need of physical, emotional and spiritual well-being, the greatest care of all.

Lastly, with a joyful heart I am grateful to the Center’s director and her assistant for being God’s messenger who believed in my capacity to accompany our students in their spiritual journey. Together we live our Catholic faith and mission.

Columban lay missionary Febie Gonzales lives and works in Taiwan.
God’s Work
A Sisterhood Sent by God
By Columban Sisters

People’s activity is usually their response to the historical situations in which they find themselves. In 1918, Lady Frances Moloney had in mind “some kind of Sisterhood.” From 1918 to 1920 she was a prime mover in bringing this to reality. Fr. John Blowick, co-founder of the Missionary Society of St. Columban, referred to her as “the first live spark” of what became the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban. He saw her as “the woman sent by God.” Together they worked and prayed, planned and refined the Constitutions of the newly founded Missionary Congregation of Columban Sisters.

The context, in which Lady Frances Moloney’s dream for “some kind of Sisterhood” was born against the backdrop of war. In 1916, Europe was on the march. The 1914-1918 war was at its peak. The propaganda of war was in the air, and men were urged on to “great things.” Patriotism encouraged them to be willing to sacrifice everything for the love of their country. The challenge was great and many young men and not-so-young men marched into the battlefield to fight for the “great cause.” Some went proudly and gladly with heads held high and sureness in their steps. But some wondered and reflected on the death and destruction, crippled bodies and damaged minds. In the end, what would victory mean?

In 1916, China was coming to an awareness of herself. She was very aware of her great Empire and the vastness of her territories. She was also aware of her potential as a world power. Ireland in 1916 was awakening to the cause of freedom. Revolution was in the air, and the youth of the nation were not asleep.

The leaders of the movement were men and women of high ideals — poets, writers, scholars, mystics and idealists. Their goal was not merely that Ireland fight for freedom from foreign domination but that she become free to shape her own destiny and to make available to her sons and daughters the heritage of faith and culture which was rightly theirs. They aspired to take their place in the world in a manner worthy of God and country. They were in no doubt as to the greatness of their cause and the dedication which was necessary. They weren’t blind to the sacrifices which might be asked of them. Ireland was witnessing its rebirth, and like every birth it came by way of suffering. Padraig Pearse summed up his insight and understanding when he wrote: “I turned my face to the road before me. To the deed I see and the death that will be mine.”

In 1916 the Irish Church was experiencing an extraordinary upsurge of missionary zeal which touched almost every household for many years. New centers of missionary endeavor emerged. Leaders rose up who were committed to the cause, challenge and call of mission. They put their hands to the plough and didn’t look back.

Fr. John Blowick took up the call and challenge of mission. He gave up his professorial chair in Maynooth. In 1920, he made his first journey to the Far East when he led the pioneer group of Columban Fathers on mission to China. In 1918 he wrote, “The work is God’s work—not yours or mine. God is behind the whole thing and He will see it through.”

On February 7, 1922, six young ladies arrived to join the Congregation. On the day after, four more came and on the February 16, 1922, two young ladies came from Australia. Now life in the new Congregation could go ahead. Right from the beginning the emphasis was on preparation for China. It seemed a distant dream. However, in March 1926 shipping accommodations for a group of Sisters was booked for the autumn. They sailed thirteen thousand miles to Shanghai and couldn’t presume on returning to Ireland again. The Missionary Sisters of St. Columban had reached their goal.

Today, Columban Sisters are back again in China. They are also in Korea, the Philippines, Pakistan, Myanmar, the U.S., Britain and Ireland. Sisters from Asia have been missioned abroad and are carrying on the work of those first Sisters who left the security of their daily lives to venture into places unknown so that all people may come to know the Living God. They have the same energy and dedication as the Sisters had one hundred years ago. What Fr. Blowick wrote is still relevant: “The work is God’s work. He is behind the whole thing and He will see it through.”

The Missionary Sisters of St. Columban provided this article.
Columban Sisters helping with sick baby

Mother Mary Patrick

Bringing aid to flood victims

Columban Sister helping girl

Columban Sisters in Burma 1945

Mother Moloney’s gravesite

Columban Fathers and Sisters in Hanyang China 1932

Caring for the sick

Columban Sisters in Burma 1945

Columban Sisters watch women weaving
“I am all yours, my Queen, my Mother, and all that I have is yours.”

In 2017, when Sr. Joyce Arevalo, OSA, our pastoral coordinator in Hsinchu Cathedral asked me to be the directress of the Filipino Legion of the Mary, the only answer I gave was “I’ll try.” I had no idea about how to become a spiritual directress of the Legion of Mary (LOM) and how to accompany the migrant and immigrant members of the LOM. I had no experience as a spiritual directress. I read in the LOM handbook that the spiritual director/directress is a priest, deacon, religious Sister or brother. I felt I did not deserve to be their spiritual directress because I was a lay missionary. During the ACIES, (function of the LOM when all the members renewed their promises to Mary), I had the opportunity to ask an Augustinian Sister, a former spiritual directress of the LOM, why they chose a lay missionary to become their spiritual directress instead of a priest or religious Sister. She simply replied, why not? I pondered her response to me. I reflected on the call of Mary. There are millions of women but why did God call Mary to be the mother of Jesus? From that time my journey as a spiritual directress of Legion of Mary started.

The situation of the LOM members was rocky at the time. Many old members didn’t like to attend the weekly meetings. Some new members were also confused because they didn’t know what the direction of their Praesidium (unit of the LOM) was. I didn’t know how to accompany the LOM members and do my duties as their spiritual directress. I felt worried because I didn’t know where to start. I prayed to God to give me the grace to handle this situation. Every time we had a weekly meeting, I read a spiritual reading from the Legion of Mary Handbook and gave an Allocutio after recitation of the Catenal. I was always praying to the Holy Spirit and Mary to assist me on giving the Allocutio (a short talk on the Legion of Mary handbook). I listened to their sharing about the LOM duties and daily experiences – their ups and downs. Reading the LOM Handbook gave me an opportunity to know more about Mary, particularly her qualities and her values, and it also brought me closer to the Holy Spirit. I became aware of the functions of the Legion of Mary and appreciated the works of the Legion of Mary in the Church.

Many things happened while journeying with the LOM members. Many challenges, happy times, ups and downs, but I am still accompanying them. All the members of the Legion of Mary are working in factories or in homes as caregivers. They are very committed to attend the weekly meeting after work and serving during the Masses as ushers, attending the labor education in order to share their knowledge to other migrant workers like them and sometimes visiting the sick. I see their passion to serve God despite the time restraints and the effects of the pandemic on their lives. Most of them are working at night, and they go to the Church to serve in the morning after work. They are happy to attend Mass, the weekly meeting and do their apostolate during the Mass before they go back to their dormitories to rest. I am inspired by how they are living out their faith.

For almost give years as their spiritual directress, I didn’t imagine that the Praesidium that started out rocky would become peaceful and active in their apostolate. As I reflect on how the Holy Spirit works through the intercession of the Blessed Mary, I realized how God is good to me and to the Praesidium. The worries I had before are now replaced with the faith I have now. I learn from Mary about how to be open, be receptive to God’s call and let the Holy Spirit guide me. Journeying with LOM members brings me assurance that nothing is impossible with God.

I see how the LOM members grow in their faith and become faithful to their promises to Mary. “I am all yours, my Queen, my Mother, and all that I have is yours,” the promise they recite during annual consecrations (ACIES) is the promise that they live daily as children of Mary. This is also my promise not only as part of the Legion of Mary but as a servant of God. I am all yours.
Throughout the western world, the growth of women's and children's rights has changed much of societal and cultural expectations for both groups. However, some areas still face challenges. A common expectation that largely remains unchanged is the household duties and caring for children. Today, many women work outside of the home. However, upon arriving home from work, the majority of household duties (cooking, cleaning, etc.) and child raising falls upon the woman. In general, a man can arrive from a full day's work into his house to rest. Meanwhile, the woman arrives from a full day's work to more work. My mother was an example.

She had married at the age of 18 straight from high school. My father was a career Air Force officer and often was away. When my father retired and opened his own private business, my mother decided to pursue a nursing degree. I am the youngest of six and from early childhood I remember seeing her studying over the medical books piled on her bed. Yet, she was constantly interrupted by the needs of her children. Once I had a terrible earache and entered into the bedroom crying. My mother was deep in her studies but immediately dropped everything to take care of my needs. Her studies at the moment were secondary. It took me many years to appreciate the sacrifices of her small acts of kindness.

In my first year of the Columban seminary, I had the challenging workload of a Master's degree in Theology. Like my mother, I would have books piled on my bed as I read and took notes. One evening one of the priests in the house had a mission reflection group in the house. One of the members of the group was a young mother who brought her daughter (about 10 years of age) because a babysitter could not be found. They had placed the daughter in a room with various games to play with. I was on kitchen duty hastily cleaning up while mentally preoccupied with a test for the next day. When I finished, relieved that I can go to my room, I was surprised to find the young child standing by the kitchen door. Immediately I asked her if she needed something to drink, snack on, etc. All of which she replied no. Therefore, I asked how I could help her. She said, “I’m bored. Can you play with me?” Immediately, my mind screamed NO! I had too much to prepare and no time for this! However, I saw the look on her face, and I said I could for a short time. Initially, I was a little put out but proceeded to play some board games. In time, I forgot about my studies and enjoyed the relaxation of play and laughter. Eventually, her mother showed up, and they left. Tired, I went to bed with no worry of studies. As you guess, it all turned out well.

Witnessing my mother’s selfless sacrifice to care for her children in spite of a busy workload, and a child’s simple approach of enjoying life at every moment, I realized that the more important things in life were these small acts of kindness. After all, wasn’t that the purpose of my studies? Women and children have been my greatest teachers in life.
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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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“Do not prevent them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”
– St. Matthew 19:14

To whom does the kingdom belong? It belongs to the children, indeed, but also the weak, the poor, and those on the edge of society are those who possess it. He sends us to bring the good news to them and to be good news for them.