

Columban Mission

The Magazine of the Missionary Society of St. Columban

August/September 2026



Economic Impact of Missionary Projects

C O N T E N T S

Issue Theme – Economic Impact of Missionary Projects



GRANDMA'S MITE

10



CHAINS CANNOT BIND THE SOUL

12

4 HOPE AMIDST HEARTBREAK

Birthday Celebrations

6 MISSIONARY ZEAL

Kim Young-ja Susanna

8 KOREAN MARTYRS PARISH

Columban Hall

14 PATHWAY TO PEACE

A Missionary Reflection from Pakistan

16 FROM TOURISTS TO PILGRIMS IN JEJU

Missionary Disciples

18 POLIO IN PAKISTAN

Failing Our Children

20 VIP

Inspiring Dedication

22 SALAAM WA ALAIKUM!

Eid Mubarak!

DEPARTMENTS

3 IN SO MANY WORDS

23 FROM THE DIRECTOR

Volume 110 - Number 5 - August/September 2026

Columban Mission

PUBLISHED BY THE COLUMBAN FATHERS

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

MAILING ADDRESS:

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

TOLL-FREE PHONE: 877/299-1920

WEBSITE: columban.org

Copyright © 2026, The Columban Fathers (Legal Title)

PUBLISHER

FR. ALBERT UTZIG
DIRECTORUSA@COLUMBAN.ORG

EDITOR

KATE KENNY
KKENNY@COLUMBAN.ORG

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

MARCI ANDERSON
MANDERSON@COLUMBAN.ORG

RENEA STEELE
RSTEELE@COLUMBAN.ORG

DYANNE WENDLING
DWENDLING@COLUMBAN.ORG

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

KRISTIN ASHLEY

EDITORIAL BOARD

DAN EMINGER
KATE KENNY
ERNIE MAY
FR. ALBERT UTZIG

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 Columban Missionaries

Meaningful Benefits

While Columban missionaries have long been associated with spiritual outreach, their presence has also generated meaningful and often overlooked economic benefits for the communities they serve. While their primary mission is rooted in faith, the practical outcomes of their work frequently contribute to local development, stability, and opportunity.

One of the most immediate economic impacts of missionaries is the establishment of essential institutions. Schools, clinics, and community centers founded by missionary groups often become cornerstones of local infrastructure. These institutions not only provide critical services but also create jobs for teachers, healthcare workers, and support staff. In many regions where government resources are limited, such contributions help build a foundation for long-term economic growth.

In particular, education plays a transformative role not only for individuals but also for communities. From the Higher Education Center in Myanmar (formerly Burma) to the Manual Duato school in Peru, Columban missionaries help educate individuals around the world. As

individuals gain knowledge and practical abilities, they become better equipped to participate in local economies, start small businesses, or pursue higher-paying work. Over time, this leads to a more skilled workforce, which can attract investment and foster entrepreneurship within the community.

Healthcare initiatives, like the work of Columbans with tuberculosis and polio patients in Pakistan and HIV/Aids patients in Myanmar, also carry strong economic implications. By improving access to medical care, missionaries help reduce the burden of disease, enabling individuals to work, provide for their families, and contribute to economic life. Healthier populations are more productive, and reduced healthcare crises can free up resources for education, infrastructure, and business development.

Additionally, missionaries often promote values such as stewardship, cooperation, and ethical business practices. These principles can encourage trust and stability in local markets, which are essential for economic progress. When communities adopt practices that emphasize fairness and accountability, they create environments where commerce can flourish more sustainably.

Missionaries also frequently act as bridges between cultures, connecting local communities to global networks of support. Through partnerships with international donors, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations, they bring in financial resources, training, and materials that might otherwise be inaccessible. This infusion of support can stimulate local economies, fund development projects, and provide opportunities for community members to engage in broader markets.

Importantly, Columban missionaries prioritize empowering local leadership. Rather than creating dependency, they often work to equip individuals with the tools and confidence needed to sustain and expand initiatives independently. This focus on self-sufficiency helps ensure that economic benefits endure long after the missionaries themselves have moved on.

In reflecting on the economic impact of religious missionaries, it becomes clear that their contributions extend well beyond the spiritual realm. By investing in people, building institutions, and fostering values that support growth and cooperation, missionaries can play a quiet yet significant role in shaping healthier, more resilient economies.

Columban Missionaries



Hope Amidst Heartbreak

Birthday Celebrations

By Fr. Alvaro Martinez

At the Columban Border Ministry in the basement of the cathedral in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, children's birthdays are more than just passing dates—they are signs of hope. The celebrations happen on the last Friday of each month. Migrants who have traveled thousands of miles, leaving behind family, language, and things they know, can easily have their birthdays overlooked. But within the warm walls of the cathedral, no one's birthday is forgotten.

The Columban Border Ministry has long served as a place of refuge for people journeying north from countries across Latin America and beyond. Many arrive exhausted. Carrying little more than a backpack and a story marked by courage and sacrifice, they face great uncertainty. In the midst of waiting for asylum appointments, dealing with border

policies, or planning the next step, celebrating a birthday becomes a powerful reminder: each life has dignity and worth.

When a birthday approaches, staff members and volunteers organize a small but heartfelt celebration. A nice homemade cake sits on the table. Colorful decorations adorn the room, and a small gift awaits the children celebrating a new year. Children laugh as they help hang balloons. Adults gather around to sing “Las Mañanitas” or “Happy Birthday” in Spanish and English. For a moment, the worries of migration give way to smiles, music, and shared humanity.

These celebrations are not extravagant. The cake might be simple, and the decorations modest. Yet the joy they generate is profound. For some, like those children, who have crossed more than one country and lived through harsh moments in their

short lives, being surrounded by people who recognize their birthdays can bring comfort and even tears. It sends a clear message: you are seen, valued, and belong.

In a border city often defined by movement and waiting, celebrating a child's birthday becomes an affirmation of life itself. At the Columban Border Ministry, each candle lit is a symbol of resilience. Each song sung echoes with solidarity. And each embrace reminds migrants that even far from home, community can still be found.

We are grateful for the Columban Border Ministry in Mexico/USA supporters, who make these faces smile and allow us to provide care and assistance to thousands of migrants coming from many countries in Latin America. **CM**

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



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.

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

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

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

Missionary Zeal

Kim Young-ja Susanna

Fr. Donal O'Keefe



On February 8, 2026, Kim Yongja Susanna (89) - a long-time Columban supporter died very peacefully at her home in Seoul. Born in 1937, her father was a carpenter who worked with the Columbans in building the cathedral in Chuncheon, Korea. Growing up around the church, she had vivid memories of the missionaries who worked there in the late 1940s and early 1950s. She had a special place in her heart for Bishop Thomas Quinlan. At times when rice was scarce, she recalls him calling in her mother after the dawn Mass to give her some rice!

Another deeply touching and unbreakable bond with the Columbans came through her brother, Gabriel Kim

Kyung-ho. Gabriel served the Church as assistant to Columban priest Fr. Tony Collier, who was appointed in January 1950 as the first pastor of a new parish in Chuncheon city.

On the morning of June 27, 1950, just after the outbreak of the Korean War, Fr. Tony and Gabriel were walking across the city to the Cathedral when North Korean soldiers stopped them, bound them together and shot them. As the shots were fired, Fr. Tony pulled Gabriel toward himself and fell on top of him. Fr. Tony was killed instantly, but the bullets struck Gabriel only in the shoulder and neck, knocking him unconscious. Believing them to be dead, the soldiers left them, but Gabriel survived and told the story.

Today, Fr. Tony is honored not only as a martyr for the faith, but as a man whose last action was an act of love: giving his life so another might live.

Growing up in post-war Korea, Susanna had a dream of studying literature but like so many in that era, particularly the women, she did not have the opportunity then to follow that path. She worked in a bank, got married and for years was busy raising a family. But later in life, after her husband died, she returned to night school and graduated from University majoring in Korean Literature. It was a new life for Susana—she joined various groups, became a member of the Korean Poets Association and published two volumes of poetry.



Fr. Tony & parishoners, May 1950



Dalgan 2009



Susana with Collier Family 2025



Her brother's Parish

Around that time, she moved to Donam Dong parish and reconnected with the Columbans. I first met her then, when she became a benefactor and a regular presence at Columban events. Her daughter Helena has special needs and has an exceptional gift for music. Susana devoted immense time and resources to nurturing that talent, and today Helen plays the piano and organ at our Benefactors' Masses, at Donam Parish as well as other venues.

During the last year, declining health meant that Susana was not able to attend the monthly Benefactors' Mass. Her last visit to the Columban House was to meet with the family of Fr. Tony Collier, who visited Korea in

May 2025. It was a special moment for Susana and the Collier family. She was meeting with the family of the man who had saved her elder brother, and they were meeting with the sister of the man who was with their uncle when he was killed.

Susana's funeral was held at her local Donam-dong parish, the first church built by the Columbans in Seoul. Despite being a bitterly cold morning on February 11, the church was full for the 6:00 a.m. Mass. Columban Kwon Tae-moon, John and I attended, along with some of our benefactors and staff, as well as Fr. Jeon Jae-Geon, Martino of the Korean Foreign Mission Society. The gathering bore witness to how Susana's

missionary zeal, nurtured in her Chuncheon days, reached far beyond the Columbans.

To end with the opening lines from one of her poems entitled [I write poetry]:

*To meet the self that lives within,
I write a poem.
Yes!
Another self emerges —
unfamiliar, abundant.
How sacred it feels.*

Susana indeed sensed that the ordinary things of life were sacred, and she lived each day with purpose and presence. May she rest in peace. 

Columban Fr. Donal O'Keefe lives and works in Korea.



Korean Martyrs Parish

Columban Hall

By Fr. Gerry Dunne

On August 15, 2025, the parishioners of Korean Martyrs Catholic Center gathered with their pastor, Fr. Benedict Yang, to bless their renovated parish hall. At the parish council meeting, it had been decided that the new hall should be known as “Columban Hall.” This was the parish’s way of thanking the priests of the Missionary Society of St. Columban for their service to the community since the parish’s founding in 1977.

Korean Martyrs is a Catholic parish in Orange County, California, about 45 miles south of Los Angeles. It was established to serve the spiritual and social needs of the Korean Catholics in the area. Its older members are

immigrants from Korea, most of whom arrived in America in the 1970s and 1980s. The younger members are now second and third-generation Korean Americans.

While the majority of Korean immigrants to California settled in Los Angeles, many also found their way to Orange County (OC), south of the city. But while Los Angeles had three parishes providing Mass in the Korean language, in OC, there were none.

In April 1977, eleven Korean Catholic families gathered in one of their houses to look for ways to resolve this problem. With the support of the local bishop, they arranged to have a Mass celebrated in Korean in the nearby Blessed



Sacrament parish. But their dream was to build a church that would not only provide Masses in Korean but also would become a gathering place for Koreans in the area.

In November 1978, a Columban missionary priest, Fr. Frank Mannion, was appointed as pastor of the growing community. Fr. Mannion had served as a missionary priest in Korea for 25 years before being appointed to the American region to minister to newly arrived Korean immigrants. While he continued to celebrate Korean Masses in the nearby Blessed Sacrament parish, Fr. Mannion understood the need for Korean Catholics to have a church that would cater specifically to their own religious and cultural needs.



Photos from the Center throughout the years





He began searching for a suitable building, knowing that if he could provide the facilities, the people would gather.

Eventually, in 1981, Fr. Mannion heard of a Protestant church that was for sale in the Westminster area. The parishioners collected enough funds to purchase the building. The OC Korean Catholics finally had their own church. By that time, there were now 770 adults and children registered as members.

Fr. Mannion retired in March 1980 and was succeeded as pastor by Fr. Sean Brazil, who added meeting rooms and a parish office. In July 1999, Fr. John Hogan became pastor. For over 30 years, a total of twelve Columban

priests have served as pastors and assistant pastors in the Korean Martyrs Catholic Center.

In 2010, the first Korean American priest, Fr. Eugene Lee, was appointed as pastor. Fr. Eugene already had a strong Columban connection as he was a seminarian when Fr. Brazil was pastor at KMCC. To celebrate the parish's 50th anniversary, Fr. Eugene erected a plaque commemorating the Columban priests who served in the parish.

Today, the parish is a vibrant community, catering to the spiritual and social needs of Korean Catholics in the area. Masses are celebrated in Korean for the older generation and in English for the younger members.

RCIA programs are held in both languages and other parish groups include the Legion of Mary, St. Vincent de Paul, Bible study, Korean language school for children and Korean drum groups for students and adults. Yearly celebrations include Chusok (harvest festival), the Korean and the Chinese New Year, a family festival, and outings for Mother's Day.

While the growth of the Korean Martyrs Korean Catholic Center is a tribute to the Columban priests who served the community there, it is an even greater tribute to the faith of Korean Catholics. **CM**

Columban Fr. Gerry Dunne provided this update.



Grandma's Mite

Good Enough

Fr. Jovito Dales, Philippines

On October 2, 2021, during an opening Mass in Rome for the launching of the two-year synod process, as reported by Christopher White in the National Catholic Reporter (NCR), the late Pope Francis said: "Every encounter, as we know, calls for openness, courage, and a willingness to let ourselves be challenged by the presence and stories of others." I was privileged to have this kind of life-changing encounter.

For years, I have been helping, whenever possible, mission appeal Masses here in the Philippines with our active and energetic mission promotion coordinator in Mindanao, Mr. Bernardo Durangparang.

One day, while distributing newsletters outside the cathedral in Pagadian City, an old woman who was selling candles approached and asked me: "What is it that you're doing, Father?" I looked at her: she was a little bent, with grey hair, and a gentle face. "Oh, we are Columban missionaries, and we are doing a Mass appeal in your parish to thank you all for your continued support to us through prayers and financial help." She seemed satisfied with my reply.

She then went back to her place, where she displayed her candles. A few minutes later, she approached me once again and gave me ten pesos (more or less equivalent to USD \$0.20) as her donation to our mission. I looked at her smiling face. At the back of my mind, I knew she was earning a living not just for herself but for her grandkids, too. So, instead of accepting her money, I offered it back to her. With all sincerity, I told her: "Thank you, Lola ("grandma"), for being so thoughtful, but I think you need it more than we do." To my surprise, she begged: "Please, Father, accept my little help for your mission. I will be okay."

Taken aback by her reply, I was speechless for a moment. Then, I hugged



Fr. Jovito facilitating a recollection for our Misyon partners in mission



Fr. Jovito with parishioners during the Mission Appeal in Gusa, Cagayan de Oro

and thanked her. What a great display of generosity and kindness. Left alone, I felt embarrassed and humbled at the same time. Nevertheless, my heart was filled with joy and gratitude for such an experience.

Ten years have passed, and I still remember that encounter as if it just happened yesterday. It was a gift that continues to teach me valuable lessons about divine providence, as revealed brilliantly to us by the story of a widow's mite (Lk. 21:1-4). Like that old woman selling candles, the widow in this pericope gave everything that she had, leaving nothing but her trust and confidence in God's divine providence. What else is left for her to

survive another day or two? And if she had a kid to feed, what then? Instead of finding answers to these questions, I turned toward God in my prayer and asked: "How can I repay our generous benefactors?"

Getting involved in facilitating recollections for Columban friends and benefactors has provided me with opportunities to express my gratitude to a multitude of generous friends of the Columban missionaries here in the Philippines. Meeting them face to face, listening to their stories about their first encounter with Columban missionaries, having meals together, and praying with and for them have deepened my appreciation of their

quiet accompaniment and support for our missions. These are simple, ordinary, kind, and generous people, many of whom do not even want to be named, who, in their own little ways, fuel our missionary endeavors. Yet, they are there, present like a mist that seeps and creeps into the crevices of the doorways of our lives, quietly entering and enriching us with the depth of their faith and trust in God. Their prayer intentions that I read during our regular Mass for Columban supporters demonstrate their deep trust in God and their selfless concern not only for their loved ones and friends, but also for those who suffer from various calamities and wars in various parts of the world.

One of the challenges in mission today is the overwhelming and seemingly insatiable hunger for power by those in authority who create ripples of misery and hopelessness in many innocent lives. "Grandma's mite," as I fondly called that unforgettable encounter, has this to offer us, who, in spite of the apparently insurmountable difficulties we are facing today, continue to work for a just and peaceful world. We are called to offer to those in need whatever we have, in whatever way we can, no matter how small. The greatness of the grandma's mite and the widow's mite in the Gospel is not so much in what they give, but their deep trust in the Giver who never fails them. We are challenged to emulate that same trust.

I suppose that one little act of kindness, like one little candle we can all light together, makes this darkened world a little brighter. We cannot give in to hopelessness. We cannot be overtaken by the darkness around us. We need to do something. That something could be just like "grandma's mite." It's good enough, I believe. 

Columban Fr. Jovito Dales lives and works in the Philippines.



Chains Cannot Bind the Soul

A Migrant's Experience of Freedom in Prison

By Fr. Erl Dylan J. Tabaco

During my seminary years, I had several encounters with inmates whose lives were transformed by their experiences in prison. Once, prior to my ordination to the diaconate, I was assigned to the New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa to give catechesis to our brother inmates in the Medium Security Compound. My presence there was an affirmation that God was already at work among them. The inmates' dedication and desire to know more about God and to deepen their relationship with Him were very inspiring.

Despite the events they had gone through, the suffering they endured as consequences of their actions, and their willingness to amend their lives, I saw in them a revelation of God's

The inmates' dedication and desire to know more about God and to deepen their relationship with Him were very inspiring.

undying love. Every time they shared their personal stories, I was amazed at how they gradually experienced God's liberating love, manifested in their testimonies. Their experience behind bars paved the way for them to realize what true freedom means—a freedom that comes from a heart willing to let go of the aches of the past, live the present with gratitude, and face the future with hope. My experience in prison ministry marked a significant

impact on my life as I continued my missionary journey.

Years after my ordination to the priesthood, I was brought back to this experience when I had the opportunity to visit a penal colony in Ancón, Lima, Peru. It was a two-hour drive from the parish of the Holy Archangels, where I was assigned. I never thought I would be able to continue this ministry, which is very close to my heart, until two prison ministry volunteers—a couple, Reginaldo and Marleni—approached me. They had been serving in the ministry for many years and were very close to the Columbans, as they were part of the Columban Missionary Collaborators, a ministry founded by Fr. Noel Kerins, an Irish Columban whose main purpose was



to empower local people to become missionaries.

When they shared their experiences in the prison, especially the challenges of finding a priest to administer the Sacraments, I realized how important accompaniment is—the gift of my presence with the inmates, especially the migrants who had been in prison for many years without visits from their families.

My commitment to help in the prison ministry brought me immense joy, especially the moment I celebrated Mass with them right after the pandemic, when visitors were once again allowed to enter the prison. I remember how they approached me with gratitude, telling me that they had been waiting for that moment to finally receive the Lord in the Eucharist after many years since their last Mass in their home countries.

That celebration did not end there. I had several occasions to visit them. Not only did we celebrate Mass, but they also asked for confession. Those moments confirmed that I was no longer a stranger to them—I was one with them. They are my brothers who never cease trusting in the mercy of

Their stories reflect God's endless love, enabling them to hold on to hope that one day, when they see their families again, they will be renewed—no longer prisoners of their past.

God. No matter what their past may be, they hold on to the hope that they are not forgotten.

My regular visits—administering the Sacraments, celebrating Mass, and sharing simple agape meals with what little we have—accompanied by their inspiring stories, are indeed like a heavenly banquet made present on earth. Their stories reflect God's endless love, enabling them to hold on to hope that one day, when they see their families again, they will be renewed—no longer prisoners of their past.

My mission in Peru, especially among migrants, has widened my horizons. Migrants are not only found on the streets of Lima or in the peripheries of the parish. Some of them are in prison, with no one to visit them. Their longing to be reunited with their families is a daily struggle. Yet through my presence and with the help of dedicated volunteers, they have

found a new family. It is a blessing to be part of this journey.

As I continue God's mission in Peru, I always look forward to being with them—being inspired by their stories of hope and strengthened by the friendships and brotherhood we have established. Like my experience in the Philippines, the same is true in Peru: inmates are no longer labeled by their past. They are seen as brothers whose lives reflect God's unceasing love.

Their testimony has taught me the real meaning of freedom: even when you are behind bars, if you set your heart free from past heartaches, resentments, anger, and hopelessness, you become a living example that true freedom comes from the heart—and no one can take away this gift from God. 

Columban Fr. Erl Dylan Tabaco is from the Philippines. He currently lives and works in Peru.



Pathway to Peace

A Missionary Reflection from Pakistan

By Fr. Elbert L. Balbastro

Sadness fills my heart every time I hear news about wars between nations. The unending war between Russia and Ukraine, the continuing conflict between Israel and Palestine, the ongoing civil war in Myanmar, and the persistent tension between Pakistan and India have shattered countless lives. In the midst of these conflicts, it is always the poor who suffer most. They are displaced from their homes, forced into refugee camps, stripped of security, dignity, and hope. In prayer, I continually ask the Lord for peace, because only in peace can people—especially the poor—live the dignified and humane lives they deserve.

As a Columban priest, justice and peace are at the heart of our charism. Living and working in Pakistan, I often ask myself how peace can be built in

*God offers me daily
opportunities to become
an instrument of peace.*

the midst of religious diversity, social tension, and economic hardship. Over time, I have come to realize that peace does not always begin with grand gestures. Sometimes, it begins quietly, in ordinary places—like our small tuberculosis clinic. As person-in-charge of the clinic, I see daily how care becomes a bridge between people. In our clinic, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians are welcomed without distinction. Each patient is received with respect, tenderness, and love. In this simple act of service, walls are lowered, and trust is built. Healing becomes more than a medical act; it becomes a sign of peace.

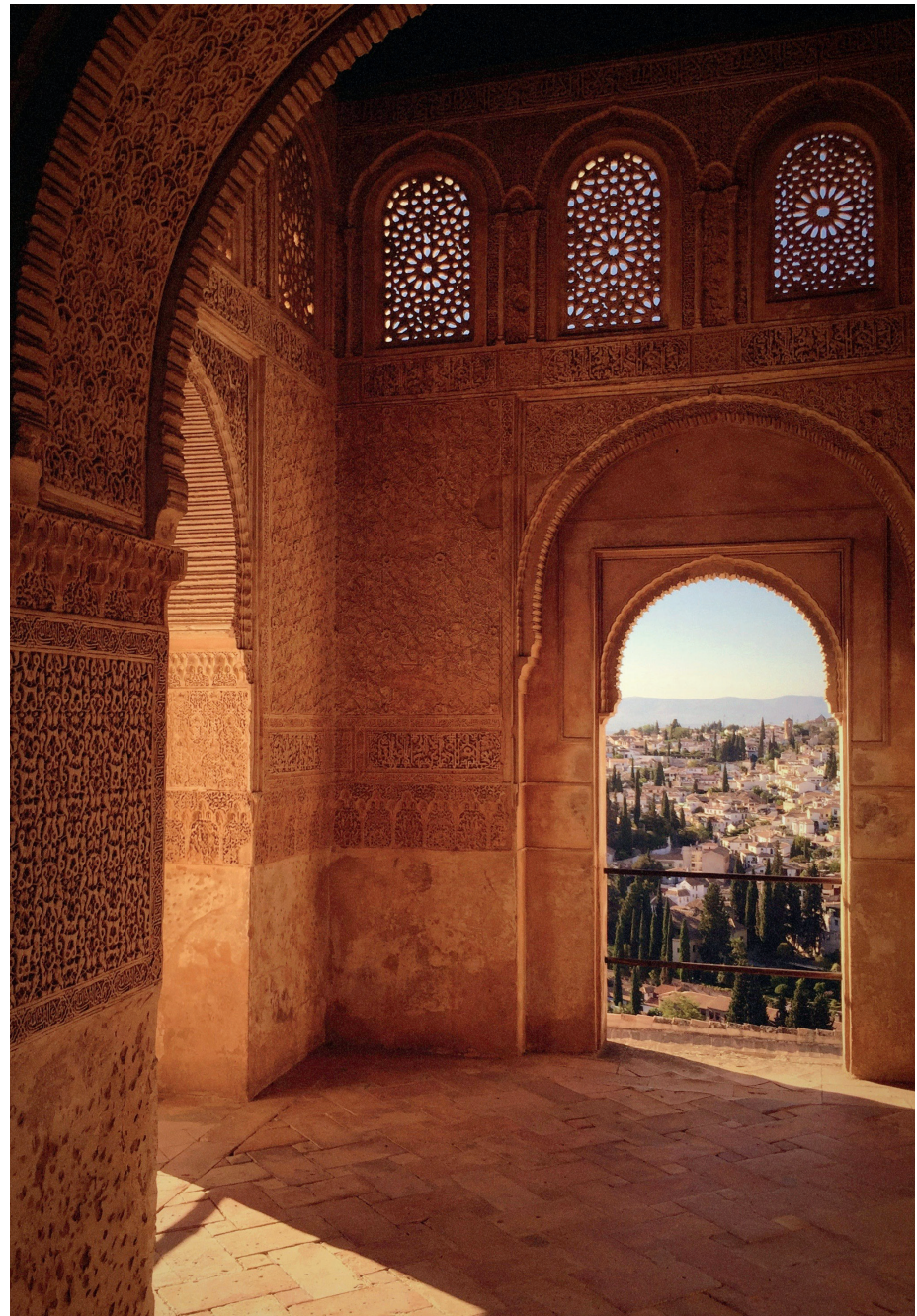
I am deeply inspired by the witness of Dr. Zakir Hussein, our in-house doctor. A Shia Muslim, Dr. Zakir has faithfully served at the Catholic Church Badin Clinic for almost twenty-one years. Every Friday,

Living and working in Pakistan, I often ask myself how peace can be built in the midst of religious diversity, social tension, and economic hardship.

without fail, he offers his skills and time to care for the sick. One day, out of curiosity, I asked him, “Doctor, what made you stay in a Catholic clinic for so many years?” He replied simply, “I look at people with care. It does not matter to me whether my patient is Hindu, Muslim, or Christian. What matters is giving them the best care they deserve. I also consider you and the staff here as my family. I care for you, and I feel the care you show me.” His words touched my heart deeply. In that moment, I realized that care itself is a language everyone understands. It crosses boundaries that politics, religion, and history often divide. Care heals not only bodies, but relationships—and ultimately, communities. Care, I believe, is one of the most powerful gifts we can offer our world. If we truly desire lasting peace, care must be at the center of our lives.

I recall a short story about a monk teaching his students about enlightenment. A man holding a cup of coffee was bumped by another person, causing the coffee to spill. When asked why the coffee spilled, the monk explained, “It spilled because that is what the man was holding.” The lesson is clear: what we carry within us is what we pour out into the world. If we hold anger, fear, or hatred, these will shape our actions. But if we carry compassion, love, and care, these virtues will naturally flow to others.

With this insight, my prayer has changed. I now ask God to help me store goodness, peace, care, and love in my heart, even amid the daily



challenges of mission life in Pakistan. I remind myself constantly that my model is Jesus Christ. At His birth, the angels proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of goodwill.” Peace was at the heart of His coming. Throughout His life, Jesus demonstrated that peace is born from love, expressed through service, and sustained by compassion. I have also learned that God does not always give peace as an immediate answer to my prayers. Instead, God

offers me daily opportunities to become an instrument of peace. Each day, I am invited to choose care over indifference, welcome over fear, and love over division. Each day, I have the opportunity to share the peace I carry—within myself, with my family, the people I encounter in mission, and to the wounded world. 

Columban Fr. Elbert Balbastro is from the Philippines. He currently lives and works in Pakistan.

From Tourists to Pilgrims in Jeju

Missionary Disciples

By Fr. Seok Jinwook Antonio



Fr. Jinwook with Columban lay missionaries Bae Sihyeon and Kim Sunhee

In July 2025, the humid air of Jeju Island carried more than just the scent of the sea; it carried the prayers and laughter of twenty-four young people from Taiwan. This five-day journey was not a mere vacation but a meticulously planned Society Invitation to Mission (SIM) program, a signature initiative led by our Columban lay missionary (CLM), Bae Sihyeon. As a priest serving alongside her, I found immense joy in this collaboration. Our partnership was a living testament to the Synodal spirit—ordained and laity walking, planning, and praying together as one missionary body.

We began our journey at the Blessed Felix Kim Gi-ryang Martyr Memorial. Felix, the first to bring the Catholic faith to Jeju, occupies a quiet corner of history, and his memorial

is humble. Initially, I worried the youth might find it underwhelming compared to Jeju's famous scenic landmarks. I was wrong.

The turning point came during a simple activity: the youth were invited to write their deepest burdens and prayers on slips of paper and physically hammer a nail into a large wooden cross. The rhythmic, heavy “thwack” of hammers against wood replaced the usual chatter of teenagers. I watched as tears welled up in their eyes. In that small room, the abstract concept of “martyrdom” became a physical reality. They weren't just looking at history; they were nailing their own lives to the Cross of Christ. This was the exact moment they ceased being “tourists” and became “pilgrims.”

The mission exposure was profoundly enriched by an unexpected

tapestry of international solidarity. While we were there to learn about the Columban legacy, the Holy Spirit expanded our boundaries. We were joined by Hongseok, a Korean Columban preparing for his mission in Taiwan, providing a bridge between the youth's home and their host island.

However, the most moving encounter was facilitated by Fr. Peter Dong, the first Chinese Columban priest who was working in Korea. He brought together a group that truly represented the “Church without borders.” This group included not only Chinese youth living in Korea but also a special delegation from mainland China, featuring two priests and one religious sister.

To see youth from Taiwan, Korea, and mainland China—territories often divided by complex politics—breaking



The cross in the Blessed Felix Kim Gi-ryang memorial

bread and singing hymns together was a miracle of grace. We sat together in the shadows of the volcanic Oreums, discussing our shared faith. This encounter was a powerful spiritual preparation for World Youth Day 2027 in Seoul, proving that the missionary call of the baptized is a shared responsibility that transcends every human border.

Our itinerary led us to the St. Isidore Farm. There, the youth saw how faith takes flesh in social and economic development. We reflected on how the Columban pioneers didn't just build churches; they built communities and dignity.

We also visited the Jeju 4.3 Peace Park. It was a somber lesson in the necessity of social justice. The youth stood before the monuments of the fallen, reflecting on the Church's role as

a healer in broken societies. Whether we were trekking through the woods or celebrating Mass on the basalt rocks of the shore, we practiced a "theology of the road." The youth began to understand that mission is lived in the "ordinary moments"—in work, in family, and in the way we treat the environment.

As we boarded the flight back to Taiwan, the group was different. The initial "tourist excitement" had been replaced by a quiet, settled strength. These young people are now returning to their parishes not just as members, but as missionary disciples.



Group picture of SIM participants at the memorial of Blessed Felix Kim Gi-ry



For me, this experience reaffirmed that the most effective mission is one where the ordained and laity work in true partnership. By honoring the Synodal path, we showed the youth that every baptized person has a seat at the table and a role in the mission. Through the SIM program, we didn't just show them Jeju; we showed them the heartbeat of a Church that walks together. **CM**

Columban Fr. Seok Jinwook Antonio is from South Korea. He currently lives and works in Taiwan.



Polio in Pakistan

Failing Our Children

By Fr. Daniel O'Connor

In 2024, a young girl became the 72nd and last recorded polio victim of the year. Balochistan Province had 27 cases, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with 22, then Sindh with 21 and one each in Punjab and Islamabad. Recently, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stated that, “the Government of Pakistan will not rest until we have ended the scourge of Polio from our borders.”

I remember many years ago when I was attending school in Hokitika, N.Z., that there was a girl who suffered from being a victim of polio. During those years, I recall nurses coming to school to administer polio drops (oral

Previously, despite meagre resources, old tools and lack of personnel, the results were good. Now it is tragic that a polio-free Pakistan appears to be a distant dream.

vaccines), which were quite tasty.

Polio or poliomyelitis is a viral infection. Lack of access to clean water increases the risk of transmission. There is no cure for the disease and paralysis caused by an infection is irreversible. In Pakistan, I have seen too many people of all ages limping along as best as they are able, being victims of this terrible, debilitating disease. Some wear a brace, while others hobble along with the aid of a solid stick. Others, having one leg badly weakened, grasp it with their hand so as to give support to the affected leg. My heart goes out to them as they must bear this burden for the rest of their lives. I also admire them for their courage, determination and for not complaining.

It is said that the polio virus entered Pakistan in the 1970's. In 1978, because of the many numbers of polio cases detected, there was an Extended

Progressive Program of Immunization launched with the great hopes for polio control and eradication in the country. Unfortunately, this hope was undermined by a number of obstacles. Then, with another launch of the Pakistan Polio Eradication Program in 1994, there was a significant annual decline from nearly twenty thousand cases in the early 1990s to only eight cases in 2018, fourteen in 2019, 85 in 2020 to then just one in 2021. Tragically, the tide turned again with the number of recorded cases on the rise over the last few years to 72 in 2024.

In Pakistan, with a population of 240 + million, there could be about 40 million children under the age of five who require the vaccination. Three doses are required annually so as to boost the immunity. Previously, despite meagre resources, old tools and lack of personnel, the results were good. Now it is tragic that a polio-free Pakistan appears to be a distant dream.

Many parents and localities persist in refusing their children to be inoculated. An issue that contributes to this is that the female literacy rate is stated to be 51 percent. Some think that the vaccination will result in infertility. It is also said that the house where Osama Bin Laden was living had active polio was confirmed through the information of health workers. Still some see it as a Western conspiracy! During the Inoculation Campaign of October 2024 in Sindh Province, a troubling trend emerged in that there were over 43,000 vaccine refusals. In many places, especially the northern areas of the country, armed security personnel accompany the health teams.

Despite this precaution, during 2024 at least twelve people, mostly police officers, were killed and dozens were injured during vaccination campaigns. One health worker stated, "We walk miles daily, often under threat, to save lives. We demand safety, respect and a proper service structure."



Health workers are stationed at many places e.g., bus stops, railway stations, hospitals, health clinics, schools, etc. There are teams that walk from house to house performing immunizations.

Health workers are stationed at many places. e. g., bus stops, railway stations, hospitals, health clinics, schools, etc. There are teams that walk from house to house performing immunizations. The date is recorded on their records as well as being written on the door of the family house and the children's fingers dabbed in an ink pad. Once it is determined that the child is under 5 years, they are asked to put their arm over their head. If they are unable to touch their ear, then they are given the polio drops. The children cry out loudly as they fear that they will be receiving an injection.

Often, when I visit a family or celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism, the small children are fearful and cry out loudly. I try to comfort them with the help of their parents. As a part of the ceremony, I ask the parents if their child has been given the health

inoculations, as well as informing them on the importance of sending their children to school. Parents need to be made aware that refusing the vaccine is not just a private decision but a public health hazard.

Afghanistan is the only other country in the world with polio cases. During 2024, it is reported that the polio cases in Afghanistan have decreased. In Pakistan, with the number of infections increasing, does the hard question need to be addressed? Are the Government and Health Officials truly committed to eradicating polio? A large amount of International Funding is received. The general public needs to know how the millions in aid have been utilized and why, despite these resources, we continue to fail our children. 

Columban Fr. Daniel O'Connor lives and works in Pakistan

VIP

Inspiring Dedication

By Fr. Liam O'Callaghan

During my time in Pakistan, I met very important people who truly touched my life, and one of them is George Taj from Lahore. I worked with him for ten years in the parish where he is a catechist. During that time, he also started working in the medical field, taking patients to the hospital.

That project has been ongoing for the last seventeen years. My inspiration from him comes from seeing his dedication and commitment to patients. One example was just recently, when a patient with a fractured spine required a major operation. George was instrumental in ensuring he was seen by the orthopedic surgeon, and the operation went well. He was also involved in making sure two units of blood were provided. Seeing this successful operation, which restored the patient's life and the ability to work again, hopefully within a month or two, to support his family, was truly inspiring.

This entire medical project has given new life to many people, up to 500 patients seen annually, and about 20 to 30 operations per year. It originates from faith and compassion, with George going out of his way to ensure patients receive good care. What makes it remarkable is the deep respect and collaboration among healthcare professionals of different faiths. George is Christian, most doctors are Muslim, and many nurses are Christian, creating a place of mutual respect where Christians and Muslims work together for the common good—patient healing and care. I find this especially inspiring



Fr. Liam (far right) and George (center)



Dr. Afzal Hussain

because it's built on respect and admiration for each other, enabling us to bring healing to countless patients over the years.

My friendship with George has been one of the highlights of my time in Pakistan. Even though I'm no longer in Lahore, now living in Hyderabad in Sindh province, I visit Lahore about three times a year and stay with his family. That friendship and shared dedication to this work have produced

incredible results for many people. I am grateful to have met him, known him, and shared his life. It's truly a blessing for me, and I believe it's a blessing for him as well. Together, our efforts have led to numerous successful surgeries and helped people regain their health through his care and commitment. **CM**

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



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.

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

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

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

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

Salaam Wa Alaikum!

Eid Mubarak!

Fr. Kurt Zion Pala

“Wa alaikum was salaam!” “Eid Mubarak!” Mufti Irfann greeted me back. This day is Eid al-Fitr. Eid al-Fitr is celebrated by Muslims worldwide because it marks the end of the month-long dawn-to-sunset fasting of Ramadan. This is the third Eid that I had visited him and his family. Today, they offered me some traditional Burmese sweets and the popular Eid snack called “samay,” which is a warm sweet snack with coconut meat and the *Sa-Nwin-Ma-Kin*, which is a semolina pudding.

Mufti Irfaan is an Islamic scholar and lawyer. He runs a language center where he teaches English and Arabic to many students. That day I met some of his students who also wanted to speak English with me. So, I engaged with them and spoke with them. They were asking me how long I had lived in Myanmar (formerly Burma) and if I could speak Burmese. I replied in my broken Burmese. And they commented that I spoke Kachin with their teacher, Mufti Irfann.

Mufti Irfaan is a Kachin by blood from Sumprabum, one of the remote Kachin hills. His family converted to Islam. It is very rare to find Kachins who have converted and are practicing Muslims. Most of his relatives are still Catholics. His grandmother is a regular church-goer in the parish where I used to serve and I would often see her and Irfaan when he visited his grandmother. Sadly, his grandmother passed away just a month before Ramadan.

He went overseas to complete his Islamic studies. He is a master of the Arabic language and the Quran. Mufti Irfaan’s house and center is located in

Rambo Quarter. This is where most of the Muslim families of Myitkyina live and work. In Myitkyina, like many cities, people often congregate and live together based on their religion or social status.

As I entered this part of the city, one can sense the joy in the people along the streets and the houses. Children visit houses and families and would be given some sweets or money. Irfaan said that most kids would refuse the sweets and snacks and prefer money instead. Times are changing, he added.

Mariam, his little child, is sweet and very intelligent. She can speak Burmese, Kachin, English and of course Arabic. I mentioned to Mufti Irfaan the new document *Al-Mizan, A Covenant for the Earth*, which was released recently by Muslim scholars to address the climate crisis. He took out his English-Arabic Quran and showed me the text used in the new document on care for the environment.

“The Most Merciful, Taught the Quran. Created Humankind. Taught him Eloquence. The sun and the moon move in precise calculation and the stars and the trees prostrate and the heaven He raised and imposed the balance {Mizan}. That you not transgress within the balance {Mizan} and establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance {Mizan}.” (Quran SS:1-9)

He asked Mariam to recite the text by memory. Mariam recited the text smoothly without looking at the Quran. In Islam, the term ‘Al-Mizan’ refers to balance or justice, and it is often used to describe the equilibrium that should be maintained



in all aspects of life, including the relationship between humanity and the environment. After a few minutes of conversation in Kachin, more and more people started coming to see him and the family, so I told him that I had to leave and thanked him for the welcome. I told him that we would meet again soon to discuss more ways we can work together.

Myitkyina is an example of how Myanmar is diverse in terms of cultures and faith traditions. In Myitkyina, you can find temples, monasteries, masjids, and churches. Interreligious or interfaith dialogue for social cohesion is an important ministry that we Columbans can animate and work with the local community. We are looking forward to working with the network of interfaith youth and women in the coming months.

Myanmar continues to experience war and conflict, but it is important to continue to work for social cohesion and peacebuilding—to keep things in balance. 

Columban Fr. Kurt Zion Pala lives and works in Myanmar.

Summer Days

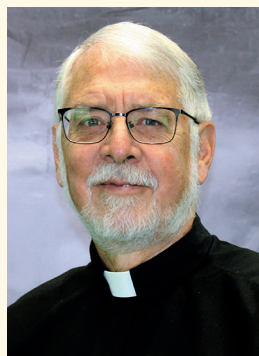
I grew up in western Pennsylvania and around this time of year, the cicadas started making their “weing, weing” noises in the trees everywhere and we knew summer was coming to an end, and soon we’d be going back to school. These days, summers are getting longer and hotter and back-to-school starts sooner. I hope that all our readers have been enjoying a slower pace, with some iced tea in the shade.

At our house in Omaha, the 47 community gardens we have fenced off are peacefully busy growing tomatoes and all kinds of vegetables. In my two little plots, I have some corn stalks with squash around them and pole beans climbing up them, Native American style. I hope they produce! I also have some beets, Swiss chard, and carrots with a few tomatoes of my own. In September, I plan to plant some Korean cabbage to harvest in November after the first frost.

For me, getting out in various weather conditions, on uneven terrain, in new places, with the smells of trees, grass, plants of all kinds, and the possibility of meeting animals along the way has always been what I enjoy. And getting my hands dirty in a garden, smelling fresh soil, and sweating a little are how I relax, even if it’s work. I’ve never been a person who liked to exercise on machines indoors. Around Earth Day in April, we had around twenty students and some parents from a local parish grade school join us in planting 65 tree seedlings, mostly red oak but with some flowering trees, apples, pears, persimmons, and hazelnuts. The deer and squirrels need to eat, too. We

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fr. Al Utzig



can only hope most of them grow. I encourage the kids not to use gloves even if they might get a blister or a cut. Getting dirt under the fingernails is more important.

All of us are who we are. We grew up with our family members in cities, suburbs, or the country. Some of my fondest memories are turning over the garden of my grandmother every spring. She would have piled maple leaves from the yard in autumn in the garden and I came and turned them over into the earth in the spring. I’ll always remember how many earthworms got



cut in half by my shovel, but how rich that dirt was! I loved it even as I felt guilty about the worms. And I loved cutting her grass with the old push mower, piling up the grass for next year’s garden. At other times, I washed her windows on a ladder with vinegar water and dried them with old newspapers. My reward was sugar cookies with orange icing that she would make and iced tea. Another

Summer is a good time to just sit and remember and hopefully give thanks.

of my jobs was to keep the hedges around our front cut with clippers. Clip, clip, clip. No shirt, sweating, getting sunburned. We didn’t keep soda in the house in those days, but my mother would have some Kool-Aid popsicles in an ice tray in the refrigerator. So refreshing!

Summer is a good time to just sit and remember and hopefully give thanks. Whatever our experiences were, they are the little or big things that have made us who we are. It’s good for us to sit with them and decide to appreciate them and carry them with us, or to let them go, and move to a different place. But we are who we are and God is good!

Fr. Al

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

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
COLUMBAN
FATHERS

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

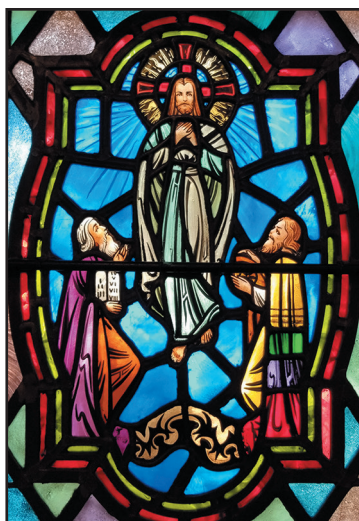
Columban Mission magazine is published eight times each year and tells the stories of our missionaries and the people they are called to serve. Columban missionaries live in solidarity with their people and, together, they move forward to improve their social, economic and spiritual lives, always with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

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

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



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



*"This is my beloved Son.
Listen to him."*

*Suddenly, looking around, they
no longer saw anyone but Jesus
alone with them.*

At the transfiguration, on a mountain, in a fog, those whom He invited had an experience that encouraged their resolve to walk with Him and work with Him. Has He been inviting you to a special closeness?

Answer the Call: Become a Missionary Priest

Do you feel called to serve, to spread the Gospel and to bring the light of Christ to the ends of the earth? The missionary priesthood offers a life dedicated to service, faith, and love. It is a vocation that crosses borders, cultures, and languages, offering a unique opportunity to make a profound impact on the lives of others. If you feel the stirrings of God's call in your heart, we invite you to explore the missionary priesthood.

Fr. Arturo Aguilar
National Vocation Director
Columban Fathers | St. Columbans, NE 68056
Toll-free: 877/299-1920 | Email: vocations@columban.org
Website: columban.org

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