

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

VISIT TO MYANMAR

Columbans past and present recalled

REBIRTH AND REBUILDING

Fr Eamon Sheridan on his vocation and the Kachin drug epidemic

NEW REGION, NEW PRIEST

The first ordination in the new region of Oceania

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THE FAR EAST

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THE PURPOSE OF THE FAR EAST IS

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Subscription

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Contact the Mission Office:
Tel: (01564) 772 096
Email: fareast@columbans.co.uk

Editor

Sarah Mac Donald
editorfareast@gmail.com

Assistant Editor

Sr Abbie O'Sullivan

Layout & Editorial Assistant

Breda Rogers

Manager

Stephen Awre

Original Design

Gabriel Carbone

Printers

Southern Print, Dorset

Columban Websites

News, reports, reflections etc.
www.columbans.co.uk
www.columbansisters.org

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Missionary Society of St Columban

Widney Manor Road, Solihull,
West Midlands, B93 9AB.
Tel: (01564) 772 096

Columban Sisters

6/8 Ridgdale Street, Bow,
London E3 2TW.
Tel: (020) 8980 3017

Front Cover

A young man at the camp for internally displaced people in Bhamo in Myanmar. Photo: Fr Pat Raleigh.

“Why did you choose to join the Columban missionaries and not some other missionary organisation?” is a question I’m often asked. My simple response is, “A letter from God!”

After graduating from college, I moved to a mid-sized town in order to be close to my new job. My apartment was situated in a three-story building, one floor up from street level - another tenant lived on the floor above me, while below me was a real estate agent’s office. A year after I moved in, the real estate agent closed his office, and the ground floor was left vacant. I gave the matter no thought, since I didn’t imagine it would have any impact on my life.

The following year, I decided to pursue my plans to become a missionary priest. Since it was long before the internet era, I wrote letters requesting information to two missionary organisations with which I was somewhat familiar thanks to their monthly magazines.

A few weeks later I received a response from one of those organisations, the Columban missionaries, inviting me to come and spend a weekend with their community. Thanks to that weekend, I developed a clearer picture of the missionary way of life, which strengthened my resolve to pursue it. However, I was not yet ready to make a decision.

For several weeks I waited for a response from the other missionary organisation, hoping that I would be invited to have a similar weekend experience with that community. Back then, I had found their mission magazine even more attractive than the **Far East!** Besides, I thought it would be helpful in my decision-making process to be able to compare and contrast my experience of two communities. Even though I checked my letter box upon returning from work each evening, there was no response. I grew disappointed.

During the weeks that followed, I continued to learn more about the Columban missionaries, and then finally

I made up my mind to make a formal application to enter their seminary. After I was accepted, I notified my employer that I was moving on, and informed the landlady that I would be leaving my apartment. As I attended to various matters during that period of transition, I found myself wondering from time to time why I had not received a response from the other missionary organisation. It seemed that one piece of the jigsaw puzzle was still missing.

On the day I was due to leave my apartment, I returned from work and found the landlady waiting to say goodbye to me. After we exchanged pleasantries, she handed me a letter, explaining that she had found it in the letterbox of the vacant office of the real estate agent. It was from the other missionary organisation and had been left lying in the wrong letterbox for five months! I was astonished. It was the only letter that had gone into the wrong letterbox during the entire year that the office had been vacant.

At that moment, I sensed that a mysterious hand had guided my decision to join the Columbans rather than another missionary organisation. Over the course of many years, I have come to a deeper appreciation of having been led by God into the Columban missionary way of life - thanks to a letter that went astray. ●

Fr Tim Mulroy

Ordained in 1995, Fr Tim Mulroy is a former school teacher from Swinford, Co Mayo. He served in Japan and in the US, where he was Regional Director for six years before he was elected Society Leader in 2018.

01. Fr Teakare Betero, following his ordination as a Columban Father last November, with members of the Missionary Society from the region of Oceania, who travelled to his island home of Rabi to attend the ceremony.





01

HOW I SPENT GOOD FRIDAY IN CHINA

Recalling the events of his first Good Friday in China, Fr Tae-moon Kwon suggests we can be instruments of salvation for other wounded souls when we express the love we have within us.



02

Ever since I took up my mission appointment to China, people have constantly asked me what kind of ministry I am involved in as mission activity is banned in China. Due to a number of restrictions placed on foreign missionaries, I cannot be involved in parish ministry. However, having received invitations from the Chinese Church I have been able to give lectures on spirituality and give spiritual direction in seminaries and monasteries as well as providing retreats to Chinese priests and members of religious orders. I am also involved in looking for vocations to the Columbans in China.

Actually, since my student days I have had an ardent desire to get involved in parish ministry. When I was young all the priests in our parish were from Ireland. I always found the way those priests and we, the parishioners, looked out for and took care of each other very appealing.

Having arrived in China, I went to a rural parish to a Chinese parish priest that I knew well and celebrated Mass with him and the local Catholic community. The parish priest provided me with opportunities to celebrate Sunday Mass, to bless houses, to baptise people, and to preside at weddings at the Chinese New Year. Last April, at the invitation of the parish priest I was able to be involved in planning ceremonies for Holy Week and to participate in them.

On Good Friday, the parish priest and the parishioners gathered outside the church at two o'clock and began the Way of the Cross. We went in procession around the whole village, as we meditated on the sufferings and passion of Jesus. We formed two lines with the two people at the front carrying candles followed by the next people in line carrying pictures of the fourteen Stations of the Cross. We sang hymns as we processed around the village. The parish priest and I were in the middle of the procession carrying the cross as we remembered Jesus

on his way to Golgotha. I will never forget that long procession with the cross, the sound of the people singing hymns, the local people looking on and the expression on the faces of each of the parishioners. It was such a sacred ritual.

When we had completed the hour-long procession, we gathered in the church to celebrate the Good Friday liturgy. During the ritual of the kissing of the cross I was struck by the way the people kissed not only the feet but also the calves, knees, the back, shoulders, arms and even the head of the figure of Jesus. On seeing this I became perplexed as I always understood that during this part of the liturgy people went to the front of the church and kissed the feet of the figure of Jesus hanging from the cross.

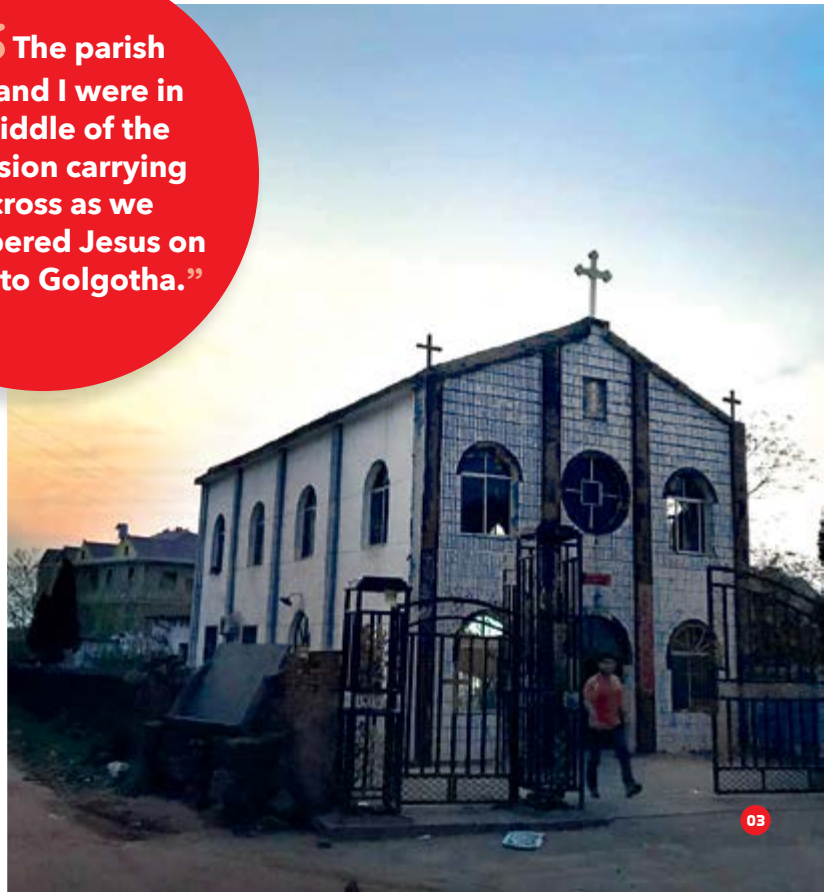
I found that my heart was beating heavily as I observed Jesus enduring this treatment. I thought Jesus appeared like a young child or even like an estranged neighbour longing to be accepted and loved. Jesus appeared to be a completely weak person craving assistance from those who had come to kiss him. He seemed to be sorry for troubling the people that he sought assistance from.

I had a strong feeling that Jesus sincerely wanted our love and sought our attention. Just like any human he wanted to be helped, loved and touched. Of course, there are those who might reject such a weak and needy Jesus believing that only a resurrected and glorious Jesus could be capable of consoling and giving strength to the tired and weary of this world. I found that my heart was in a knot and I was not able to control the flow of tears as I continued to observe the Catholics kissing the Jesus figure hanging from the cross. This extremely human appearance of Jesus who desired our care and concern, our love and human touch, was in itself his desire to be one with us. At the same time, I also felt that how great was the love each of us possessed.

Hanging from the cross suffering greatly, Jesus provided us with strength to discover our compassion and love. Having received that strength, we could overcome suffering and death and be led to the glory of the resurrection.

We have resurrection experiences each time we show sincere compassion by helping our suffering neighbours by touching their wounds. We can be instruments of salvation for other wounded souls when we express the love that we have within us. It is possible for us to save others by showing our love and compassion. It is like when Jesus, through love and compassion, cured the many that were sick and those possessed by evil spirits. I am sincerely grateful to God who led me to experience this on the Good Friday I spent in that rural Chinese parish and ask you to pray unceasingly for the Church in China. ●

“The parish priest and I were in the middle of the procession carrying the cross as we remembered Jesus on his way to Golgotha.”



Fr Tae-moon Kwon is from South Korea. He studied Spirituality at Fordham University and was ordained in 2010. He was appointed to the Taiwan Mission Unit in 2010 and the China Mission Unit in 2015. He has since been appointed to formation work in the Philippines.

This article was translated by Fr Noel Mackey.

01. On Good Friday, the parish priest and believers gathered outside the church at two o'clock and began the Way of the Cross around the whole village, meditating on the sufferings and passion of Jesus. Pic: Fr Tae-moon Kwon.
02. During the ritual of the kissing of the cross I was struck by the way the people kissed not only the feet but also the calves, knees, the back, shoulders, arms and even the head of the figure of Jesus. Pic: Fr Tae-moon Kwon.
03. Rural parish in the Chinese countryside where Fr Tae-moon spent Good Friday. Pic: Fr Tae-moon Kwon.

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