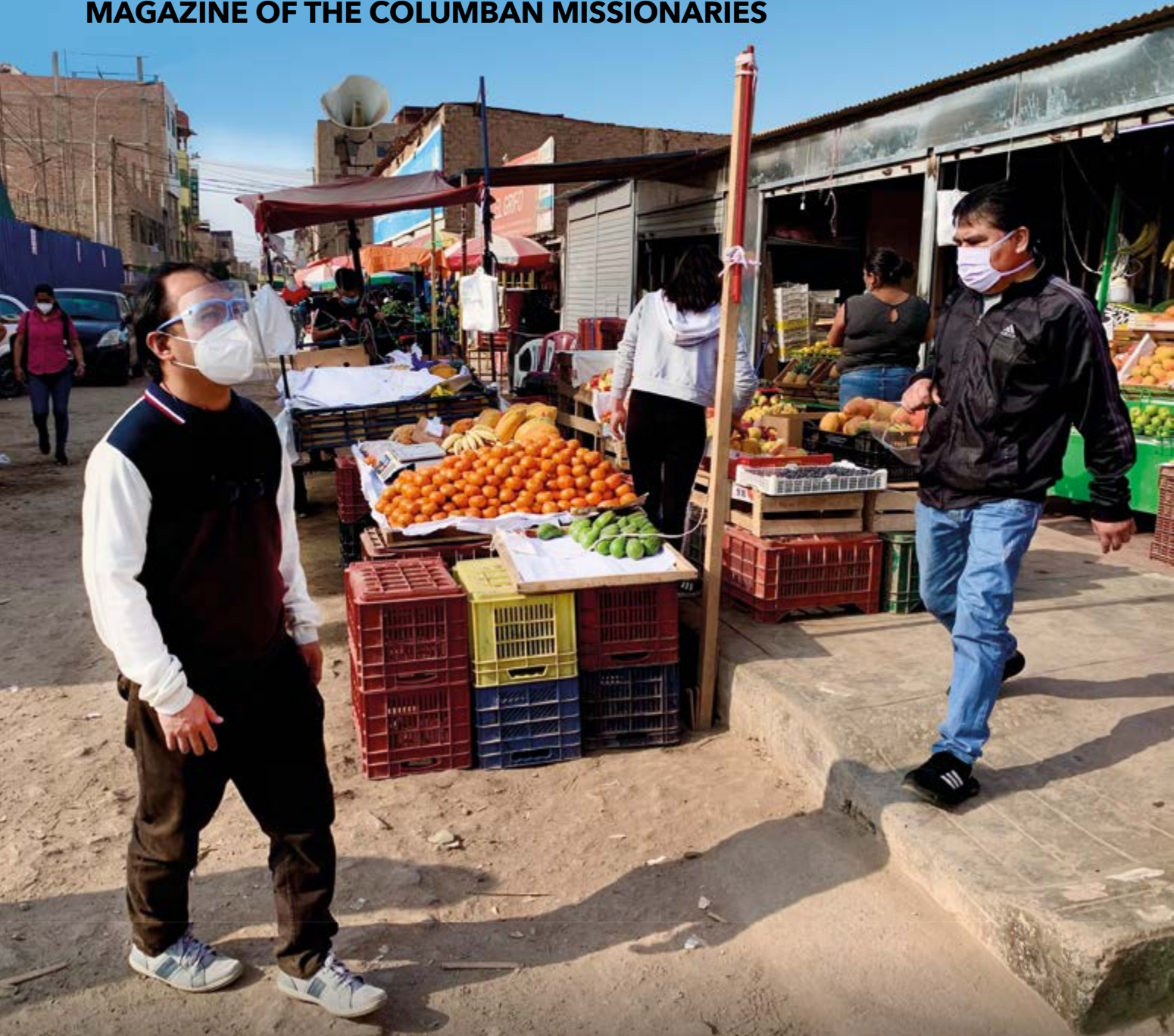


far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES



ARCHBISHOP PAUL GRAWNG

A Great Friend to
the Columbans

KEEP ON WALKING

Columban Covid outreach
in Peru

THE PASCHAL CANDLE

Hope and the Promise
of Freedom

CONTENTS

04 A Great Friend to the Columbans

Fr Neil Magill pays tribute to Archbishop Paul Grawng of Mandalay, a great friend to the Society and successor of Columban Bishop John Howe in Myitkyina.

06 Commodifying Hope

Fr Bobby Gilmore writes about the desperation of trafficked people and asks why are the destitute used to sow fear and resentment by political leaders promoting their own popularity.

08 Human Trafficking: A Scourge on Humanity

Adults allow the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children warns Fr Shay Cullen as he reveals how the Preda Foundation is trying to counter this scourge.

10 Keep on Walking

Columban Fr Dylan Tabaco in Peru tells Fr John Boles about his Covid-19 outreach to someone who walked across half a continent in search of work.

12 This Candle

The Paschal Candle symbolises the risen Christ. Fr Tim Mulroy recalls a particular candle with its own unique story about prison and freedom, as well as hope and promise.

14 Were You at the Rock?

Sr Victoire Ryan pays tribute to the people who took huge risks to practise their faith and pass it on to future generations in Penal times.

16 The Martyrdom of Fr Tony Collier

Gabriel Kim's sworn account of the last days of Columban martyr Fr Tony Collier, outlining the circumstances of his death.

18 Sharing Food and Building Friendships

Columban Lay missionary Kim Sun-Hee Sunny considers how food can be a means to learn and understand the uniqueness of each other's culture.

19 Obituaries

20 Reflection

21 Stories from the Bible

22 Children's Section

23 Nature: Outstanding Octopuses



THE FAR EAST

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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 German Carbone
ggcarbone@gmail.com

Printers

Walstead Bicester, Oxfordshire

Columban Websites

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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 Ridgale Street, Bow,
London E3 2TW.
Tel: (020) 8980 3017

Front Cover

Columban missionary Fr Dylan Tabaco at a local market in Lima, Peru during the Covid-19 pandemic. Image: Juan Diego Torres, Communications Officer for the Columbans in Peru.



REFLECTING ON THE PANDEMIC

EDITORIAL

Last October, Pope Francis published a very important encyclical entitled *Fratelli Tutti*. Due to the focus on the Covid-19 pandemic, the international media paid relatively scant attention to it.

In his encyclical, Pope Francis wrote, "It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity." (*Fratelli Tutti* Article 8)

Some early sections of the encyclical concern the pandemic and are well worth quoting. They include Article 32: "True, a worldwide tragedy like the Covid-19 pandemic momentarily revives the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person's problems are the problems of all. Once more we realised that no one is saved alone: we can only be saved together."

Elsewhere, Pope Francis writes in Article 35: "If only this may prove not to be just another tragedy of history from which we learned nothing... If only we might rediscover once and for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human family can experience a rebirth, with all its faces, all its hands, and all its voices, beyond the wall that we have created."

We have been forced to rely more and more on social media to communicate with one another during the pandemic. Although we are grateful that modern technology has provided us with this valuable means of keeping in contact with each other, we can see clearly that there is no substitute for face-to-face contact.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope also lists some of the problems of social media. "Digital relationships, which do not demand the slow and gradual cultivation of friendships, stable interaction, or the building of a consensus that matures over time, have the appearance of sociability. Yet they do not really build community; instead they tend to disguise and expand the very individualism that finds

expression in xenophobia and in contempt for the vulnerable. Digital connectivity is not enough to build bridges. It is not capable of uniting humanity."

One of the effects of the pandemic and its lockdowns is a greater degree of silence which offers an invitation to prayer and reflection. St Patrick reminds us that kidnapped as a youth by Irish pirates, he found himself in an involuntary 'lockdown', caring for sheep on the harsh slopes of Slemish Mountain. The Saint wrote, "When I had come to Ireland, I tended herds every day and I used to pray many times during the day. More and more my love of God and my reverence for him began to increase. My faith grew stronger and my zeal so intense that in the course of a single day I would say as many as a hundred prayers, and almost as many at night." (*Patrick in His Own Words* by Joseph Duffy, Veritas Publications, Dublin 1975)

May the experience of this pandemic help us to realise, "... that our lives are interwoven with and sustained by ordinary people valiantly shaping the decisive events of our shared history: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and supermarket-workers, cleaning personnel, caretakers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests and religious... They understood that nobody is saved alone." (*Fratelli Tutti* Article 54) Like St Patrick, may we be helped by the silence and isolation to grow in prayer and reflection. ●

Fr Cyril Lovett

Fr Cyril Lovett is the former editor of the Far East magazine and served on mission in the Philippines and Brazil.

01. Pope Francis and Bartholomew I, Patriarch of Constantinople, attend an inter-religious ceremony promoted by the St Egidio Community in Piazza del Campidoglio, Rome in October 2020. Image: Shutterstock.

A GREAT FRIEND TO THE COLUMBANS

Columban missionary Fr Neil Magill pays tribute to Archbishop Paul Grawng of Mandalay, a great friend to the Society, who succeeded Columban Bishop John Howe as Bishop of Myitkyina.

In 1970, I was a theology student at our Columban seminary in Ireland and in the college we had a book shop. I was one of the shop assistants. One afternoon Bishop John Howe came in and asked me to send some theology books every three months to a Paul Grawng in Myitkyina. That was 50 years ago and that was the first time I heard the name of Fr Paul Grawng. I had to wait another 32 years before I had the privilege of meeting him.

In 2002, I visited Myitkyina in Myanmar and on arriving at St Columban's Cathedral I met a man outside. I thought he was either a farmer or someone who had dropped in to say a prayer. He was wearing slippers, grey trousers and a casual shirt.

He approached with outstretched hand and a genuine smile. I introduced myself as a Columban and he invited me in for coffee. He gave me a room and told me to stay as long as I wished.

Over coffee he mentioned several Columbans who worked in Kachin State and told stories about them. I wondered how he knew so much about the Columbans and still, not knowing who he was, I innocently asked, "And what is your name?"

He gave a gentle smile and said, "I'm Bishop Paul,

Bishop Howe's successor." I was happily surprised as it was the first time I had met a bishop so simply dressed with no ring on his finger. We hit it off and enjoyed some great chats over the next three days.

When I returned to Ireland, we kept in contact and in 2003 he told me he was transferred to Mandalay as Archbishop. A few months later he emailed to say he was going to Rome to receive the *pallium*, symbol of an archbishop's authority, and would like to stop over in Ireland. This was great news and he spent some time in Dalgan and met those Columbans still alive who had worked in Myitkyina, Frs Colm Murphy, David Wall, Paddy Conneally and others.

That weekend I was going to visit my elderly parents in Derry and asked Bishop Paul if he would like to come with me. He jumped at the idea and stayed with my parents for three days. He offered the weekend Masses in my home parish and spoke about the importance of the family, something very dear to him. I took him to visit friends and he made a big impression on people.

One 80-year-old lady gave him a 30-minute talk on the ills and injustices in the world. Bishop Paul listened attentively and when she had finished told her, "You should be the Prime Minister." She was chuffed and took delight in telling her friends and neighbours what the Archbishop thought of her. From then until his death people around my home place would always ask me, "How is wee Bishop Paul."

Bishop Paul knew I was finishing my term on the Columban General Council in Ireland in 2006 and he invited me to come to Mandalay to teach in the pre-major seminary. In early 2007, I went to Mandalay and my friendship with Bishop Paul grew stronger. To be appointed as Archbishop was a great honour but he remained a simple shepherd.

Both of us were interested in





02

Fr Neil Magill was ordained in 1973 and went on mission to Taiwan where he founded the New Life Workers' Centre (NLWC) helping workers get to know their rights through educational programmes. He is now missioned in Myanmar where he founded the Mandalay Archdiocesan Higher Education Centre which provides high quality third level education to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The aim is to help them achieve their potential and become leaders in both their civil and church communities.

- 01. Archbishop Paul Grawng of Mandalay. Image: Sarah Mac Donald
- 02. Collage of images from the funeral and burial tomb of Archbishop Paul Grawng.
- 03. Bishop Paul (second row, second from left) with Fr Neil Magill (second row, third from left) with some of the students from Mandalay Higher Education Centre (HEC) students.



03

education and in young people so, after a lot of planning, we started the Higher Education Centre (HEC) in Mandalay. This was not without difficulties and headaches but we persevered and opened the HEC in 2010. It is a three-year residential course to train teachers.

Bishop Paul very frequently came to the HEC, offered Mass, chatted with the 150 students and on Sunday nights joined the students for their social night of drama, singing and disco dancing. He was always out on the floor dancing to the great joy and amazement of the students. He would say "life begins at 75." This meant so much to the students as Bishop Paul debunked the image of pomp and ceremony associated with bishops.

My greatest joy was in early 2017 when Bishop Paul asked me if we could give him a room at the HEC. We prepared a small sitting room and bedroom for him and we were all happy that he was now a fully fledged HEC family member.


Our friend, Archbishop Paul Grawng died on 24 October 2020; he was 81.

Words which come to mind about this great shepherd are: saintly, encourager, cheerful giver, prayerful, simple lifestyle and patient. He loved everyone and had a special place in his heart for the youth and believed in their potential. The Church, Myanmar and all of us are much better because of Bishop Paul. What a blessing he was to all of us!

He is always in our hearts. ●

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