

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES



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IN COVID
TIMES**

Remembering our
dearly departed

**FINAL
PROFESSIONS
IN HANYANG**

Order founded by
Bishop Galvin rejoices

**TRIBUTE TO
FR CHARLIE
O'ROURKE**

A lifelong thirst
for God

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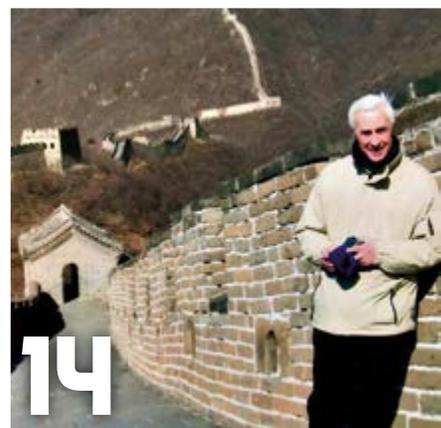
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FUNERALS IN A TIME OF COVID

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THE FAR EAST

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Front Cover

Sr Fiona Yang Fuli and Sr Columban Zhu Wenjuan of the Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang, founded by Columban Bishop Edward Galvin, on the day of their final professions at St Columban's Church in Hanyang, China. Photo: Fr Dan Troy.



Traditionally we Irish have dealt with death in a positive and hands-on manner. The Irish wake is known for its celebration of the deceased person's life. In the midst of pain, grief and loss the support of relatives and friends to the family is palpable.

During the Covid pandemic I lost a close family member. His wake, Requiem Mass and burial were nothing like anything I have ever experienced before. Coupled with the grief was the sense of isolation triggered by the physical absence of family and friends.

The death of a loved one in normal times is a painful experience but in these Covid-19 times that pain is heightened, and it is a very lonely experience. Like so many other families we were deprived of the time to be with our loved one in his last hours. Standing in the bitter cold keeping vigil through a window is something that will remain with me for the rest of my life. Yet we were not alone in this experience – so many families experienced the same.

As a family we missed the support and comfort of relatives and friends calling during those sad days, and felt the loss of a physical hug or handshake or the sharing of stories about our loved one. It left an ache in our hearts. Ten of us gathered for his funeral Mass and yet there was an intimacy in this, even if the Church was empty. When the prayers were said, and the burial finished, each member of the family returned to his or her own home to grieve and cope in their own way. No celebration of the deceased person's life over a meal was possible, each had to mourn in isolation.

Yet I am grateful for those who stood

in the bitter cold along the side of the road or in the cemetery keeping their distance yet supporting us by their physical presence. Behind the masks, their eyes reached out in solidarity and compassion to those gathered around the graveside. It shows the goodness as well as the helplessness that many felt, unable to support the grieving in the traditional ways we are accustomed to. The phone call, the emhissail and the text message show that people care but it can never replace the presence of the family member or friend during those days of sorrow and grief.

Celebrating the Month's Mind Mass in an empty Church without the family present was something I found incredibly difficult. However, at the end of the day I found comfort in the words of the Preface of the Mass: *"Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven."*

This is made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus our Saviour.

Life for Danny is now changed not ended; through God's grace he is now in that place where pain and suffering are no more. Like so many families we continue to mourn his passing, particularly as November is a time for remembering and praying for those who have gone before us and whose loss we feel. ●

Fr Ray Husband

Fr Ray Husband is regional director of the Columbans in Ireland. He returned to Dalgan in 2017 from the Philippines where he had been working in formation with Columban seminarians in Manila.

CARDS CELEBRATE THE WORLD GOD SO LOVES



Fr Vincent Busch explains how the images on this year's Subanen Christmas cards celebrate the ordinary, thoughtful ways that Joseph and Mary cared for each other.

The Subanens are an indigenous people whose ancestral habitat lies in the highlands of Western Mindanao in the Philippines. Guided by the Columban Sisters, who have been living and working with the Subanens since 1983, I began working with the Subanens in 2000. I came to see how their traditional way of life helped keep their habitat healthy, and how, in turn, their habitat provided their daily food.

I also came to see how the beauty of their habitat evoked in them an awareness of the spiritual dimension of the natural world, and I came to appreciate how they communicated with that dimension through music, ritual and dance.

The Subanen way of life has a long crafting tradition. They developed, for example, clever ways to shape rattan, bamboo, grasses, and palm leaves into baskets, tools, furniture, mats, hats, roofs, walls, musical instruments and even the walls and roofs of their homes.

Attracted by their crafting tradition I worked with Subanens to form a project called Subanen Crafts. Each year, as part of that project, we create Christmas cards whose images celebrate the

ordinary, thoughtful ways that Joseph and Mary cared for each other.

Instead of a stable I drew Mary and Joseph within an image of our planet - the temporary shelter of all God's creatures. Above Mary and Joseph, I drew the mountainous homeland of the Subanens whose climate, forest, rivers, and soil provide them with a safe and bountiful habitat. The Subanen people know that just as Joseph made the manger a safe place for Jesus, they need to make their habitat a safe and healthy place for their children.

This next card shows Joseph giving Mary some food. Subanens make nutritious soups using leaves, vegetables and root crops from their small garden plots. To cook these ingredients they need water and firewood which are readily available if their forest and its streams are healthy. This card calls to mind the words in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread". How limited that prayer would sound if it said, "Give me my daily bread."

In the Philippines economic policies that many thought would enhance the nation's progress and development turned out to be hostile to the common good. These policies allowed extractive industries to make quick profits at the long-term cost of polluting and



degrading the nation's seas, rivers, forests, air and farmland.

From 1950 to 1990 logging companies deforested huge areas of the Subanens' homeland. These companies made huge profits but caused permanent damage to the food-producing forest and soil of the Subanens. The Subanen crafters are working on programmes run by the Columban Sisters that are restoring their God-given habitat so as to provide a better life for all into the future.

The next card shows a thoughtful shepherd bringing some kindling wood to Mary and Joseph as fuel for their fire. In another card we show Joseph sweeping the stable while Mary spreads a blanket over the manger. It looks like Joseph has stopped his sweeping to look at Mary and Jesus. I can imagine him experiencing the bond parents have with their children. Mary and Joseph will deeply feel the joys and sufferings of Jesus throughout their lives.

The Bible points to this parent-child bond as an example of God's enduring love for his people: "Can a woman forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child of her womb? Though she may

forget I will not forget you." (Isaiah 49:15).

The last card shows Joseph pouring water into a basin while Mary puts fresh straw in the manger. For the Subanens, fetching water often involves a steep downhill hike to a forest-fed stream. As deserts spread throughout our over-heated planet thousands of people, mostly women, have to walk ever greater distances to get water for their families. Jesus praises those who give drink to the thirsty (Matthew 25: 37-40) so it makes sense that he would praise people who, through their work and their way of life, enhance the ecosystems that provide that water.

In the vastness of the universe the Earth is a tiny, fragile shelter for God's creatures. Jesus drank its water, breathed its air, and ate its plants, and that air, that water, and that plant life have been recycled ever since. The Bible tells us that Mary held in her heart the memories of the birth of Jesus in a stable (Luke 2:19). The Subanens hold their life-giving habitat in their hearts. Their cards celebrate the ordinary yet profound ways that they care for each other and for the world that God so loves. ●

Fr Vincent Busch is from the USA. He was ordained a Columban in 1974. He has been serving in Mindanao in the Philippines since his arrival in 1975. He initiated a handcraft project with the Subanens in Zamboanga del Sur in 2001.

01. Mary and Joseph are depicted not in a stable but within the planet - the temporary shelter of all God's creatures, with the mountainous homeland of the Subanens in the background.
02. Joseph giving Mary some food. This card calls to mind the words in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread".
03. A thoughtful shepherd brings some kindling wood to Mary and Joseph for their fire.
04. Joseph sweeping the stable while Mary spreads a blanket over the manger.
05. Joseph pouring water into a basin while Mary puts fresh straw in the manger.
06. Fr Vincent Busch at the seedling nursery set up by the Columban Sisters' Subanen Ministry.

SUBANEN CHRISTMAS CARDS

Connecting the nativity story with the story of the Subanen people in the Philippines

The Subanens face eviction from their homes by logging and mining companies. With assistance from the Columbans, they use their traditional crafting skills to make jewellery, mandalas, children's books and cards to sell. The income generated provides food, education, housing and healthcare for their families.

Why not support the indigenous Subanen people of the Philippines by buying their traditionally crafted cards?



To place your order contact the Mission Office at: Tel: **01564 772 096** or email: office@columbans.co.uk or write to: Subanen Christmas Cards, Columban Missionaries, Widney Manor Road, Solihull B93 9AB.

* Subanen Christmas cards are sold in packs of ten, with envelopes. They cost £10 per pack plus postage, incl VAT. Cheques payable to Columban Missionaries.