

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES



Synod
2021
2023

For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

COMPULSIVE GAMBLING

A Columban who helped thousands of Koreans

NEW SERIES: SYNODALITY

What does it mean for the Church?

EMBRACE OF PEACE

An icon of Saints Peter and Paul by a Columban artist



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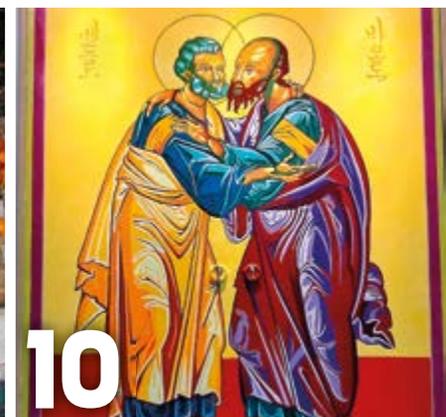
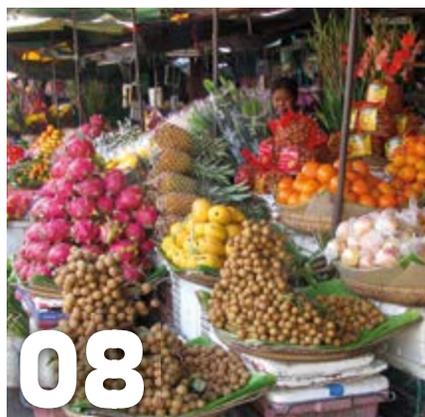
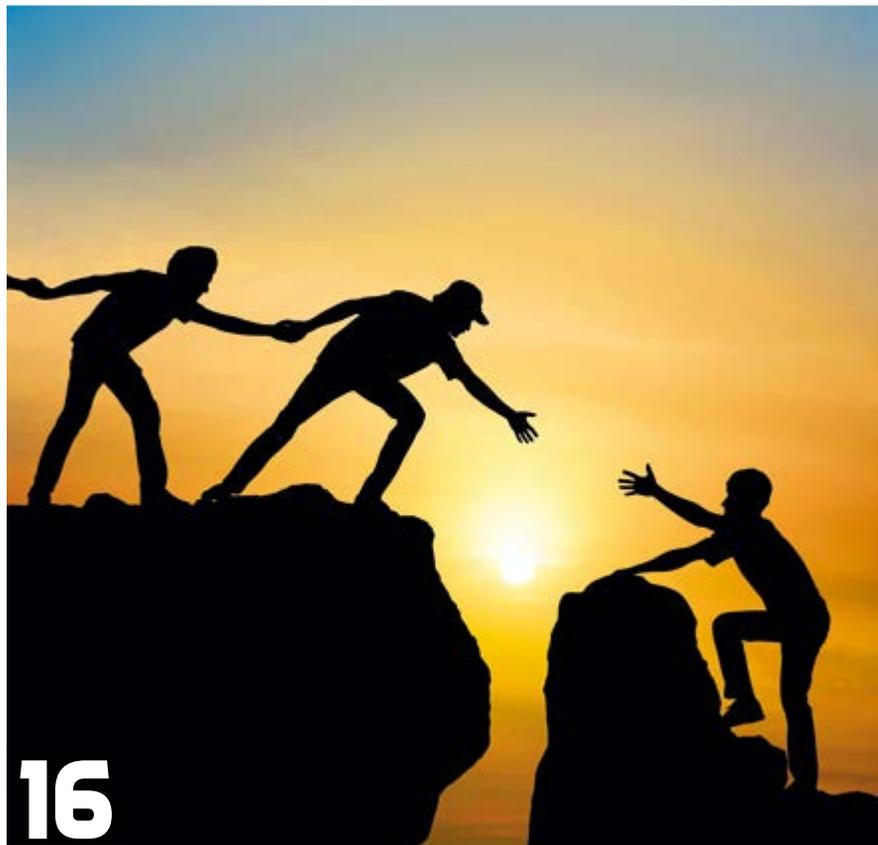
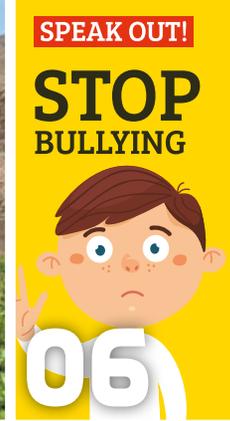
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THE FAR EAST

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Front Cover

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Pope Francis arrives for his weekly general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican. Image: Shutterstock



THRICE BLESSED: COLUMBANS - FRANCIS - SYNOD

To be blessed on one count is good enough. To regard yourself blessed three times over is quite overwhelming. However, this is how I am feeling as we start a new year.

Blessing N°1 came when I was appointed as Regional Director of the Columbans in Britain, following the retirement from the post of my illustrious predecessor Fr Peter Hughes. I have spent nearly all my 25 years of priesthood abroad, mainly in Peru, so this is a God-given opportunity to repay my own people for their generosity to the missions.

Blessing N°2 is that I am able to minister in the Church during the pontificate of Pope Francis, a truly outstanding leader and prophet. It appears to me that his emphasis on topics such as ecclesiastical reform, social justice, inter-religious dialogue and environmental protection simply echo the policies followed by the Columbans for decades. Thus, while he has been termed a 'Jesuit pope' for his congregation, and a 'Franciscan pope' for his adopted name and lifestyle, I think he could also truly be called a 'Columban pope'.

Blessing N°3 comes in the form of Francis's historic call to hold a worldwide synod and a universal consultation process over the next year or two, aimed at creating a more synodal (or participatory) Church. The preparatory document repeats the message of Vatican II that the Church is not merely a hierarchical institution but rather the entire People of God, journeying

through history under the guidance of the Spirit.

The same document reminds us that Church authorities are required to teach but also to listen and to act on what they hear, in the same way that Our Lord did. The example of Jesus and the Canaanite woman is cited, whereby her famous riposte, "Even the puppy dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table" (Mt. 15:27), convinced Jesus that His mission was to the gentiles as well as to the Jews.

Now, we have been here before. Clifford Longley in an article in *The Tablet* (13/11/21) recalls how in 1980 the Church in England and Wales held a National Pastoral Congress, "a synod in all but name", which proposed some fundamental reforms in the Universal Church, but whose recommendations were rejected by the Vatican. ("A door had been slammed on our fingers," remarked Cardinal Hume.) Given the present administration in Rome, it is highly unlikely that the same would happen this time.

And that might turn out to be the greatest Blessing of all.

On behalf of all Columban Missionaries I wish to express my appreciation and thanks to you our readers for your continued support of the **Far East** Magazine and the work of our missionaries. May 2022 bring you and your families many blessings. Happy New Year! ●

Fr John Boles

Regional Director of the Columbans in Britain

BACK TO THE ROOTS

Columban missionary Fr John Hegerty never thought he would be able to go back to his life as a farmer, writes Fr John Boles, until the pandemic struck!

When Covid-19 appeared on the scene, Columbans throughout the world had to react to the emergency. We all had to ask ourselves, "How can I carry on serving the People of God in these strange new times?" For Australian John Hegerty, on mission in South America, it was a case – literally – of going back to his roots. He responded to the pandemic by combining his current role as, 'Father', with his original one as 'Farmer'.

Born in 1941 in Redesdale, Victoria, John grew up on his parents' 1,700 acre sheep, cattle and rotational holding. "From the word go I helped with all the jobs around the place", he recalls. He worked on the property right up to joining the Columbans when he was 23. "I never had a city job. I went into the seminary as a 'hayseed'. I was the 'boy from the bush', a 'country hick'!"

During his holidays from the seminary in Sydney, 'Hegs' as he is known within the Columbans, returned home and helped his parents with whatever was needed. He even managed to host some of his fellow seminarians for a week or so. "This was cheap labour!" One thing that still makes

him laugh is how some of these big, burly footballers and surfies wilted under the pressure of sheep work. When "crutching" (removing wool from areas where flies might strike), their backs would pack up. When pruning hooves to avoid footrot brought on by the lush springtime grass, their hands would swell up. Maybe 'Hegs' couldn't keep up on long runs in the bush or on the football field, but on the farm he was out in front!

After ordination John was posted to Peru, where he has been for most of the last fifty years. By 2020 he reckoned he had filled just about every missionary role imaginable. Then, Covid came knocking.

He was in semi-retirement in our Centre House in Lima, a pleasant spot set amidst a kind of oasis (Lima lies in the world's driest desert). Peru was hit very hard by the pandemic and the economic collapse which followed. The Columbans were in lockdown for months, leaving them with two challenges – how to keep themselves and the people they cared for sane, given the new restrictions.

"We had Irish Columban, Fr Tom Hanley, who works in Chile staying with us as he was left stranded by the lockdown,"



John explains. "Tom had gained a lot of experience on the land back in Ireland, so he suggested he would use his time digging and planting part of our grounds. Not only would it keep him occupied, but it would also make us partially self-sufficient. He sowed vegetables, corn, herbs and some potatoes. The experiment was a great success, they all grew like mad!"

This combination of greenery in the Columban grounds combined with the unaccustomed peace and quiet, due to the surrounding educational establishments all being closed by the lockdown, resulted in an explosion of tropical birdlife, with many species nesting in or around our garden.

As Covid restrictions eased, Fr Tom Hanley was able to return to Chile, leaving the post of farmer vacant at the Columban house in Peru. John suddenly felt those old green fingers twitching again. Fond memories of life back on the farm in Australia came flooding back. So he filled the vacancy.

"Not that I was alone", he remarks. Full-time local gardener Gaspar lent his expert advice as well as two young Columban seminarians from Fiji, Atonio Saula and Iowane Naio. "This was the perfect match,"

says John. "Not only were they two strong bucks from a farming background in Fiji, but they were also working in a poor parish where there were a number of comedores." Comedores are subsidised canteens. The Columbans set up a series of them at this time to help feed families who had lost their sources of income. Each comedor caters for up to a hundred of the needy at each midday sitting.

A regular routine has now emerged. John and Gaspar look after the day-to-day running of the mini-farm. As required, Atonio and Iowane come in and prepare new beds, add manure, do the watering and harvest the produce. Some is kept for the Columban houses, but the majority goes to one or more of the comedores. It is planned to continue this system even after the coronavirus emergency ends for, as John points out, the effects of this virus on the poor will last for years.

'Hegs' insists this has resulted in the best of all worlds. The poor are helped, Columban running costs are defrayed and, "it is great therapy for me. I love it. I go out working every afternoon after lunch. Much healthier than a long siesta. It's doing me good." ●

Fr John Boles is a Columban missionary from England who worked in Peru from 1994 until 2021. He is now Regional Director for the Columbans in Britain.

01. View of the large slum of San Juan de Miraflores on the edge of Lima, Peru. Photo: Shutterstock
02. Fr John Hegerty and gardener Gaspar water some of the crops growing in the Columban house on the edge of the Lima desert. Photo: Juan Diego Torres, Communications Officer, Columban Missionaries, Peru.
03. Columban seminarian, Atonio Saula from Fiji, brings produce to one of the local Comedores or canteens set up by the Columbans to feed the needy during lockdown in Peru. Photo: Juan Diego Torres, Communications Officer, Columban Missionaries, Peru.
04. Columban seminarian, Iowane Naio from Fiji, collects ripe tomatoes. Photo: Juan Diego Torres, Communications Officer, Columban Missionaries, Peru.

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