

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given; and
the government will be
upon his shoulder, and his
name is called Wonderful
Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.*

- Isaiah 9:6

**LAND
OF
DREAMS**

Outreach to
Iquique's settlers

**THE CHALLENGE
OF
GIFT GIVING**

God's gift to us

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AND YOUNG
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THE FAR EAST

Published seven times yearly by the Missionary Society of St Columban (Maynooth Mission to China).

THE PURPOSE OF THE FAR EAST IS

To promote an awareness of the missionary dimension of the Church among readers; to report on the work of Columban priests, Sisters and lay missionaries; and to seek spiritual and material support for missionaries.

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News, reports, reflections etc.
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Front Cover

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CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

I like Christmas lights. In many Suburbs of Australia there are marvellous displays of Christmas lights. In the northern hemisphere I enjoyed the lights with the snow and the cold. They bring a wonderful feel to the whole season.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." Is this our experience? When we see all the confusion and darkness of our world, do we think of Jesus as being the light? What could He mean?

There is the darkness of ignorance, of oppression by others and depression suffered by many. There are many people who have no hope and ask whether they should keep going on with life. Many also suffer with the tedium of the regular routines of life. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the light of the world, when we think about the many dark things of life?

One thought that comes to me is that light helps us to see what is already there. With the coming of Jesus, we can see what is already there. Jesus came to tell us and show us what is true about God. The story of Jesus casts light on the truth of God's wonderful love for each and every one of us.

The early followers of Jesus came to see the truth that God is intertwined with the whole universe. God's ongoing creating of us, of the trees, the animals, the earth and everything we can think of, is an amazing truth that is wonderful for us to take in. The message of Jesus brings light to a solely

scientific understanding of the world. Christ is the light that helps us to see that God's love embraces and sustains the whole of creation. To ponder this truth helps us to know more deeply the power of love.

Jesus is the light, but he also spoke of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has been at work since the very beginning of time. The Spirit hovers over the chaos of our world and brings forth form and beauty, but would we have come to know this had Jesus not been the one to reveal the truth of God and the universe? If Jesus had not been the light, we would be much poorer.

Like our Columban friends and supporters, we missionaries have also seen that Christ is the light that overcomes the darkness. This is the missionary impulse. We want others to see what we see. As we celebrate and remember that baby in Bethlehem, the light of the world, we remember all those who are still searching for the light wherever they may be. Let us pray for them. Let us continue our missionary effort. In this way we continue the work of God the Father who sent his only Son, the light of the world. ●

Fr Trevor Trotter

Fr Trevor Trotter is Director of the Columbans in Oceania. After ordination in 1970, he went on mission to the Philippines. He has served on the General Council in Hong Kong and also lectured in Scripture and been involved in formation.

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*Wishing all our subscribers, readers and supporters
a very happy and peaceful Christmas and every blessing for 2023!*



A CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

Last Christmas Fr Frank Hoare took a break from life in the Fijian capital, Suva, to return to a rural parish where he had worked previously. But his attempt at playing Santa Claus did not get the reaction he expected.

Fr Frank Hoare is from Ireland. He is a member of the Regional Council and Student Formation team in Fiji where he has been working since 1973.

01. A little boy in the village of Tamaquto in Ba Parish is uninterested in the soft toy Fr Frank Hoare has brought.

02. Fr Frank gives a Christmas toy to a delighted little girl in Tamaquto.

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Maybe it was because I wasn't wearing the required red robes or lacked a white beard but as I drew a soft toy out of my sack and offered it to a little boy I was surprised by the suspicious look, the turning away in disdain and the clinging to his parent's neck in utter rejection. The children's reaction to the soft toy animals I offered was not what I expected. Perhaps these items were too esoteric to the small boys in Tamaquto village in the interior hills of Ba Parish.

It was the Sunday before Christmas. I had offered to help Fr Pat Colgan who was on his own in the large extensive parish of Ba in the west of Fiji. For me, it was a break from life in the capital, Suva and a return to a parish in which I had worked years before.

I was happy to get the opportunity to return to Tamaquto in the hills, of which I had happy memories from my previous stay. This village had Mass only once in three or four months and sometimes even less when the rivers flooded in the rainy season.

In the absence of a priest, their catechist, Semesa, led the liturgy of the Word and distributed Holy Communion on Sundays. A couple of catechists from other villages would help out when needed. Catechists are very important in

Fiji. They prepare couples for marriage and the baptism of their children. They often instruct children in preparation for the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confirmation.

Catechists are unpaid volunteers who give their time willingly to God and the Church. Their wives are a big support to them and assist them in their work. The local archbishop has recently begun to commission female catechists, but it is taking a while for them to be fully accepted. I was delighted to meet four catechists in Tamaquto after Mass and sit and chat with them.

Someone had given Fr Pat a large bag full of soft toys for distribution among the children for Christmas. Pat suggested that I take them to the small village of Tamaquto rather than leave a lot of disappointed children in one of the larger villages.

I believed that I would be a very popular priest by playing the role of Santa Claus. Not so! At least not among the male children. The reaction of the young girls was different. They directed a big smile and outreaching arms my way. That was more like what I had expected. It seems to me that the children's different responses had more to do with genetics than environmental conditioning. Well, maybe from both! ●

ADVENT RETREAT



Fr Tim Mulroy recalls a friend's theory that nothing captures the spirit of Advent like a fishing expedition.

Each year, at the beginning of December, as those around him begin preparing their Christmas shopping list, Ben begins preparing his fishing gear. Then, as family members and friends make plans for Christmas parties, Ben heads off with a few close friends to spend a long weekend at a remote lakeside village.

A few years ago, as this group of middle-aged men set out with the light-hearted spirits of schoolboys, Ben turned to me with a big grin, "It's such a pity that you're not coming with us on this Advent retreat."

A few weeks later, when I met Ben again at a New Year's party, my first question to him was, "So how did your Advent retreat go?" I had expected a witty response, but instead he began talking earnestly about the fishing trip.

For Ben, no other experience can capture the spirit of the Advent season like a fishing expedition. A few days in a boat, with a rod and line, teaches him what it truly means to wait in joyful hope. While he engages in detailed planning and preparation, he can never predict the moment when he will make his first catch.

On some trips that joyful surprise happens within the first hour, but on other occasions he must wait patiently for a day or more. Over the years he has learned to remain alert and vigilant for that moment when a fish nibbles the bait, the line becomes taut, and his heart pounds with excitement.

For Ben, this practice of attentive waiting is similar to the spirit we nurture during the Advent season as we wait in joyful hope for the return of Christ in glory at an unexpected moment. Part of our attentive waiting means becoming more attuned to the signs of God in the world around us, so that we can recognise Christ when he

returns. Again, Ben thinks that there is no better way to develop such an awareness than to go on a fishing trip.

Before setting out he carefully studies the weather patterns for several days. Throughout the trip, he constantly scans the sky and the horizon for subtle changes in the sun and in the clouds. He frequently notes the direction and strength of the wind, as well as the temperature of the air and water. After carefully weighing these various factors, he then propels his boat to that place where the fish are most likely to gather.

Thanks to such careful attention to his natural surroundings, as well as to his comprehensive knowledge of the habits of fish, Ben thinks that he can come close to entering into the mind of a fish! "The key to fishing," he says, "is to learn to see the world from a fish's standpoint ... and the key to Advent is to enter into the mind of Christ so as to see the world from God's standpoint."

As I tried to grapple with this unusual insight, Ben proceeded to remind me that the first group of apostles who were chosen by Jesus at the outset of his public ministry - Peter, Andrew, James and John - had been fishermen. Furthermore, after his resurrection, Jesus returned to Lake Gennesaret to invite those same fishermen to become messengers of the Gospel to the world.


There is no doubt in Ben's mind that, when Christ returns in glory, those who will be ready to welcome him will be those who are vigilant in waiting, filled with a joyful hope, and attentive to the world around them. In short, people with the same mind and heart as those fishermen who became apostles.

Now I understand why, at the beginning of December each year, Ben and his companions head off to that remote lakeside village to do their Advent retreat. ●

Society Leader, Fr Tim Mulroy, is from Meelick, Swinford, Co Mayo. Prior to his appointment to this leadership role in the Columbans he worked on mission in Japan and in El Paso, Texas. He was also Regional Director in the US.

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LAND OF DREAMS



“ Brothers and sisters, Iquique is a ‘land of dreams’ - that is what its name means in the Aymara language. It is a land that has given shelter to men and women of different peoples and cultures who had to leave everything behind and set out. Setting out always with the hope of obtaining a better life, yet, as we know, always with their bags packed with fear and uncertainty about the future. Iquique is a region of immigrants, which reminds us of the greatness of men and women, entire families, who, in the face of adversity, refused to give up and set out in search of life. In search of life. They - especially those who had to leave their land for lack of life’s bare necessities - are an icon of the Holy Family, which had to cross deserts to keep on living.”

Fr Michael Hoban writes about the Chilean city of Iquique and its hinterland - known as the “land of dreams” - to which people flock in the hope of building a better life for themselves and their families.

These words were spoken by Pope Francis in his homily during the open-air celebration of the Eucharist on 18 January 2018. The Mass was celebrated near a desert beach outside the city of Iquique on a hot, sunny morning. As a visiting priest, I did not appreciate fully the importance of his words.

At the end of November 2020, I returned to the diocese of Iquique to work in our parish, Sagrado Corazón de Jesús. Since then, I have come to realise the truth of the Holy Father’s words. I am ministering in the desert, in a land of dreams. The Columban parish of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús is located on the desert plains above the port city of Iquique in a municipality called Alto Hospicio. When the Columbans first came to the diocese of Iquique more than forty years ago, there were only a few scattered temporary wooden dwellings, a couple of truck stops and an explosives factory.

Today, it is estimated that more than a 150,000 people live in Alto Hospicio. There are fourteen squatter camps located in our parish. There is plenty of empty space in the huge Atacama Desert. Groups of people organise and invade

empty sectors of Alto Hospicio; take a piece of ground and build a temporary dwelling. In time, these makeshift dwellings are replaced with something more permanent. In the beginning, the families live without electricity, water, sewage, garbage collection or paved streets. Over the course of a few years, the municipality and the Chilean government provide those essential services. However, there is no guarantee that they will be allowed to settle permanently. In some cases, the families are relocated to apartments built by the government, while in other cases they are allowed to purchase their piece of land at a good price.

Northern Chile has a long history of mining, so men and women have flocked to this “land of dreams” in the hope of building a better life for themselves and their families. Many of them are able to achieve their dreams; normally it is easier for Chileans. It is a different story for the immigrants from Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and, most recently, Venezuela. They face many challenges. Recently, there has been a huge influx of Venezuelan immigrants. They live in a



03

04

legal “limbo”. They are undocumented and that means that it is very difficult for them to get regular jobs. Instead, they become part of a network of informal work: street vendors and day labourers who wash windshields, sell sweets or beg on the streets. Most of these immigrants are young couples with small children. Without documents, most schools will not accept their children. However, the local primary health clinics and the hospital will take care of them if they are sick. They can also get vaccinated without any problem.

The parish of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús has always welcomed the immigrants and tried to provide some material help for them. A soup kitchen has functioned for many years. Despite the restrictions of the pandemic, a delivery system was set up to bring food parcels to the families. Last year, we teamed up with the Daughters of Charity to provide assistance in a huge new squatter camp known as ‘El paso de la mula’ (the Mule’s Trail). It is located on the southern boundary of the parish. Immigrant families from Venezuela and Bolivia continue to pour into it. Families take over a plot of desert land; put up some sort of fencing and a makeshift dwelling. Sometimes, they just pitch a tent until they can build a better shelter.

The Daughters of Charity were able to get a cement truck to pour the foundations for some dwellings. There is no electricity, water or sewage; water tank trucks come several times during the week. But there was a problem. The plastic water containers are too small

for the hose of the water truck. With a donation from their congregation in France, the Sisters bought 10 plastic water tanks with a capacity of 1,000 litres of water which means that families can fill their water containers. The social apostolate of the parish regularly provides food parcels and used clothing. A Christmas supper of chicken, rice and salad was prepared for 280 immigrants. Columban benefactors provided the chicken. Local benefactors donated toys and Caritas Chile provided food parcels.

Some families were lucky enough to get their children into school. However, they could not afford the school supplies for their children. Parish groups and Columban benefactors came to the rescue and provided the supplies. In the desert, it is warm in the daytime but cold at night. In winter, the temperature drops, and you can really feel the cold. Right now, we are distributing blankets to the families. Thanks to two close friends of the Columbans, we have been able to distribute 240 blankets. We hope to continue providing relief to the immigrants who have come to this very unlikely “land of dreams.” However, we know that the most important gift we have to share with them is our faith in the Risen Lord. ●

Please donate to our 2022 Christmas Appeal and support Columban ministries around the world like Fr Michael Hoban’s in Chile. Donate at: www.columbans.co.uk/donate or call 01564 772 096 or send a cheque payable to ‘Columban Missionaries’ to St. Columban’s, Widney Manor Road, Solihull B93 9AB. Thank you!

Fr Michael Hoban was ordained in 1970 and arrived in Chile in 1972. He has served there for 50 years apart from time spent on the Columban General Council and undertaking study. He is now based in the Diocese of Iquique in northern Chile near the Atacama Desert.

01. Some families who were lucky enough to get their children into school could not afford the school supplies. Columban benefactors came to the rescue.
02. Northern Chile has a long history of mining, so men and women have flocked to this “land of dreams” in the hope of building a better life for themselves and their families. In the beginning, the families live without electricity, water, sewage, garbage collection or paved streets.
03. With a donation from the Daughters of Charity 10 plastic water tanks were bought enabling families to fill their water containers.
04. Fr Michael Hoban and parishioners in the Columban parish, Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, in the Chilean Diocese of Iquique.

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01

GENEROUS GIVING

Sr Ann Gray explains why 'We give by going, you go by giving' perfectly describes the partnership between missionaries and benefactors.

Earlier this year the Columban Sisters looked back to one hundred years ago, February 1922, when a group of young women came together in Cahiracon in Co Clare. These became the first group of postulants who were the foundation of the new Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban.

Now, in 2022, we have Sisters on mission in Ireland, the UK, USA, China, Myanmar, Pakistan and the Philippines. This is quite an expansion when we consider those early days when thirteen young women answered a call to respond to the needs of the people of China. Thankfully, we still have young women ready to respond to the call of mission. Today we have two novices, Marianna from Korea and Annalyn from the Philippines, as well as two postulants from Myanmar. None of this, of course, would have been possible without the prayers and financial support of our many faithful benefactors.

In our early days, the Columban Fathers, under the leadership of Fr John Blowick, made provision for the upkeep of the Sisters in Cahiracon. Gradually, this resulted in a strain on finances. In July

1926, when the first group of Sisters was preparing to set out for China, Fr Blowick made his first appeal for support in the **Far East** on behalf of the Sisters. This resulted in a tremendous outpouring of generosity.

Responding to this generosity, Fr Blowick wrote in the **Far East**: "Little did you think as you sent us your donation - small or great as it may have been - what a burden you raised off our shoulders. Little did you think that the combined efforts of our army of friends in Ireland made it possible for us to come to the aid of our immense family, young and old, priests, students and Brothers and Sisters at home in the college and away in the lonely plains of China."

In the years following 1926, a small trickle of donations, some totalling up to £10, which was a large sum of money at that time, reached Cahiracon from the four corners of Ireland. One donation of 2/6d was accompanied by a request for prayers because of "struggles with unemployment and the availability of part time work only".

Another benefactor sent "a small donation towards the flood victims of Hanyang" and added, "I am only a working man and I am sorry this gift is so small,"

while from another we heard, "I joined with a friend in selling cattle which did not do well, but we promised to send you some money no matter how it would go." Our hearts were equally deeply touched by messages such as, "When starting my career, I promised three pence a week out of my small salary of 5s to go to the Missions and any little extras I got in the way of tips."

By 1930, the response to the appeals for support had become so generous and numerous that, in order to keep pace with all the correspondence and donations, the Sisters in Cahiracon had to set aside a special room as an office from which to correspond with the many people who had become our generous benefactors.

This past year, I have been opening the envelopes which have continued to come to us since 1926 sending support for our missionary work. Like our Sisters in the early days, I have been overwhelmed



01. The Missionary Sisters of St Columban's first group of novices in 1922: FB. Walsh, Mgt M. Scanlon, FX. Mapleback, BF. Moloney, B. McSweeney, J. McKey, E. Dalton, F. Collins, and T. Brannigan.
02. Annalyn from the Philippines who is currently in formation as a Columban novice.
03. Marianna from Korea who is in formation with the Columban Sisters.

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AND GOING

and inspired by the generous support and the concern which people in Ireland and Britain give to our Sisters and the people among whom we live and work.

Some of these envelopes contain a cheque for a large amount of money, others contain a few Euros or Pounds which, in the eyes of the world today, would be considered a small amount of money. But, for us Columban Sisters, each of these envelopes contains a treasure – not only in money but a treasure of faithfulness to us which stretches over many years, a treasure of concern for our safety and well-being, and that of the people whom we serve – treasures of great value indeed.

Today, throughout the world, we are all living in uncertain and precarious times as we learn to live with the virus that has disrupted so much of our lives and caused so much suffering. Many of us are living in fear and worry over the war in Ukraine and the spiralling cost of living. And yet, the people of Ireland and further afield continue to respond with great generosity, supporting us with their prayers and donations.

At a recent meeting of Apostolic Workers, I heard it said that we missionaries 'give by going' and that others 'go by giving'. For me, that is a perfect description of the partnership between us missionaries and our benefactors. Both the going and the giving are intertwined and equally necessary and for both we give thanks to God. ●

Columban missionary Sr Ann Gray is the new Assistant Editor of the Far East magazine. She is based in Ireland.

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you can donate online here:
www.columbansisters.org/donation
or write to the Missionary Sisters of
St Columban, Magheramore,
Co Wicklow, A67 A446, Ireland.



THE WAITING

Advent is a time to pause, listen and look back on the past year. There is much to ponder. Mother Earth is suffering. There have been droughts and famine in some places while in Pakistan there have been floods of epic proportions. War broke out in Europe with Russia's invasion of Ukraine causing pointless destruction and resulting in many experiencing fuel poverty in a cold winter. The poor are the worst affected. Refugees continue to flee from places all over the world seeking shelter and hospitality, but that can be in short supply as the 'flight into Egypt' reminds us.

Christmas is the season of hope. It is a light in the darkness of winter, symbolised in the glow of the candle. The Celts honoured the winter solstice on 21st December, the darkest and longest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, as an awesome time and a powerful symbol of light penetrating darkness.

Five thousand years ago in Newgrange (Ireland) a passage burial tomb was built in which the sun, at its lowest point in the sky on the winter solstice, enters the heart of the tomb. As the sun rises higher, the beam widens so that the whole chamber is dramatically illuminated. It is a journey out of darkness to light - a turning point when the sun pauses on its journey north, changes course, and then begins to return on its journey south. It is a powerful symbol of light penetrating darkness.

Many believe that the celebration of

Christmas, the birth of Jesus, was set to synchronize with the December solstice when earth was in its darkest moment and so, Jesus, the Light of the World, entered our world at this point bringing hope. Isaiah spoke about: *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. On those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone."*

Irish poet, priest and philosopher, John O'Donoghue wrote once: *"At the Winter Solstice the divine presence stirs in the crib of the heart infusing our eyes with the glow of wonder."*

We know what wonder is when we see the light in the eyes of children waiting for Santa. Wonder is linked with faith and as the children enjoy their wonderland, others sit in wonder at the crib, or gaze at the star, remembering that Jesus, the Son of God, became man to **BE** our Light. Look at the tree, decorated and lit up, a symbol of light shining on our lives where there may be shadows and darkness.

Let us light our candle of wonder this Christmas and allow the Light of Christ, the Prince of Peace, illuminate every corner of our lives, homes and the whole world with peace and love. ●

Sr Rebecca Conlon

Sr Rebecca Conlon is a member of the leadership team of the Columban Sisters. She was one of the first group of Columbans Sisters to go to Pakistan in 1990. She has also served on mission in Korea and the Philippines.

CAPTIVATED BY AN INFANT'S GAZE

*In the old days there was a myth
that new-born babies could not see
for some time after birth.*

*Now we know better:
within hours of being born
a tiny child is focusing its eyes
above all on its mother.*

*This helpless, vulnerable baby
is fixing its unblinking gaze to draw in,
charm and captivate its only source
of food and protection.*

*For millennia, God the Father,
who made us in his own image,
had to live with mankind's perverse response:
we made Him in our image!
If the great, the powerful, the rulers
of this world so often turned out to be
remote, capricious, merciless and vindictive
then God was viewed through the same lens.*

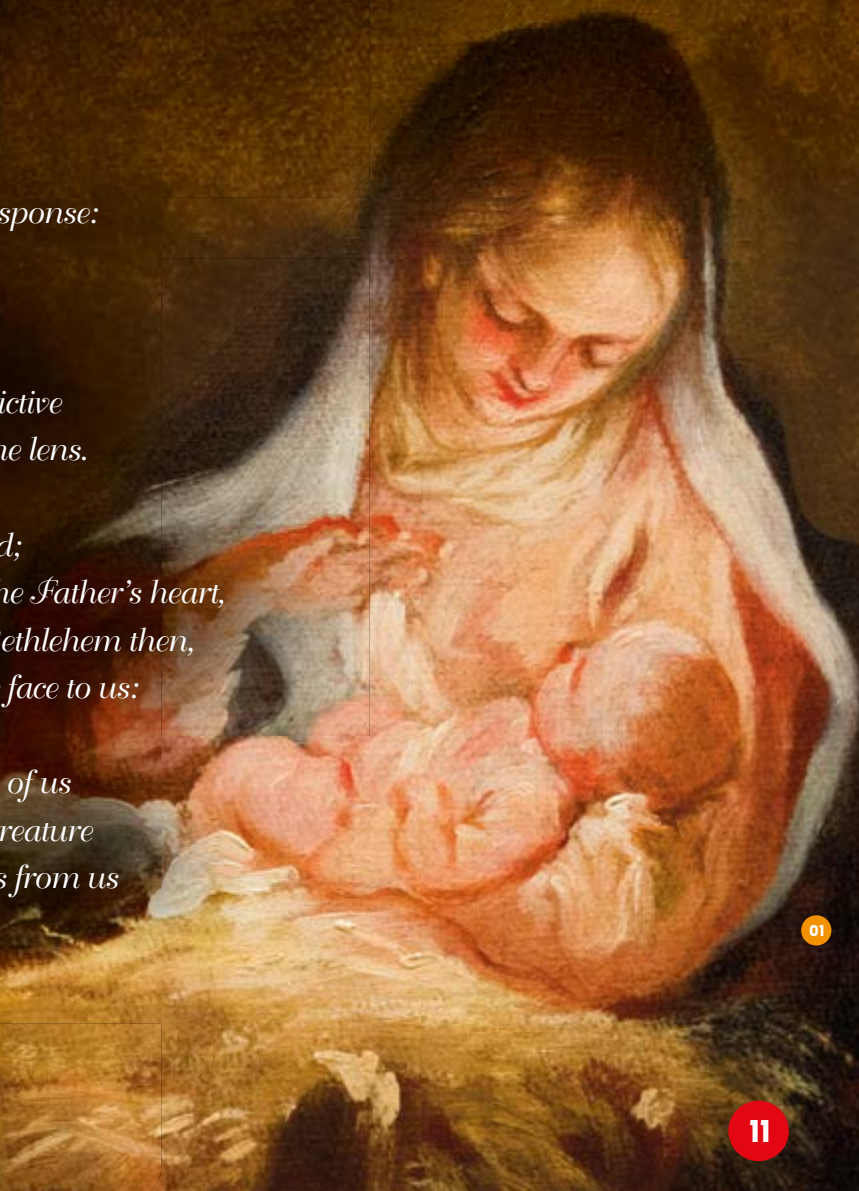
*John wrote, "No one has ever seen God;
God's only Son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart,
has made him known". The birth at Bethlehem then,
was God's final effort to reveal his true face to us:
to make clear that our God
desperately seeks to captivate each one of us
by appearing in the form of the only creature
that invariably disarms us, and draws from us
such a loving response.*

*Why did he do this?
To make clear that he needs our love?
That we are infinitely precious to Him?
That there is no measure he will not take
to captivate us and assure us of his love?*

*So let your face be the unwavering focus
of your baby's gaze. Fall under its spell, and
remember again just how much you are loved
by the Christ-child of Bethlehem.●*

Cyril Lovett SSC

Fr Cyril Lovett is the retired editor of the Far East magazine.
He served on mission in the Philippines and Brazil. His
collection of poems, 'Matters of the Heart' was published by
Vilnius Press in 2013.



01. The Virgin Mary lovingly holding the Infant Jesus in her arms by Antonio Balestra (1666-1740). Currently in Castello Visconteo, Pavia, Italy.

THE CHALLENGE OF GIFT GIVING

Christmas is the season of gift-giving. During Advent, we are preparing our souls to welcome the Christ-child. It is a gift designed for us by God. Preparing well what we give to others can help us prepare to receive the supreme love of God, writes Fr Jim Mulroney.

Ping-pong played an instrumental part in thawing the freeze between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America in the 1970s. While far from being the cause, as friction with Russia was already pivoting Beijing towards Washington, a simple gesture of welcome from Zhuang Zedong, a member of the Chinese Table Tennis Team at the Nagoya World Championships, towards a stranded American rival proved an important catalyst to the thaw.

Zhuang overcame a lifetime of anti-American education to give a small gift to Glenn Cowan, who was hitching a ride on the Chinese team bus after missing his own. The gift of a cheap screen painting of a mountain scene in his home country may have been small, but it was the best Zhuang could find in his bag.

The then Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong, later described Zhuang as having good hands for table tennis, before enthusiastically adding, and a good head for international relations! While a furthering of international relations was the furthest thing from Zhuang's mind at the time, he has gone down in history as a significant player in instigating what today is referred to as Ping-Pong Diplomacy.

And it all began with two agonising decisions. Firstly, welcoming a stranger from China's number one enemy, and secondly, giving the lone American some memento of their meeting. Both ran against the grain of his entire life's education.

In any other circumstance, Zhuang's gesture would have passed unnoticed by the world. It was a brave act of giving, but much of its power lay in the graciousness and joy with which Cowan received and cherished the gift.

While naturally there is a lot more to this story, it was the sort of meeting an English monk some 800 years ago described as a combination of belief in the other, harmony in the soul, deep respect and a hefty dose of goodwill, which, he noted, can bear undreamed of fruit.

Gifts play an important part in our society and Christmas is our biggest season of gift-giving. Some gifts are cherished and a source of great joy; others put aside with little care or even passed on to others. Perhaps it is true that it is the thought that counts, but the single, well considered thought can be worth a thousand cast in haste.

There are occasions that society mores dictate giving. Little is expected. The simple remembrance may be appreciated, but equally regarded with scorn. Ignoring the occasion can also be a source of hurt. It's a sort of Catch-22.

There are many dimensions to gift giving, and Advent is a good time to think about them. Our purchases have an economic impact, so we can think about where we source them. We can choose to support big, conglomerate companies or small business enterprises. And, most importantly, we can ask about the condition of the labour that went into the manufacture, rather than the glamour attached to the maker's label.

There are some things we can make ourselves, which can touch the recipient deeply. Others can relate to an important occasion in a relationship. We can give an experience, a tour of an historic site or place of importance to the recipient.

Thought and preparation put into the choice of a gift can add to the enjoyment of the giving, as well as the joy of receiving. It does not have to be designer label, but if designed for the person on the receiving end it can be a great boost to the

relationship between us.

Not all of our gifts can be as earth-shaking as the one from the Chinese table tennis player, but perhaps a gift given to someone or some enterprise we have been conditioned to believe is our enemy can do wonders to our ability to receive with a graciousness that is truly life-giving.

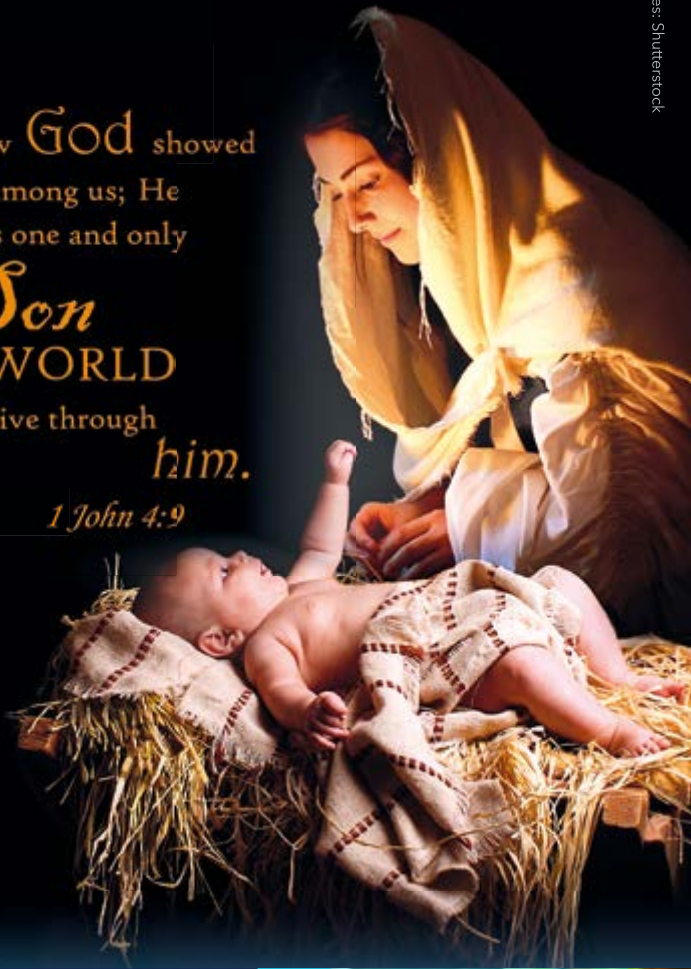
During Advent, we are preparing our souls to welcome the Christ-child. We are on the receiving end of this gift and that is a challenge. It is a gift designed for us by God and preparing well what we give to others can help us prepare to receive this most precious of all gifts - the supreme love of God.

Given with love and received with joy, it can truly be a combination of belief in the other, harmony in the soul, deep respect and a hefty dose of goodwill, which can bear undreamed of fruit. ●

Fr Jim Mulroney was deputy editor-in-chief of the Sunday Examiner in Hong Kong until he retired to the Columban house in Essendon, Australia in 2018. He died in October 2022.

This is how **God** showed
his *love* among us; He
sent his one and only
Son
into the **WORLD**
that we might live through
him.

1 John 4:9



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And he said to them,

“Go into all the world and
proclaim the good news to
the whole creation.”

Mark 16:15

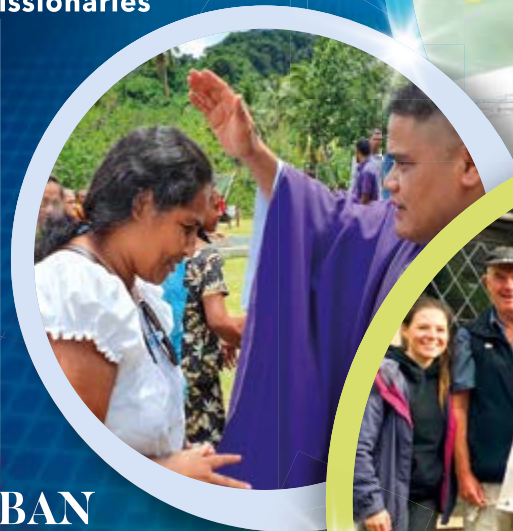
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A TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION

Pakistan experienced some of its worst flooding in decades earlier this year, leaving thousands of people dead or homeless. Fr Dan O'Connor and Fr Liam O'Callaghan write about the impact of the disaster, its link to climate change, and the support Columbans have offered to flood victims.

The sheer scale of the flooding disaster was hard to comprehend and the misery of people, camped on the side of the road with their meagre belongings, was heart-breaking to see. The Pakistani Government declared a national emergency. There was an urgent need for relief aid to help those left homeless and contending with the shocking scale of the destruction of infrastructure like roads, bridges, rail lines, schools and health centres. Where do you start? It will take years to repair.

Aid is given to those most in need of it, whether they are Christian, Hindu or Muslim. Though it may be seen as a drop in the ocean in the context of the massive floodwater damage, it is a Godsend to people who are badly in need of food

rations and other material help.

The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres visited Pakistan to see with his own eyes the flood disaster. "Pakistan and other developing countries are paying a horrific price for the intransigence of the big emitters that continue to bet on fossil fuels. From Islamabad I am making a global appeal: Stop the madness, invest in renewable energy now. End the war with Nature. Today it is Pakistan, tomorrow it will be another country," he warned.

Financial aid has been promised by the international community but much of it has not arrived. According to the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, "Friendly countries had started looking at Pakistan as a country that has always asked/begged for money." He highlighted how in this present disaster



Pakistan is not asking for charity, but for justice. The truth of the matter is that this flood is caused by climate change and nature has unleashed its fury on Pakistan. Pakistan has a population of approximately 225 million people. It contributes less than 1% in greenhouse gas emissions and so it is paying the price for the ecological negligence of others.

With the help of Caritas, the Columbans distributed food rations, hygiene kits, mosquito nets and even toothbrushes and toothpaste to families in villages like Baharo. Close by, the canal overflowed with waves of water and this in turn flooded the land, destroying the healthy cotton crop. Farmers have only made one picking this year, whereas normally they would have had about seven pickings.

The people told me they were delighted to receive the rations as they had to borrow money to get food to eat. This will keep the 'wolf from the door' for the present time. There is some hope for the future. The rice crop suffered much damage, yet although swathes of it collapsed, much can be retrieved. So there is hope for people that they will be able to obtain their daily rice bread.

It is estimated that several hundred thousand people who had to flee their homes are camping on higher ground, such as the sides of roads. Large numbers do not have toilet facilities which means they risk catching diseases such as malaria, the dreaded dengue fever, cholera and dysentery.

Global action needs to be taken before it is too late to address the climate change crisis so that Pakistan does not

suffer this kind of calamity again. Pakistan also needs internal action-planning and it also needs to slash non-development expenditure including on its large defence budget. Finance will be required for flood rehabilitation and flood prevention measures.

With the flood waters slowly receding, rehabilitation and the rebuilding of homes and agricultural lands are essential. This is urgently needed so that the affected victims will be able to return to some sort of normal life, given the changed circumstances. Strict laws are required so that the rebuilding of houses does not happen on flood plains. Stopbanks or embankments need to be constructed so that the flow of water is directed away from populated areas. Small dams and reservoirs could be built to prevent flooding. With better land development practices, improved water management and a government that is better prepared, the hope is that this mammoth tragedy will not be repeated. ●

Fr Dan O'Connor and Fr Liam O'Callaghan are based in the Columban-run parish of St Thomas the Apostle in Badin in Pakistan's Sindh Province.

01. Columban missionary Fr Dan O'Connor presenting food rations to a widow in the village of Bharam in Pakistan.
02. The ruined cotton crop.
03. Happy villagers receiving flood relief aid.
04. Columban missionary Fr Pat Visanti wading through flood waters on what was once a road.

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Scan and read more about Columban efforts to provide relief and support to those affected by the floods, or visit: www.columbans.co.uk/pakistan



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YOUNG PEOPLE: VOICES ON THE MARGINS?

James Trewby, Columban Justice and Peace Education Worker in Britain, provides some reflections from a young adult synodal conversation.

During the strange 'lockdown' times much of my work as Columban Justice and Peace Education Worker in Britain went online. Each week, often working collaboratively with Pax Christi's Education worker, I facilitated multiple Zoom-based communities, helping different groups explore the relationship between Catholic faith and action for the common good. I hosted discussions with young people in schools, communities of teachers, volunteers in youth retreat centres, even international groups... but the one I particularly looked forward to was with the Catholic youth charity, Million Minutes.

Each week we gathered a group of young adults who had won awards for living out Catholic Social Teaching for 90 minutes of games, learning and sharing - it became a beautiful community that sustained, encouraged and challenged its

members. So when a year later I was invited by a Religious Sister to "put on a Synod party" to bring young adults' voices into the synod process, my friends at Million

Minutes were my first call. Together we hosted an evening online, aiming particularly at people we knew to be committed to faith and work for justice but who might not have had the opportunity or felt able to feed into the synod process via other means.

We gathered a diverse range of young Catholics from different backgrounds and cultures, aged 17 to 25 years old, from six dioceses in England. The evening was simple: following prayer we spilt into small groups to discuss the synod questions, and then shared these discussions together in a plenary. Members of staff from Million Minutes and I acted as scribes, reflecting back their feedback. I'm happy to have this opportunity to share something of the responses of these young adults with the readers of the **Far East**. I hope that they challenge and encourage all of us!

The questions explored the experiences of young adults during the pandemic and the extent to which they felt the Church was journeying with them. A range of themes emerged, including mental health and isolation, impacts on opportunities and education, and effects on professional options. The young adults were thoughtful about how the world around them had changed as a result of the pandemic, including working patterns. Some described the pandemic as oddly 'restorative', allowing time and space



The perfect church is...



to question the status quo, which (pre-pandemic) seemed to prioritise a culture of overworking and consumption.

The ways in which the Catholic Church responded to the pandemic varied from participant to participant. Some felt that they had seen the very best of their Catholic communities during the pandemic, ministering as a 'field hospital', at the front lines in their local communities, for example addressing food poverty or organising digital provision. For some, the suspension of the weekly obligation allowed them the chance to find community beyond the usual confines of parish walls. One talked of the pandemic "turning faith upside down" and challenging all practicing Catholics to examine what exactly their faith is about. Some talked of their faith being "stronger than ever" as a result of the pandemic, allowing them to engage with a much more "creative" understanding of Church, one where online community and personal reflection was as important as weekly attendance.

We asked participants to consider what 'returning' to parish churches has felt like. Some young adults talked of a feeling of "disconnection" and "disappointment". There seemed to be a genuine fear amongst some participants of losing the gains made in lockdown: finding a voice of their own, developing a community of friends, and being in a space of communal youth-led prayer.

A consistent theme was that the young adults we listened to were not representative of their peers. Participants spoke openly about the fact that many of their friends and students from school had left the faith or become lapsed or disengaged; "people our age just don't believe in God". Some also spoke of perceptions of the Catholic Church as

being a space of disharmony and exclusion, leading to young adults walking away. There was a sense that if more young people understood that faith was richer than just the weekly obligation, fewer young people would leave.

The theme of intergenerational tension was also shared. The young adults had a huge amount of respect for members of the older generation but did not always feel that respect was reciprocated. Themes of the "adult knowing best" in parish spaces seemed to abound, leaving participants questioning what role they had, if any, in Catholic spaces. Some spoke of older people feeling threatened by them as if their presence challenged their understanding of faith. One young adult shared that they found it difficult to call the Church "home" due to feeling like an intruder or an unwelcome guest. These feelings were shared by others who had experiences of feeling pushed out or brushed to the side, especially by comments such as, "you're sitting in my seat" and "we've always done it this way".

Despite their diverse experiences, the group were united in their agreement of the need for renewal. Participants stated they wanted to see a commitment to constant listening, changing with the times, staying relevant, and genuine inclusion, not leaving anyone behind. ●

In his role as Columban Justice and Peace Education Worker James Trewby helps young people and educators explore the relationship between faith and action. He is a qualified teacher with an MSc and PhD in Education.

01. James Trewby and young people walking towards Whitehall in London to lobby on climate change.
02. Columban Faith-in-Action volunteers with James Trewby.
03. Word cloud made by young adults taking part in the synod discussion.



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GOD IS A GIFT-GIVER

Fr Malachy Hanratty sets out some important lessons he learned as a missionary in Japan, where Christianity remains a tiny minority and is of little interest to the vast majority of the population.

Japan has long been a 'First World' country, very advanced in commerce, manufacturing, education, medicine, politics, very organised and regulated; all of this built on a distinct culture. In 1957, when I and six others joined the Columban mission in Japan, we were entering a country whose people were united in rebuilding after the ravages of World War II. It was 98% non-Christian. I learned in Japan I was a 'nobody'. I was in a different world, 'lost,' ignorant, illiterate, irrelevant, a politely unnoticed 'outsider'.

After a gruelling time at a language school, we were sent out to join older Columbans in small recently founded Christian communities. All our efforts went into interesting a few inquirers in what we had come to share, namely the teachings of the Catholic Faith. We put a mountain of time and effort into preparing for little classes of two or three adults. Very few

persevered until baptism. As I struggled with disappointment, frustration and bewilderment, I kept searching for not just *how* to say things but *what* to say.

Then Vatican II came like an apparition. It meant much more study, talks, seminars, discussions and pondering. It was a blessed leap forward. I remember listening to a speaker who said, "The N° 1 truth of Christianity is not that we must love God and our neighbour. No, it is that God loves us. Our journey of faith is to integrate that." But because so much seems to be continually going wrong it is hard to believe God really loves us. It requires a deliberate effort to notice God working in our lives. This growing awareness of God's care leads us on the road to accepting He loves us.

It is out of this growing gratitude and wonder - not out of an imposed service or fear - that we get the desire and the strength to love God and neighbour. But this requires a habit of prayer and a

growing awareness of our relationship to God. Vatican II brought 'praying Scripture' out of monasteries and special praying communities to 'ordinary' Christians.

I learned in my prayer-time to pause and wait until small positive things in my daily experience, or in Nature, or in 'praying Scripture' would bring themselves to my notice. These strengthened the teaching that God is a gift-giver, a Saviour, compassionate - even if mysterious.

Another eye-opening aid was understanding that Faith is more than a noun; it is a verb! It means trust, handing oneself over with conviction, a 'stepping out of the boat'. Experience of God's action, reflected on, enlivens taught Faith. We are all called to a deeper personal relationship with God as we understand that Christianity is more than a teaching; Christianity is a person.

This sent me to the Gospels in a new way and they became the backbone of my teaching. 'Praying Scripture' helped me realise that what God did in Scripture is telling us what He is doing, here and now, in our own lives.

You can imagine how discoveries and growth like this affected my teaching, talks and sermons with the growing Christian community I was in. We had changed the title of our explanation classes from 'Teachings of the Catholic Church' to 'Introducing Christ'. Besides these classes of 'Introducing Christ', there were groups for 'Discoveries in Prayer' and 'Praying Scripture'. In these, after a little input, we had a silent praying time together and then, in small groups, a sharing on noticed insights, struggles or inner changes noticed.


I soon realised that not only were they learning from me and from one another, but I was learning from them. Gradually I also came to realise that the people in these groups were pillars of the growing Christian community.

The last place I worked in was the new parish of Fujisawa. It is now the biggest parish in Yokohama diocese. As I looked on the packed congregation for my last time, I felt it was a summary of our missionary life in Japan. They were our successors. They were now the missionaries influencing Japanese society. Yes, I thought, a missionary's number one task is to help form missionaries. They by their witness 'introduce Christ' in their own surroundings. ●

01. Fr Malachy Hanratty blesses a parishioner in Japan.
02. Setting off from the Columban house in Japan.

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Since returning to Ireland, Fr Malachy has published a series of booklets on prayer. These include 'Discoveries in Praying Scripture' Volume I and II and 'Discoveries in Prayer' Volume I and II. Both provide a series of 'Guided Meditations' that he used with groups in Japan to show what can happen when praying. Fr Malachy has recently published 'Resurrection Gifts', a series of guided meditations.

All of these booklets are free to download here:
www.columbans.ie/spirituality/publications-by-fr-malachy-hanratty



THE SPRINGTIME OF YOUTH

Columban Lay Missionary Nathalie Marytsch believes the Church needs to be open to where the Spirit may be leading it, and this includes trusting the younger generation.

Columban lay missionary Nathalie Marytsch is from Chile. She lives and works in Britain.


01. Columban Lay missionary, Natalie Marytsch with faith-in-action volunteers in Britain.

01. On 19 December 2021, Gabriel Boric defeated José Antonio Kast in the second round of the presidential election, obtaining 55.9% of the votes. President Boric's government took office in March promising to spend more on health, education and pensions.

Image: Shutterstock

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On 11 March this year, 35-year-old former student leader, Gabriel Boric, was sworn in as the youngest president ever in the history of Chile. He joins Austria's Sebastian Kurz, first elected at the age of 33; Finland's Sanna Marin at 34; Jacinda Ardern from New Zealand at 37; and France's Emmanuel Macron at 39 in a coterie of young national leaders on the world stage that came to power before their 40th birthday.

Boric garnered 56 percent of the popular vote in a two-horse run-off, defeating a candidate from what **The Economist** described as the far-right wing of the political spectrum, José Antonio Kast.

Almost immediately images of Boric and Patricio Aylwin, who took office in 1990 as the first democratically elected head of state after the horrific 16-year dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, were posted on social media together with their respective cabinets.

Commentators highlighted the stark contrast in dress and age. Aylwin's soberly clad, dark-suited men seemed still and distant, while Boric's majority female collection, some even accompanied by their children, came across as relaxed, colourful and approachable. Commentators also pointed to the average age of the ministers, with the new cabinet mostly populated with 30-somethings, compared with Aylwin's 50-plus brigade.

The comparisons prompted me to reflect on how age affects decision-making. In **The Joy of the Gospel**, Pope Francis speaks about the young people of today. He reminds us that while the sagacity acquired over long years of life has its place, "Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us to the future, lest we cling to a nostalgia for structure and customs which are no longer life-giving in today's world."

I understand the new government of Chile in this context and see real hope

that this youthful band can bring about a definitive conclusion to Pinochet's neoliberal legacy of poverty, division and exclusion that has plagued Chile over past decades.

I find hope in this new generation of leaders in my home country and believe they will serve all Chileans, rather than just the minority elite. However, it does leave me wondering about the lack of youthful participation in the papal push for synodality within the Church that should involve people of all ages.

As a missionary from Chile working with young faith-in-action volunteers in Britain, I feel blessed and humbled by their contribution to mission. Their faith, energy, new ideas and new ways of doing things, which at times are alien to me, give birth to the new and expansive hope that the Pope talks about.

In today's world, I think there is a need to let go of conventional ways and be open to where the Spirit may be leading us. We are invited to trust the younger generation, trust their ideas to be of value, and to trust that what is being sown and nurtured will ripen and bear fruit.

It is important to be willing to accompany them, walk with them and learn their codes. Everyone will make mistakes, but at this moment, young people need support, not condemnation.

May we, as people of faith, listen and welcome the springtime of new life, both in the Church and in society, and pray that the energy of youth will be nurtured and encouraged by their elders. ●



BABY JESUS



When Joseph learned that Mary was already expecting a baby, being a good man, he decided he should quietly release her from their engagement, so that there would be no public scandal. But an angel came to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, do not be afraid to make Mary your wife. The child she is carrying is from God. She will have a son and you must call him Jesus."

When Joseph woke up, he believed everything the angel had told him, and he and Mary were married.

Not long after this, the Roman Emperor passed a law that every person in the empire should be counted. Each man had to return to the town of his birth with his family. Joseph and Mary - who was due to have her baby - had to make their way to the town of Bethlehem.

The city was already crowded with people. Leading

the donkey that carried Mary, Joseph searched for somewhere to stay, but everywhere was full. Then one innkeeper offered them his stable.

Joseph made Mary a bed in the straw and that night her baby was born. She wrapped him in strips of cloth, called "swaddling", and laid him in a manger where hay was kept for the animals - the only bed in Bethlehem for the Son of God. They called their baby Jesus, just as the angel had told them. ●

Read also: [Luke 2:1-7](#)

Illustration by Val Biro from One Hundred Bible Stories for Children. Published by Award Publications Ltd.

BIBLE QUIZ

NUMBER 103

1 In Genesis ch.18, who lied when she said, "I did not laugh"?

2 In Luke ch.1, who asked an angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well on in years?"

3 In I Samuel ch.4, who named her son Ichabod saying "Glory has departed from Israel?"

4 In Exodus ch.32, who made this excuse, "They gave me the gold, I threw it in the fire, and out came this calf"?

5 In I Samuel, ch.17, who asked David, "Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks"?

6 In Acts ch.9, who said to Ananias, "Go, this man is my chosen instrument"?

Name:

Address:



£15 vouchers for the first three correct entries received!

Consult your Bible, answer the questions above and send your entry to: Bible Quiz N° 103, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 30th December 2022.

Bible Quiz N° 101 Winners: Christine Pennington, St Helens • Robin M Tinsley, Fleet • Joseph Ryan, Surrey.

WORD SEARCH

Find these words in the puzzle. They can be found straight across, reversed or down:

- SANTA
- SPRUCE
- PRESENT
- ELF
- SOCK
- SNOWFLAKES
- HOUSES
- DEER
- GINGERBREAD
- BAG
- LOLLIPOP



E	I	S	N	O	W	F	S	O	C	N
K	O	S	E	K	A	L	P	O	P	O
S	L	I	G	W	F	S	O	B	A	G
A	E	L	F	E	L	K	C	S	N	O
N	G	H	T	T	G	I	N	G	E	S
T	A	D	E	D	A	E	R	B	R	O
C	M	R	E	L	S	T	O	C	A	T
A	I	K	I	O	L	L	I	P	O	H
P	R	E	S	S	P	R	O	M	P	G
B	R	D	E	N	T	U	C	E	W	I
S	A	H	T	A	H	O	U	S	E	S

PUDSY'S DIRTY - FIND THE 10 SPELLING MISTAKES

The other day at school Ms Flinn was giving us our jobs to get ready for Xmas and she sed remember what the new priest told us about helping others. So me and Bump had to collect the old newspapers for the missions and refugees so we started at our naybor old Mr McHugh. And I was telling him that I told the small cuzzins I would write to Santa Claus for them but they said no! Becos my writing and spelling was so bad last time Santa cud'nt read it and they got all the wrong presents. And Mr McHugh said that's what you get for

being nice to peepul sometimes.. like the time I was a young sailor and our ship got stuck in the ice for ages and we were starving...but just then his dog, that's bigger than a tigre started going wild and he said I'll hafta get this boyo his dinner or he might gobble us all. I'll tell you that story again... off with ye now and do'nt worry things always work out. And on the way back I said to my friend Bump if we only could have that dog with us when we are asked to spell those aful hard words imagine!.. and he said yeah imagine!.. Happy Christmas!



Help Puddy correct his spelling to win a £15 voucher.

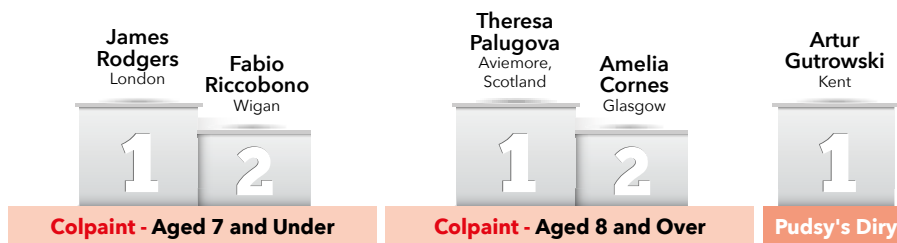
Rewrite the story and send to Puddy's Dirty, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands B93 9AB, before 30th December 2022.

HA! HA!

1. What does Santa use to measure?
2. What do monkeys sing at Christmas?
3. What do elves eat for breakfast?
4. What do you get if you cross an apple with a Christmas tree?
5. Who delivers presents to baby sharks at Christmas?
6. Where do snowmen go to dance?

1. Santametes!
2. Junglie bells
3. Snow flakes!
4. A pineapple!
5. Santa Jaws!
6. A snow ball!

COMPETITION WINNERS SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2022



A Partridge in a Pear Tree

By Elizabeth McArdle



Christmas is on the way and carol singers will be out and about collecting for charity and singing seasonal songs. Chief among these songs will be 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' which showcases the famous "Partridge in a Pear Tree". Now, you and I know that partridges would never be found dead in pear trees! They are strictly farmland birds and love to stay in low places, nesting on the ground and revelling in cultivated land, bushy pastures, grasslands and meadows. Adult partridges, also known as grey partridges, love to eat grain, grass, seeds and lots and lots of plants which we consider to be weeds. To the partridge they are delicious, fresh salads filled with nutrients and vitamins.

Baby partridges are known as cheepers and after hatching, they must feed on insects to grow and to develop their feathers. Without this protein-rich diet, cheepers would become stunted and die. As they grow older and become adults their diet changes to a mostly

vegetarian one with occasional insects on the menu.

Their flying ability is considered very poor in comparison to birds such as swallows and swifts. Therefore, they do not migrate and are 'home birds' with many of them not moving more than a few fields from where they were hatched. Their short, scratchy calls keep them in touch with family members, especially in autumn and winter when partridges gather in groups known as coveys.

These wonderful birds deserve our gratitude because they eat what we sometimes consider to be bothersome plants and seeds that invade our crops and gardens. God in His wisdom has bequeathed the earth with these distinct and beautiful birds and indeed all of nature. This Christmas, take time to get outdoors to appreciate the wonder and surprise of it all. It will enrich your days and make it a Christmas to remember. ●

Image: Shutterstock

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- ✓ Where and how is peacebuilding taking place?
- ✓ What role can faith play in peacemaking?

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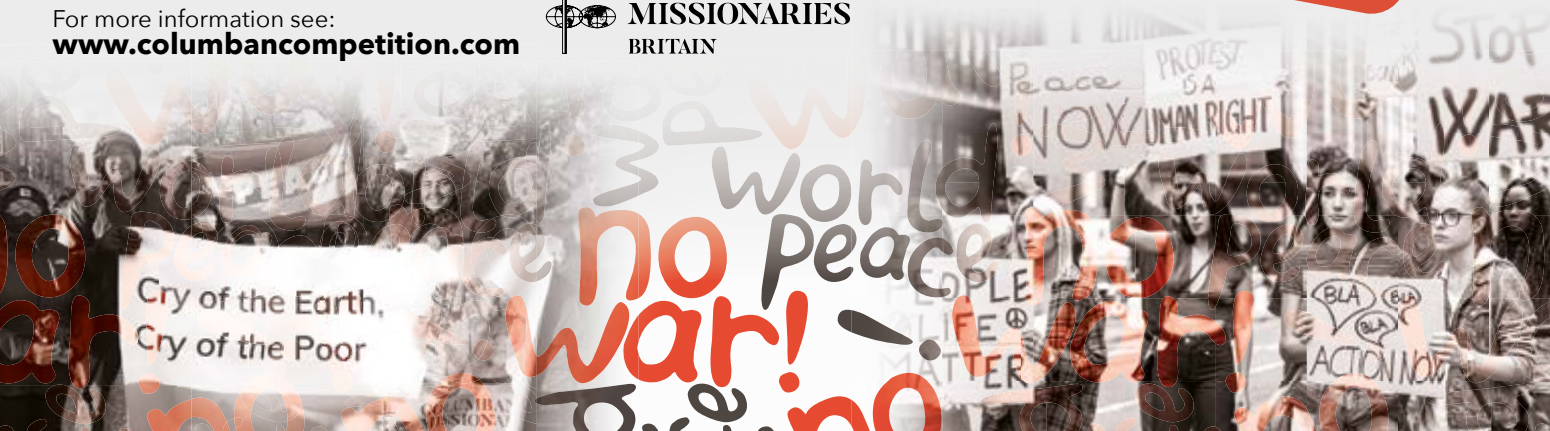
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MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST COLUMBAN ANNUAL REPORT

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Like the mustard seed, the fruits of Columban Mission grow from small beginnings to become sanctuaries of life and hope. This report is a humble celebration of what we are achieving together; a few steps closer to the dream of God's Kingdom.

“ Thank you for your support of Columban Missionaries as we continue to care for God's Great Garden. May God continue to bless and reward you.”

Fr Tim Mulroy, Society Leader



Read our 2022 Society Annual Report and dive deeper into the life and work of Columban Mission.



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