

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2024



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to Taiwan

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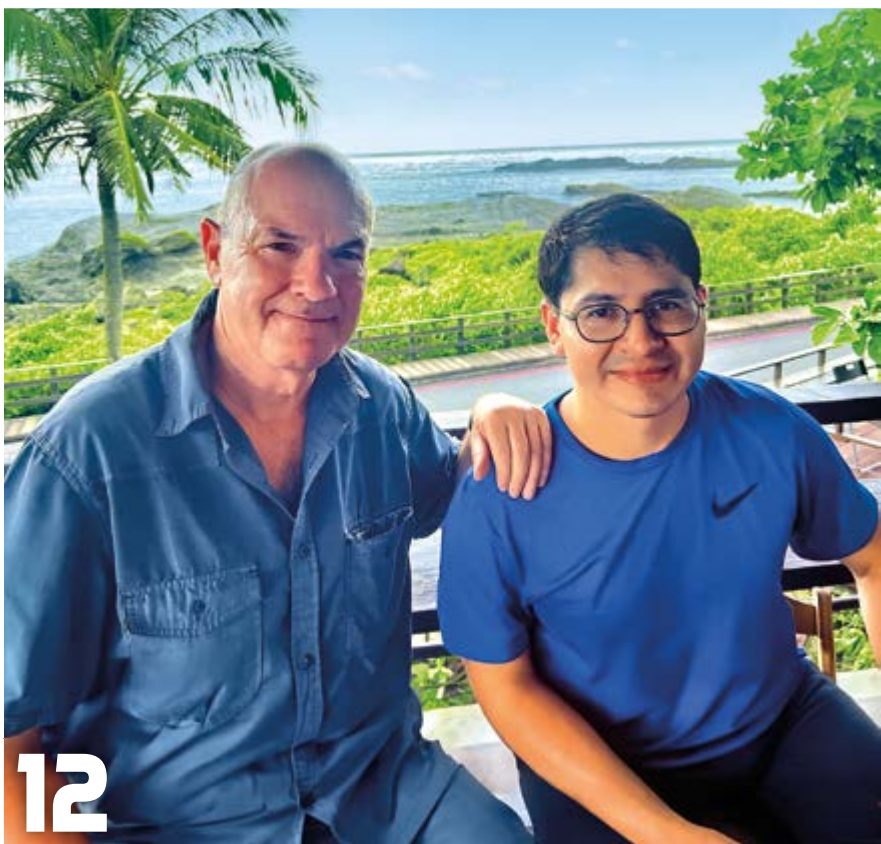
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THE FAR EAST

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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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Front Cover

Josh Egan who took part in the Society's Invitation to Mission programme in Chile. Photo: ColumbanMissionImages



EDITORIAL



I am writing this crouched under a lazy ceiling fan, dripping with sweat and staring out at the squalid, chaotic, dust-blown bedlam that is Karachi, the biggest city in Pakistan. You might ask, "Who in their right mind would choose to live and work in such an area?" The answer is: the Columbans.

For over forty years Columban priests, Sisters and Lay Missionaries have been serving the people of Pakistan. We believe that Jesus calls missionaries to go even to places like this or maybe *particularly* to places like this. Here there are religious and ethnic tensions, grinding poverty, constant threats of terrorist outrages, chronic injustice and endemic corruption.

The 'normal' reaction would be to avoid these kinds of spots, whereas we actively seek them out. We do so because we feel that this is what Jesus would do. In that case, we are in good company. Didn't Jesus associate with the poor and outcast rather than the rich and powerful? When he did, I'm sure he met with the "other side of the coin", as I have done during my brief visit to Pakistan - kind faces, warm welcomes, stunning hospitality from people who have virtually nothing.

Fr Pat Visanti gave up a comfortable existence in a bank in his native Fiji to join the Columbans and accept an appointment to Pakistan. Now he is based in the long-established Columban parish of Badin, deep in the parched Thar Desert. Here, Pat and Monaliza Sagra, a Columban Lay Missionary from the Philippines, oversee a college of 470 pupils and a clinic with five full-time health workers. Pat celebrates

the sacraments in one main church, two satellite chapels (a third is under construction) in three different languages!

New Zealander Fr Dan O'Connor is a familiar sight as he speeds across the Thar on his trusty motorbike. I accompanied him to a village primary school, where I found Hindu, Christian and Muslim children happily studying together. This is a remarkable form of witness, as Pakistan is a country born in bloodshed. Over a million people perished at Partition in 1947 as Hindus and Muslims slaughtered one another. Even today there are occasional outbreaks of communal violence. Yet here are we, the Columbans, trying to bring people of rival faiths together to face their common enemies of poverty and exploitation.

Fr Tomás King from Ireland has spent years in this area, serving not only the majority Sindhi population but also members of the Parkari Kholi tribal group - a people often despised for being both indigenous and largely Christian.

The Columban Sisters are in Pakistan as well, engaged in parish and community work in the maelstrom of downtown Karachi. You'll be hearing more of them this year as they celebrate 100 years of service to mission. Yes, it's a crazy journey we are on in Pakistan. But that is just how Columbans are. Crazy for Christ. Happy New Year. ●

Fr John Boles

Fr John Boles is Regional Director of the Columbans in Britain. Ordained in 1996, he served on mission in Peru and Chile.

01. Bishop Samson of Hyderabad and Fr John Boles celebrating Confirmation mass in Badin Parish, Pakistan.



Missionary Sisters of St Columban

100 YEARS



RISKING ALL FOR CHRIST

As the Columban Sisters open their centenary year, Sarah Mac Donald speaks to Congregational Leader Sr Anne Carbon about her life as a missionary and the challenges ahead.

“To be a Columban you need to be a risk-taker,” Sr Anne Carbon states matter-of-factly. Twenty-seven years after she made her First Profession, she is now at the helm of the Columban Sisters, having been elected Congregational Leader in Knock in May 2023.

Originally from Cebu in the Southern Philippines, Sr Anne trained as a nurse prior to entering the congregation. “When I chose to become a missionary, I didn’t know what it entailed but I knew that there was a lot of giving of myself in order to go to the periphery and the unknown.”

It was while working as a nurse in Manila for the Columban Fathers that Anne Carbon found herself reading and being inspired by the stories of mission in the **Far East** magazine. The late Fr Charlie Meagher was providing pastoral support to Anne and suggested she contact the Columban Sisters.

“I went to see the Columban Sisters, and I was really struck because they were not wearing a habit like all the other Sisters I knew. I’ve never regretted joining the Columbans because I feel my independent nature really matches the charism of the congregation. I have grown in my relationship

with God and I feel enriched by the people of different cultures that I have encountered.”

After profession, Sr Anne initially went to Britain where she secured her UK nursing registration. Her next step was mission in Peru. “In Lima, the Sisters’ mission was very good; everything was covered – education, catechetics, health.” Anne went to Lima’s largest mental health hospital and began to volunteer there.

Years of conflict in Peru had seen tens of thousands killed or disappeared. Ayacucho in the mountains, which is 10 hours from Lima by bus, is one of the places which suffered greatly at the hands of the far-left guerrilla group, *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path). “There was a lot of post-traumatic stress among the people. Some were living on the streets. At an assembly of the Columban Sisters I told them that I would really like to open up a mission in Ayacucho. There was a lot of chronic mental ill health, notably schizophrenia, and Ayacucho had no psychiatrist.”

Sr Anne visited families where some men and women were tied down to the bed because the family didn’t know what to do with them. “I was really

touched by what I saw. I knew something had to be done! I applied for some money from the Congregation and I connected with the medical staff back at the hospital in Lima where I had volunteered."

From very small beginnings Sr Anne started a mental health clinic in Ayacucho. Initially she approached those on the streets and offered them the chance to wash and provided them with some food and medication from the back of a car. In time the clinic rented a space and expanded with the assistance of nurses and doctors from Lima. A nurse from Co Kerry, Angela Keane developed the special needs programme in the clinic. Then a group of doctors from Yale University in the US came aboard. They provided two psychiatrists while *Misean Cara* in Ireland provided a grant to fund the training of five nurses in mental healthcare and the cost of building the clinic.

After eight years, having successfully built and opened the clinic, Sr Anne realised she had become more of an administrator and fundraiser than a hands-on health worker. It was time to pass the project to someone else. "As a missionary, you don't undertake a ministry for life. You start it with a view to handing it over. So I began to dialogue with different groups to find the right one who could keep it running. The Brothers of Charity had the same ethos." Sr Anne's one request to the Brothers of Charity was to "make sure to love the poor patients" and make them "a priority".

After handing over the clinic in Peru in December 2010, Sr Anne was elected to the Columban Sisters' leadership team and was based in Magheramore, Co Wicklow

for six years. In 2017, having completed her term of office, she took a sabbatical at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. The tensions between Israelis and the Palestinians underscored the need for inter-religious dialogue: while meeting the Bedouins gave her a sense of being called to mission in Pakistan.

After setting up a nursing home for elderly Columban Sisters in the Philippines, she went to Pakistan in 2019. She spent four happy years there and had just started a health programme for Pakistan's marginalised Christian community, who "are really abandoned", when she was elected Congregational Leader in May 2023.

As the Columban Sisters mark their centenary, there is much gratitude and a number of challenges ahead. The most obvious of these relates to personnel. Like every other congregation, the Columbans have seen a decline in vocations. For now mission work continues in Ireland, Britain, USA, Philippines, Korea, Myanmar, China and Pakistan. But most of the younger Sisters are Asian and they are needed in their own countries for leadership, administration and formation. "We are really very stretched," explains Sr Anne.

As the congregation celebrates its 100th anniversary, she believes that even though there is recognition of the "fragility of the congregation" there is still hope for the future. "We are acknowledging the current reality but there is also a spark of life, and we have to harness that energy." ●

Sarah Mac Donald is Editor of the **Far East** magazine.



01. Sr Anne Carbon, Congregational Leader of the Columban Sisters, with an icon of St Columban in the background. Image: Sarah Mac Donald.

02. Sr Anne on a home visitation with the sick in Pakistan. Image: Sr Anne Carbon.

03. At the home of the congregational leader in Magheramore, Co Wicklow. Image: Sarah Mac Donald.

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"Let us be Christ's, not our own"

— St Columban

The Missionary Sisters of St Columban have since 1924 served the poor and marginalised in places like China, the Philippines, Korea, Pakistan and Myanmar.

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Missionary Sisters of St. Columban





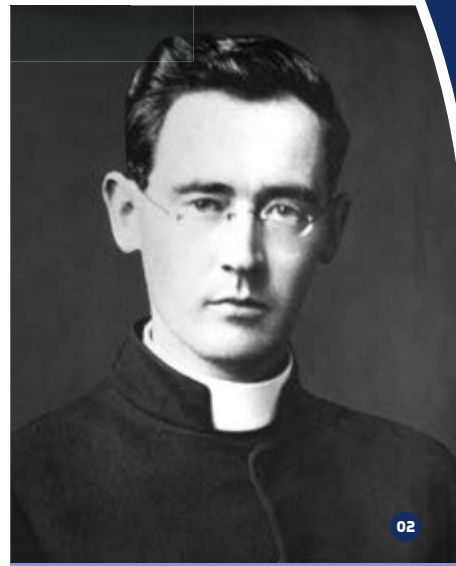
Missionary Sisters of St Columban



YEARS



01



02

"FULL STEAM AHEAD"

Sr Ann Gray recalls the foundation of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban 100 years ago this year and the vision of co-founders, Fr John Blowick and Lady Frances Moloney, for the congregation.

In these early days of 2024, Columban Sisters throughout the world find our thoughts and our hearts turning back one hundred years towards our first Sisters. The Missionary Sisters of St Columban came into being because two people in particular, Fr John Blowick and Lady Frances Moloney, shared a vision for a new missionary congregation and a group of women took a huge risk and answered the call to step into this unknown journey with them.

In December 1917, in his address to the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland in the Mansion House in Dublin, Fr John Blowick first spoke officially of including women Religious in the new mission venture of the Columban Fathers in China. He foresaw great difficulties with regard to nurses and doctors for the mission because of the attitudes prevalent in China at the time. He realised that the doctors would have to be women doctors and that because of the demands of the missionary apostolate, they would have to be Religious. This would require a new Congregation of nuns whose vow would be the medical care of the sick and whose members would be properly qualified in medicine,

surgery and midwifery.

Over the subsequent three years, Fr Blowick's initial idea of a missionary sisterhood underwent many changes until he envisaged a missionary congregation of Sisters who would be engaged not only in the medical apostolate, but also in any apostolate which would be of service in China. To prepare for this, Fr Blowick invited the Irish Sisters of Charity to send a small group of Sisters to train the early postulants and novices. They were deeply committed to keeping the missionary nature of the new Congregation to the fore and what would be required for mission. The Irish Sisters of Charity are a part of our history and our heritage and we never forget our debt of gratitude to them.

In February 1922, the first group of postulants came together in Cahiracon, Co Clare to a house prepared for them by the Columban Fathers. In those early days, the women drawn to Cahiracon came from Ireland and Australia and from a wide variety of life and work experiences including teaching, nursing, secretarial work and farming, as well as from city and country life. Some also had had exposure to the Independence movement in Ireland at the time.



What united all of them was deep faith and a concern for the poor.

In the years that followed, the Sisters would find themselves dealing with victims of floods, epidemics, hunger and war. The fledgling Congregation continued to attract other like-minded women who, as foundation members, set an example and inspiration for those of us who would follow them.

Since St Brigid's, our first house in Cahiracon, was also within walking distance of the Columban Fathers seminary, St Senan's College, the priests were available to the Sisters for daily Mass as well as for religious instruction and preparation for mission in China. Lectures, informal conversations and stories of life in the far away land of China gave the postulants and novices a sense of high adventure and dedication to a great cause.

Fr Blowick, for his part, challenged these women to be real missionary religious and not "toy nuns". He did not want them to be over pious or too demanding of themselves and he was against their becoming a community like a "string of sausages" where each one looked the same and acted in the same manner. Above all, he encouraged and inspired them to develop a spirit of charity as the special sign of Jesus's disciples because, "By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

In September of this year, the Columban Sisters will be remembering in a special way our initial group of Sisters who professed their First Vows on the Feast of St Michael the Archangel in 1924. Surely wonder and

trepidation filled the hearts of those young women as they heard Bishop Fogarty remind them that the lot of the missionary was: "to live in exile, to endure manifold labours and privations, to suffer much distress and tribulation of spirit, to encounter, it may be, the perils of persecution, to sacrifice, even life itself." At the same time, they must also have been deeply inspired by the conviction of Fr Blowick: "The work is God's work not yours or mine. We happen to be the instruments - God is behind the whole thing and He will see it through."

In the early days of the Congregation, a Columban Father noted that "the beginnings were hard, full of challenges. They - the Sisters - were characterised by a spirit of adventure. There was no knowing what was coming; they faced a total unknown. They began in real poverty but they had great faith and they were always good-humoured." In our very different world of today, we Columban Sisters strive to keep alive that spirit of adventure, faith and good humour as we face the unknown and respond to the continuing call of mission. We not only look back in remembrance, we also celebrate and give thanks for the support of so many people and the faithfulness of God's eternal love towards us as a Congregation throughout these past 100 years. ●

Sr Ann Gray is from Scotland. She was a lay missionary in Sierra Leone before she entered the Columban Sisters. She has served on mission in Hong Kong and China. She is now based in Magheramore and is Assistant Editor of the **Far East** magazine.



LOGO EXPLANATION

The C stands for Columbans. The logo contains bird-like elements symbolising the coming of the Holy Spirit, along with flag representations of every country where the Sisters work, bringing the Cross, peace and faith. The symbolic hands are those of the people who are part of the St Columban community. The colours represent heaven (blue) and the royal and humble presence of our God upon the world (purple).

By: Vian Leybag and Jhanmie Galoso.

01. The first 10 postulants of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban in 1922. **Front row:** Fr Harris, F Moloney, T McCollum, Fr O'Connell. **Middle row:** K Brennan, P McDonnell, B Walshe, E McKey, E Dalton. **Back row:** N Collins, B McSwiney, V Lees, Fr P Blowick.
02. Fr John Blowick, co-founder of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban and co-founder of the Missionary Society of St Columban.
03. St Brigid's, Cahiracon
04. The first novices doing some field work.
05. Co-founder of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban Lady Frances Moloney.



SISTERS IN PROFILE 1

Oscar Bryan recalls the life and contribution of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban's first Superior General, Mother Mary Finbarr Collins.



01



02



03

A natural starting point in our reflection on the early pioneers of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban is the first Superior General, Mother Mary Finbarr Collins. Born in Kilinga, Cork in 1885, Nora Collins was one of ten children in a dairy-farming household. Growing up, Nora craved opportunities that were not readily available on the family farm. Crossing the Atlantic in 1907, she trained to be a nurse in New Hampshire. By 1915, Nora had decided to make her way back to Cork, hoping to apply her new-found vocation closer to home. Her tenure at Mercy Hospital, Cork coincided with the onset of the Irish War of Independence.

After reading reports about the Maynooth Mission in China, Nora entered into correspondence with Fr John Blowick, expressing her desire to contribute to overseas mission work. After making the short-list of candidates for the new Congregation, Nora arrived in Cahiracon in 1922, and made her First Profession on 29th September 1924. Granted the religious name Mary Finbarr, she ranked among the more senior members of the first group of professed Sisters.

Owing to her unique life experience, Mother M. Finbarr was appointed to serve as the inaugural Superior General. The task before her was a daunting one - preparing a new Congregation for the uncertainties of a life-altering voyage to China. Taking these first bold steps out into the unknown, it was November 1926 before the Sisters arrived at their new headquarters in Hanyang. Although the Sisters enjoyed much local support, they were frequently in the crossfire of local conflict. Despite these challenges,

Mother M. Finbarr volunteered her nursing skills, and organised the Congregation in preparation for the rigorous demands of this new cultural context.

Her responsibilities as Superior General made an early return to Ireland inevitable. Within a few short months, she was back in Cahiracon, overseeing the recruitment and expansion of the Congregation. When her mandate as leader concluded in 1930, Mother M. Finbarr became director of the infirmary at the Columban Fathers' seminary in Dalgan Park. She invested almost forty years going about her duties in Dalgan, touching the lives of those she served with subtle grace.

When her body could no longer keep up with the responsibilities of overseeing the infirmary, she was offered the opportunity to relocate to Magheramore in 1968. As an experienced voice of encouragement, Mother M. Finbarr often acted as a mentor to the younger Sisters in the convent. Her death on 19th January 1977 was a poignant moment for the Congregation as she was the last remaining direct link to its foundation. Her selfless devotion, and vision in connecting the Congregation's inception to the modern age, inspired many of those who followed. ●

Oscar Bryan is the Archivist of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban.

01. Mother Mary Finbarr Collins (1885-1977)

02. The First Superior General and her Council in 1924:

F Collins, J McKey and B Walsh, FX Mapleback and T Brannigan.

03. Co-founder of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban, Mother Patrick Moloney and Superior General, Mother Finbarr Collins.



Celebrating 100 years of the Missionary Sisters of St Columban is one of the most significant milestones for me since I joined the Congregation 27 years ago. Reflecting on what our Centenary means for us as a Congregation, my thoughts were immediately directed to our Founders: Fr John Blowick and Mother Mary Patrick Maloney. I am certain that when both shared their dreams of founding a congregation, they had no idea of how their dreams would evolve - the little seed of faith branching out to different mission countries, welcoming committed missionaries from these countries, and ministering to and sharing life with peoples of different faiths and cultures in the far corners of the world.

For all of us who are privileged to be part of this Centenary celebration, we are truly grateful to our Founders and especially to our loving God for gracing us with wonderful and profound experiences of love. Our journey as missionaries is full of extraordinary stories recounting many prophetic stances, the embracing of uncertainties, unknowns and self-sacrifices undertaken in a spirit of trust that God would show the way forward.

I have no doubt that the Church has been enriched by our presence as missionaries. In return we have been blessed by the love and generosity of many people who welcomed us into their lives. We have been privileged to share the joys and pains of many people, and enriched by their presence.

We are forever in debt to our mission partners and selfless benefactors who are hidden missionaries behind all our activities. Only God knows the myriad of ways that people have helped us by their prayers, fundraising activities, promoting and reading the **Far East** and countless other creative ways of raising mission awareness and financial support.

Thanks to you, our partners in mission, and to my own experiences, I have come to know God deep in my heart in a way that words cannot express. I trust that God will continue to carry us through the years ahead even in the midst of our fragility and smallness as a Congregation. *"Fear not little flock; By this shall all know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another."* Fr John Blowick.

With a grateful heart, I believe that this is a time in the history of our Congregation to pause while being open to the urgent needs of our world and of our planet today. As we honour the past and our humble beginnings, we are inspired to embrace the future with courage and hope. *"What we are is God's work. He has created us in Christ Jesus for the good works he has prepared that we should devote ourselves to them"* (Eph. 2:10).

I pray that we will continue to trust in God's fidelity to us and to the world by expressing our appreciation of the sacredness of all life, by living in a way that reflects God's love and care for all. May we continue to be blessed with courageous young women who, like our first Sisters, will try to respond to Christ's invitation to be bearers of God's love and hope in the midst of a world, that is broken and fragile and searching for meaning. *"Walking together, with Christ and in the Spirit constitutes the essence of religious life...a sign of communion and participation marked by mission"* (Pope Francis, 5 May 2023). ●

Sr Anne Carbon

Congregational Leader, Missionary Sisters of St Columban

01. The first group of Columban Sisters to go on mission to China, photographed on-board the Bremen in 1926. The photo shows Sr Philomena Woods, Sr Theophane Fortune, Sr Finbarr Collins, Sr Agnes Griffin, Sr Lelia Creedon and Co-founder Mother Mary Patrick Moloney. The Columban Fathers in the image are Fr C. Donnelly, Co-founder Fr J Blowick, Fr J Hogan, Fr A Ferguson, Fr M Fallon, Fr J Loftus and Fr J Linehan.



02

Cross cultural mission and Columban missionary, Fr Charles Duster, were on Society Leader, Fr Tim Mulroy's mind when he visited Holy Family Parish in Fiji.

Even though it was my first time to visit to Fiji, my short stay in Holy Family Parish in Labasa felt like a homecoming! Situated among the sugarcane plantations, I arrived at the small, regional airport on a forty-minute flight from Suva, the capital city. My travel companion was Vida Hequilan, the international coordinator for Columban lay missionaries. Within moments of our plane touching down, we were warmly welcomed by Fr Carlo Jung Euikyun.

As Fr Carlo drove us along windy, country roads to Doguro Village, our conversation moved back and forth between his present-day missionary life in the remote countryside of Fiji and memories of the years we had spent together in Chicago. We had encountered one another for the first time in the Windy City in 2007, when - as a young seminarian - Fr Carlo came from Korea for studies at the Columban international seminary where I had been the rector.

Over the next four years, we shared the ups and downs of daily life in that multicultural community. While the seminarians studied English and theology, living together and forming friendships with the other members of the community from various countries was considered

equally as important as academic achievements.

As I moved around Holy Family Parish during the following days in the company of Fr Carlo, I could see that both he and the community he now serves are reaping the benefits of those seminary experiences - he was able to engage easily with the indigenous Fijian people and the Indian Fijian people, whose language and culture differ greatly from one another. Meanwhile, he translated into English for me all that was going on around us. What a joy to see that Fr Carlo, who comes from the large city of Incheon in Korea, has found his life's treasure in the sugarcane fields of Labasa, Fiji!

It was in Chicago that I also met Fr Charlie Duster for the first time. From Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Fr Charlie had spent more than twenty

FROM THE WINDY CITY TO FIJI

03





years on mission in Fiji before coming to live in the Windy City in 2005. Since his last assignment in Fiji had been in Holy Family Parish (where Fr Carlo is now the pastor), his conversations had remained peppered with stories about its people.

Later, Fr Charlie and I lived in the same Columban community outside Omaha, Nebraska. After his death there in 2017, another colleague who oversaw the disposal of his personal belongings gave me his travel bag saying, "You will be able to put this to good use!" Fr Charlie loved to travel and made new friends quickly wherever he went. I continue to remember him fondly when I take that same travel bag on my visits to various Columban missions. When I told the history of my travel bag to the people of Holy Family Parish, they recalled many stories about Fr Charlie, and we sensed that he was united in love and laughter with us within the communion of the saints.

It had also been in Chicago that I first met Fr Willie Lee almost twenty years ago when he had come as a seminarian from Fiji to continue his preparations for Columban missionary priesthood. Since he had grown

up in Holy Family Parish, he knew many Columban missionaries. As a seminarian, he had spoken frequently about them, as well as about their close friendship with his family. What a pleasant surprise, then, for me to meet his father, Joe Lee, during my stay in Holy Family Parish.

Now in his mid-eighties and widowed, Joe shared with me stories about the first group of Columbans who arrived in that district seventy years ago. As an adventurous teenager, he had accompanied them through a maze of dirt tracks and had ferried them by boat from one mission station to another. He recalled jovially their individual gifts and eccentricities, as well as their creativity and commitment to his own people.

Despite the limitations of age, Joe remains deeply committed to supporting Columban missionaries. During our initial meeting he told me, "Since I first heard some weeks ago about your visit to Fiji, I have prayed every day for you". Then, on the day before I left Holy Family Parish, he visited the rectory to say goodbye and to reassure me that he would continue to include me in his prayers.

Even though my stay in Holy Family Parish in Labasa had been just four days, I felt blessed to meet Fr Carlo in his mission field; to share memories of Fr Charlie Duster with his former parishioners; and to have the assurance of being prayed for by Joe Lee, a faithful Columban friend of seventy years. In some mysterious way, those three experiences made my first visit to Fiji feel like a homecoming! ●



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

01. Fr Carlo Jung Euikyun and Fr Tim Mulroy celebrated Mass in the village of Namukalau, a remote outstation of Holy Family Parish, Labasa.
02. Columban missionary Fr Charles Duster who died in 2017.
03. Fr Carlo Jung Euikyun and Fr Tim Mulroy celebrating Sunday Mass in Holy Family Parish Church, Labasa.
04. Parishioners of Holy Family Parish with Fr Tim Mulroy holding Fr Charlie Duster's travel bag.
05. Joe Lee, a faithful Columban friend of seventy years, with Fr Tim Mulroy inside Holy Family Parish Church.

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THE MOUNTAIN MAN

Born and raised in the mountains of Peru, Columban missionary Fr Salustino Villalobos now finds himself serving God's people in the mountains of Taiwan, writes Fr John Boles.

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The Holy Spirit is a great mover. In the Bible, the Spirit moves Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, and the Apostles from Jerusalem to "the ends of the earth". It moved St Columban from Ireland to continental Europe. Now, it has moved Columban Fr Salustino Villalobos from his home in the mountains of northern Peru in South America to the mountains of central Taiwan in the Far East of Asia.

I was in Taiwan recently and had the privilege of assisting at Fr Salustino's 'Welcoming' Mass in the parish of *Tai An*, an area mainly populated by the Atayal indigenous people. The event had particular significance for me as I'd also been able to visit Salustino in his Peruvian mountain

home, just as his life with the Columbans was beginning, at a time when I was in charge of our South American seminary.

It seems appropriate that Salustino should now be pastor of a truly missionary parish in Taiwan, for he comes from what could be considered "virgin mission territory" back in his own country. That both places are in the highlands only adds weight to the comparison. As Salustino himself tells it, he was drawn to the missionary life precisely because he saw how much his own home area was in need of missionaries.

Salustino was born



in the hamlet of *Agua de León* ('The Lion's Spring', evidence of how, not so long ago, this was an area of upland forest where animals such as the puma roamed), close to the border between Peru and Ecuador. He was the seventh of a family of eleven, the son of coffee farmers Segundo and Bremilda. To reach the family home you have to be prepared to travel for the best part of a day from the nearest highway, be thrown around on a terrible dirt road in the back of a minibus or an open truck, before scaling a steep track to the house by foot or donkey.

It is difficult to describe just how isolated this place is. There are no shops or services nearby. The secondary school is a two-hour walk away. Salustino was 19 when he first saw a doctor, 24 when he first went to a dentist. Health treatment comes in the way of herbal and traditional practices based on accumulated local wisdom. When Salustino was born, there was no such thing as the internet. Even today there isn't any TV.

"Where I live there is no formal Church presence," Salustino explains. The priest comes once a year to the chapel in the closest village, where he celebrates all the sacraments in one go – Mass, Confirmation, First Communions, marriages. Salustino was baptised on one of these occasions.

Subsequently, up to the age of 15, "I'd only been to one Mass in all my life". Religious faith is nurtured in the home and by the efforts of itinerant catechists. It is a credit to

Salustino's parents, in particular, that his faith

grew so strong.

"When I was finishing secondary school our religion teacher asked me to make my First Communion and receive Confirmation at one of those annual Masses. I did half a year of preparation. It was then that I first began to think about the religious life." As a start, once he'd received the sacraments, he entered a training course for catechists. The attraction to priesthood grew and, especially, to missionary priesthood, perhaps with Salustino reflecting on how his family might have benefited from a robust missionary presence. By chance, his elder brother had heard about the Columbans. He got hold of our telephone number in Lima. Salustino called and at the other end of the line was our Vocations Director, Fr Diego. "Come to Lima", Diego invited.

So off Salustino went. He was impressed by Diego's hospitality, took part in a number of vocational workshops, got to know more about us and ended up joining us. Even then, it wasn't easy. Our seminary was several hundred miles away in Santiago, Chile.

Needless to say, Salustino turned out to be an excellent student. I was present at his ordination Mass in 2017. He went to Taiwan as a priest the following year. He worked in a parish called the Immaculate Heart of Mary before his current appointment to that highland parish of *Tai An*, whose patron is the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In a way, Salustino has now come full circle, from the mountains of Peru to the mountains of Taiwan, drawn by the Spirit, guided by the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Surely, even St Columban would be hard pressed to match that. ●



Fr John Boles is from Britain. Ordained in 1996, he served on mission in Peru and Chile. He is now Regional Director in Britain.

01. Columban missionary Fr Salustino Villalobos near his birthplace in the mountains of northern Peru.

All images: Fr John Boles.

02. Fr Salustino with parishioners and fellow Columbans after his 'Welcoming' Mass in the Atayal indigenous parish of *Tai An* in Taiwan.

03. The Peruvian missionary outside his parish church high in the mountains of central Taiwan.

04. Columban missionary Fr John Boles (left) with Fr Salustino Villalobos.

05. At home in northern Peru with some of his family, including (left) his father Segundo and his mother Bremilda.





INVITATION TO MISSION

Last summer Josh Egan from Co Kerry took part in the Society's Invitation to Mission programme and travelled to Chile to learn about Columban mission there. He writes about some stand-out moments from his time there.

I am currently a full-time student studying adapted physical activity for people who have disabilities at Munster Technological University. One day I walked past a poster in Tralee which said that Columban Fr Liam O'Callaghan, who is serving in Pakistan, was going to give a talk about his mission there. It was good to listen to his talk.

As a student, my summers are free, and I felt I could use my time to go on a mission. I made contact with Fr Liam, and he put me in contact with another Columban Fr Padraig O'Donovan who looked for a mission placement for me. We decided that Chile would be my mission project. Fr Padraig was a great support for me prior the trip. He was pivotal in terms of helping me organise my flights and accommodation in Chile and supporting me while I was there.

MOMENT 1

I stayed with Pedro who is Chilean. He was a great support to me and to Danny Sweeney from Britain when we were in Chile. It's so important to be with someone who knows the place. When we would go to the market, Pedro helped me with my Spanish. Marketplaces in Chile are the heart of every town and city. Pedro cooked some wonderful food for us like *sopaipillas* and *empanadas*. They were delicious! To be honest Pedro was like my mother for the duration I was over there. A big thank you to Pedro for all his help. You can't beat the power of a kind gesture.

MOMENT 2

One day we were giving out food to families that live in shanty towns in *Alto Hospicio*. I met an amazing kid called Aaron, who has Hemiplegic Cerebral Palsy. This means he cannot move one side of his body. Aaron is unable to move his left arm and leg. The area that I am studying is focused on people with disabilities. So, I flicked through my lecture notes and tried to come up with a game and some exercises for Aaron. I designed a game called Polybat where you must score a goal using your hand. I also asked my friend in Ireland for some exercises for Aaron and she sent them on. I taught Aaron's sister how to play the game and how to do the exercises so she could teach Aaron and continue this work when I left. Action is great, enabling is unbelievable.

MOMENT 3

Over 10 million Venezuelans have emigrated to different countries in South America in recent years. It's frightening to hear their stories and the journeys that they had to undertake to get to Chile. One family I met has settled in Chile and their children are now in school. It's important to welcome everyone into your country, you never know what they have gone through or what has happened to them before they arrived.

MOMENT 4

We decided to take some of the kids from *Alto Hospicio* on a trip to a museum



in Santiago to give them an opportunity to see something new. This is not something the kids would have had an opportunity to do before. We also arranged some play time outside the centre. They really enjoyed the day and learnt a lot about their culture and their history. Do not be afraid to create an opportunity for someone, it might just make their day.

MOMENT 5

Most of the migrants living in the Columban migrant house are from Venezuela except for a guy from Morocco. He had to flee his home after coming out as gay. In Chile, he got his accommodation through the Columbans and a job in Santiago. He is now living a better life in Chile. God loves a trier and a fighter. ●

Images: Courtesy ColumbanMissionImages and Josh Egan.

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Scan for more about the programme and to read about the experience of previous Faith in Action volunteers.

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CLIMATE CHANGE: CHILDREN AT RISK

Children are the most vulnerable to climate change and the most at risk from it, warns Columban missionary, Fr Shay Cullen.

The low, dark clouds, the rumble of thunder, the flashes of lightning, and the rising wind bending branches all indicate a powerful typhoon is approaching. That means danger, worry and concern for the thousands of small farmers and their families. It also means another week of loss, hunger, hardship and survival. City dwellers worry less with their strong buildings and water drainage systems to protect them. But living in a bamboo hut with a grass roof or flimsy metal sheet roofing is not secure against the force and might of the all-destructive typhoons and floods that frequently hit the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries.

The consequences of climate change are here. The Philippines endured 19 typhoons and storms in 2022; they are increasing in number. Every year they destroy harvests, houses, roads, and river embankments and they cause landslides, floods, death and destruction. Climate change continues to intensify because of the non-stop burning of fossil fuels like coal and oil to generate electricity. They must be replaced with clean, renewable energy plants.

Yet, wealthy and secure politicians and business leaders ignore the dire threat to the planet. They do not see or care about the gathering catastrophe that is engulfing the planet and hurting children above all else. Pope Francis does care and he has spoken out in strong criticism of the world order

that does too little to stop global warming and save the planet. The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) has warned in a new report that children are the most vulnerable to climate change.

The world temperature is coming ever closer to the tipping point of no return when the global temperature reaches 1.5 degrees hotter since the pre-industrial era and cannot be reversed. That is when one disaster will cause another in an unstoppable chain reaction of destruction. Humans have caused this, and the 10 richest nations are 70 percent responsible for it all.

Unicef's report, **The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index** is part of a research project that analyses how climate change is endangering children. Children are impacted by storms, floods and landslides which increases the risk of water-borne diseases and the loss of their possessions and flimsy homes. This also causes psychological stress and impacts their education and well-being. In other parts of the globe, drought kills children and people.

The Unicef report finds that "approximately 1 billion children" – nearly half the world's 2.2 billion children – live in one of the 33 countries classified as "extremely high-risk." The Philippines is 31 in ranking of this "high-risk" list of countries due to natural disasters caused by climate change. Ten industrial rich nations are responsible for 70 percent of the

01. Damage caused by the landslide disaster in Sukabumi, West Java in 2020. Image: Shutterstock

02. Lignite Power Plant in Neurath, Germany. Image: Shutterstock

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global emissions of CO₂ that causes global warming and climate change. Just nine percent of the damaging CO₂ emissions are caused by the 33 nations that suffer most of the environmental damage caused by climate change.

Pope Francis in his most recent Apostolic Exhortation on the climate crisis, *Laudate Deum* (Praise God), pinned the blame for the growing climate crises on the irresponsibility and uncaring attitude of big business and government officials that seek their own gain at the cost of the planet and the poor. "Our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing breaking point," he writes. Pope Francis points out the irreversibility of the damage. "Some effects of the climate crisis are already irreversible, at least for several hundred years, such as the increase in the global temperature of the oceans, their acidification and the decrease of oxygen."

It is the higher temperatures of the oceans that greatly contributes to more frequent and more powerful storms and typhoons. When governments and industry leaders ignore the truth and continue to subsidise oil exploitation and promote fossil fuels, they cause climate disasters to develop. To promote fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, they slow down investment and development of renewable sources of energy like wind and solar power, geothermal, hydropower, bio and hydrogen power plants. They leave the problems

unchecked and thereby, as Pope Francis says, risk "the probability of extreme phenomena that are increasingly frequent and intense."

The Catholic Church has its ultra-conservative elements which Pope Francis refers to as "certain dismissive and scarcely reasonable opinions that I encounter, even within the Catholic Church." For those in the Church and outside it that deny and ignore the crises of global warming and its effects, he warns them: "Despite all attempts to deny, conceal, gloss over or relativise the issue, the signs of climate change are here and increasingly evident. No one can ignore the fact that in recent years we have witnessed extreme weather phenomena, frequent periods of unusual heat, drought and other cries of protest."

The greed and exploitation of liberal capitalism has much to answer for. The money moguls and investment gurus that ignore the global crises must be challenged. Pope Francis challenges them: "Regrettably, the climate crisis is not exactly a matter that interests the great economic powers, whose concern is with the greatest profit possible at minimal cost and in the shortest amount of time." Government and industry have to accelerate investment in the expansion of renewable energy projects. Instead of these natural forces of nature destroying us, we must turn them into positive, life-saving sources of clean energy, promoting life and the well-being of people, protecting children and the planet. ●



Columban missionary Fr Shay Cullen has worked in the Philippines since 1969. In 1974, he founded the Preda Foundation, a charity dedicated to protecting the rights of women and children which campaigns against the exploitation of human trafficking and sex slavery. To support Fr Shay's work see: www.preda.org

SCHOOLS MEDIA COMPETITION 2024

Columban Missionaries invite students aged 13-18 to submit an original piece of writing or image on the theme:

Biodiversity MATTERS

Explore Biodiversity, which humanity relies on for health, food and well-being.

DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES IS
SATURDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2024

For entry details:
www.columbancompetition.com



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LENS OF FAITH

Columban Fr Alvaro Martinez is both a missionary and a photographer. He shares some of his wonderful images and explains how faith, nature and God connect through photography.

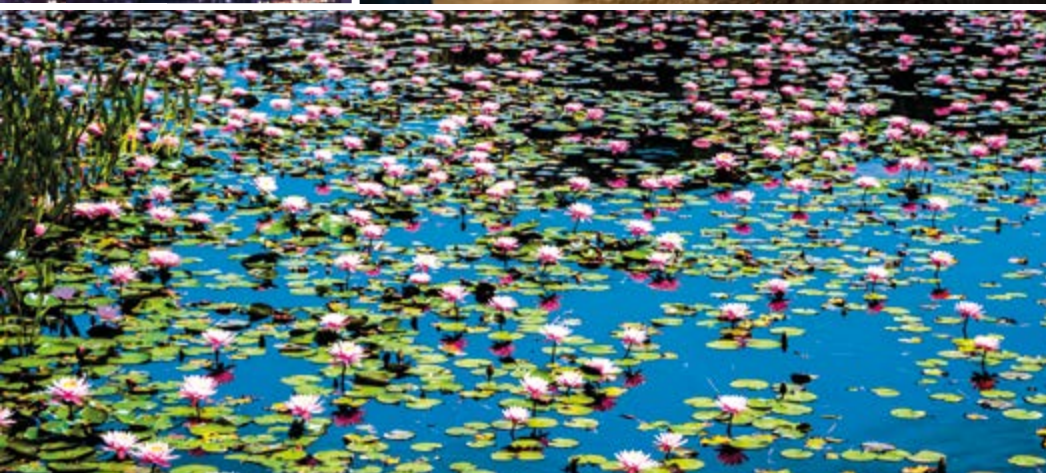
I have always been fascinated by photography. Through photography, I find a connection with nature, people, and most importantly with God. Nature photography requires patience, quietness and planning. It involves carrying heavy equipment to a location and waiting for nature to reveal something stunning. It is a moment of prayer and contemplation where I take my time to appreciate nature and God without rushing. I must remain still to allow nature and God reveal their beauty to me.

Personal encounters cannot be forced; they come in their own time, God's time. Not every encounter will be perfect or successful, but I wait patiently for that perfect moment. Contemplation does not end when I leave the location. There is a second moment when I see the photos on my computer. Sometimes, what I thought was a poor day turns out to be a wonderful and perfect dialogue with the Creator.

Do not be discouraged if you do not see immediate results in your prayer life, as in photography. It takes time to learn and improve. Keep practicing, and you will eventually see results. Do not give up! Many photographers spend days, months, or even years trying to capture the perfect photo. It is similar to our spiritual life; we must keep trying, and eventually, a profound encounter will come and make the road clearer and the path shine. ●

All images by Alvaro Martinez taken in Hong Kong.





Fr Alvaro Martinez is from Chile. He was ordained in 2003. Between 2004-2011, he acted as co-ordinator for vocations in Chile. In 2011, he was appointed regional director for Chile and in 2017 he was appointed to the Society's General Council in Hong Kong.

01. Butterfly in a park.
02. Lillies in a wetland park.
03. Duck in Hong Kong's national park.
04. Boats moored.
05. The peak in Hong Kong at nighttime.
06. Street with Chinese lanterns in Hong Kong.
07. Flowers blooming.
08. A monkey taking food from a man.

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REST in PEACE



Sr Margaret Devlin



Fr Michael John McGuire



Fr Michael James Dodd (Mike)

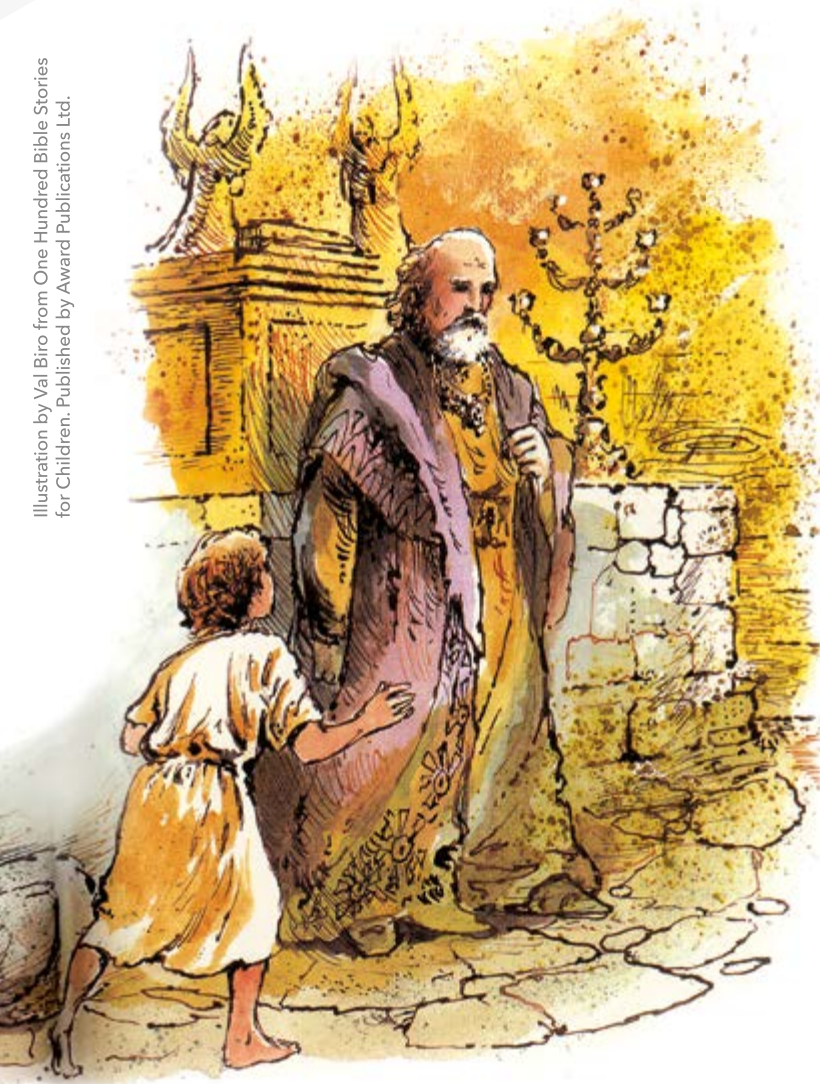
Sr Margaret Devlin was born on 5th August 1934 in Co Tyrone into what she always described as a simple and peaceful family where the Rosary was prayed every night. When she was fourteen, both her parents died within three months of each other. She and her elder brother moved to Rhode Island, USA where their relatives lived and she attended and graduated from High School there. In 1959 Margaret professed First Vows and Final Vows in 1964 when she was given the religious name of Sr Mary Petra. She expected to be assigned to China but instead was assigned to mission in California where she worked as an elementary teacher in Our Lady of Guadalupe and Blessed Sacrament school in Los Angeles. For many years after this, Margaret worked in Campus Ministry where she was known for her ability to quietly and effectively bring people together. It was a time of great spiritual and intellectual growth for her. After a sabbatical studying theology, she began working with Catholic Charities and established Bethlehem Food Centre where she was the director. It was here she saw the reality of hunger. After some years, she became involved in Campus Ministry once again. In 2001 she became a Pastoral Associate at St Thomas More Parish, Alhambra. When it was time to leave the parish and move to the community in Silver Creek, she received an outpouring of appreciation. Right up to the end her friends from the parish and from her early ministry in Our Lady of Guadalupe and Blessed Sacrament school in Los Angeles remained faithful to her. Sr Margaret died peacefully in the Silver Creek community on 9th September 2023.

Fr Michael John McGuire was born in Limerick on 10 June 1944. He was educated at Clarecastle NS, CBS Limerick and St Kieran's, Bray. He joined the Christian Brothers and spent four years at the Training College in Marino, Dublin. He then spent two years teaching in Ferns. In 1968 he applied to join the Columbans and was ordained priest on 2 April 1972. Assigned to the Philippines, he served as assistant in St Michael's Parish, Iligan City from 1972 to 1976. He was then assigned to further studies in Rome, initially in Spirituality and later in the Institute of Psychology at the Gregorian University until June 1980. His next appointment was to the Irish Initial Formation Team in Maynooth where he served until 1988. In January 1988 he was reassigned to the Philippines where he became Director of the Spiritual Year and Personal Supervisor of the Theology Students in Manila. He also served as Regional Coordinator of

Lay Mission, and in years that followed served two terms as Vice-Director of the Region. He visited many other Regions and Mission Units doing retreats, seminars on living vocation, and facilitating group communications. Michael also played an important role in setting up the Formators' Training Programme in Myanmar in 2002 at the request of Bishop Paul Grawng and he continued to support it for many years until there were enough indigenous staff to keep it going. Returning to the Philippines he worked as a counsellor at Our Lady of Peace Guidance Centre and helped seminarians, priests, Sisters and lay people. Michael died in his sleep on 10 October 2023 and he was buried in the Columban plot in Paranaque Cemetery, Manila, Philippines.

Fr Michael James Dodd (Mike) was born on 25 January 1937 at Drumming, Ardagh, Co Longford. He was educated at Edgeworthstown NS and St Mel's College, Longford. He entered Dalgan in September 1955 and was ordained priest on 20th December 1961. Appointed to Korea in 1962, after language studies he spent his first term in Chindo, in Mokpo and in Kwangju City. In 1968 he was appointed to promotion work in the USA. He served in Bayside and later in Chicago before being reassigned to Korea in 1974, where he served in Sangkye Dong and Kongdok Dong in Seoul. Mike specialised in ministry to young industrial workers (JOC/YCW). He was appointed Regional Director from 1980-1984 and he was involved in preparations for the visit of Pope John Paul II to Korea in 1984. In May 1984 he was reassigned to the Region of Ireland to the Student Formation Programme and also served as a member of the Regional Council. In 1986 he was assigned to the USA Region for promotion work of our Mission Education materials for Catholic Grade Schools, High Schools and Schools of Religion (formerly CCD) throughout the dioceses of New England. He also did mission appeals on weekends, was appointed a Counsellor to the Region, ministered to two Korean communities in Connecticut, and promoted support for Amnesty International. From 1994 to 2004, he was appointed as director of the Washington Justice and Peace Office. In 2013 he retired from active ministry and returned to Dalgan. Mike will be remembered for his competence and his sense of humour during a long and varied career in so many different ministries. He died in Dalgan Nursing Home on 5th November 2023.

May they rest in peace.



THE CALL OF SAMUEL

One day a woman brought her son Samuel to the temple at Shiloh, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, and left him with Eli, the priest in charge. She had promised God that if he gave her a son, she would give him to the temple, to serve God.

One night, when Samuel lay sleeping, he was woken by a voice calling: "Samuel! Samuel!" He thought it was Eli calling, so he ran to see what Eli wanted.

"I did not call you, my son. Go back to bed," said Eli. But Samuel heard the voice again and again he ran to Eli. The third time it happened Eli realised that it was God calling the boy.

"If you hear the voice again," he told Samuel, "say 'Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.'"

Samuel did just as Eli had told him. From that moment, God spoke to Samuel. And as he grew up, all God's people knew that he was God's prophet - his special messenger - and honoured him. ●

Read also: 1 Samuel Chapters 1 and 3

BIBLE QUIZ

NUMBER
111

- 1 In 1 Samuel ch.25, who said to David, "May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal: he is just what his name Nabal means: "Brute."?
- 2 In Luke ch.18, was it the Pharisee or the tax collector in Jesus' parable who prayed, "I thank you Lord that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers."?
- 3 In Judges ch.6, who asked the Lord, "How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family?"
- 4 In Jonah, ch. 1, who said to Jonah, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your God! Maybe he will take notice of us and we will not perish"?
- 5 In 1 Samuel ch. 3, who said to Eli, "Here I am: you called me"?
- 6 In John ch.9, whose parents said, "Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."?

£15 vouchers for the first three correct entries received!

Consult your Bible, answer the questions above and send your entry to: Bible Quiz N° 111, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 29th February 2024.

Bible Quiz N° 109 Winners: Margaret Crainie, Glasgow • Allison Dean, Tyne & Wear • Joan A Warner, Lincolnshire.

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Address:

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WORD SEARCH

Find the following words in the word puzzle. They can be across, down, across & down:

- ALARM
- CALCULATOR
- GLOBE
- BOOK
- BUS
- RULER
- STAPLER
- ERASER
- PALETTE
- MICROSCOPE
- APPLE
- BRUSH

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

PUDSY'S DIRTY - FIND THE 10 SPELLING MISTAKES

The inspektre came to our school the other day - that cross looking fella with the big beard. And he was telling us, now we have a new year and a lot to be done so we'll hafta get down to brass tacks is'nt that right and we all said yessir cept I dunno what brass tacks are unless they are flying around up in the sky and mebbe that's why he kept looking up there. And how do we get down to them if they are up there? So I whispered to my fren Bump that I dunno what this is all about and he said nor me so we'll hafta ask our

pal Federico - the lad who comes from that luvly place with all the islands and snakes and everything if they have these things and if they bite or sting..? And he said yes they have these things too but they will be nice to you when you get down to them and spell all the hard words right and do your essays proper and play football so good you'll win this year like the girls who won last year - while us boys lost...imagine! and I am thinking of all the medals we'll be showing off and we have only to get down to them brass tacks!!!



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

Rewrite the story and send to Pudsy's Dirty, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands B93 9AB, before 29th February 2024.



1. What month is the best month to tell a lie?
2. Can February march?
3. What is a ghost's favourite month?
4. What did the lawyer do on Leap Day?
5. What did the priest say to all the sinners on 29th February?
6. What made John decide to celebrate Leap Day?

1. Fib-ruary.
2. No, but April may.
3. Feb-BOO-uary.
4. Jump to conclusions.
5. Take a leap of faith.
6. Everybody was doing it so he decided to jump on the bandwagon.

COMPETITION WINNERS

NOVEMBER 2023

Jessica McManus Motherwell	Amber Sayers St. Neots	Delina Calestra Middlesex	Matilda Liverpool
1	2	1	2
Colpaint - Aged 7 and Under		Colpaint - Aged 8 and Over	

Gorgeous Greenfinches

By Elizabeth McArdle



Image: Shutterstock

Throughout this cold month of January, greenfinches are always a delightful and welcome presence in our parks and gardens. Their beautiful green and yellow feathers add an exotic splash of colour to these chilly months and they do indeed look exotic, so much so that they are often mistaken for canaries.

Greenfinches are vegetarian birds and love to eat plant and tree seeds. They find food from the bird feeders, such as peanuts and sunflower seeds, irresistible. Their powerful, triangular beaks make short work of splitting open the hard shells of these seeds and nuts. They are also partial to berries, such as rose hips and blackberries and are often seen in groups around a wild rose, tucking into the rose hips.

They are very social birds and flock together in winter to search for food. What's more, when the weather gets cold, they form 'sleep communities' and snuggle together at night to maintain warmth. We

humans did this many, many years ago when we lived in caves and huts, long before we had ever heard of duvets or central heating.

During the breeding season four to six females form a community and build their own nests. These beautiful nests consist of twigs, grasses, moss and small roots and are lined with the softest plant materials, hair and some feathers. Incubation lasts around 12-14 days and when hatched the baby greenfinches are tiny. The busy mother works tirelessly to ensure that her brood is well fed and in about 15 days they leave the nest but stay with the parents and are fed and cared by them for another three weeks.

Greenfinches are beautiful birds and deserve our care. Remember to put out suitable food for them during the cold months. I assure you that other birds will benefit from your kindness and from your care of God's creation. ●

WIN A VOUCHER WORTH £15/£10!

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Colour the drawing and send it with your name and address to: COLPAINT, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 29th February 2024.

Name:

Age:

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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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