

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

NOVEMBER 2023



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New Book

FAITH + PILGRIMAGE

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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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Contact the Mission Office:
Tel: (01564) 772 096
Email: fareast@columbans.co.uk

Editor

Sarah Mac Donald
editorfareast@gmail.com

Assistant Editor

Sr Ann Gray

Layout & Editorial Assistant

Breda Rogers

Manager

Stephen Awre

Original Design

Gabriel German Carbone

Printers

Walstead Bicester, Oxfordshire

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www.columbans.co.uk
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Missionary Society of St Columban

Widney Manor Road, Solihull,
West Midlands, B93 9AB.
Tel: (01564) 772 096

Columban Sisters

6/8 Ridgdale Street, Bow,
London E3 2TW.
Tel: (020) 8980 3017

Front Cover

Pilgrims from Ireland, including Columbans from Dalgan and Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare & Leighlin, walking towards San Gallen to join up with the Friends of St Columbanus from Switzerland, Liechtenstein, France and Italy. Image: ColumbanMissionImages



WE WHO GRIEVE

November is the month of the Holy Souls when we pray for our dear departed. We Columbans also pray for our deceased members at Cemetery Sunday Mass in June. We are joined at the cemetery in Dalgan Park by the families of those Columban Fathers who have died. After Mass we have a chance to share memories of our deceased brother priests.

Unfortunately, due to Covid, the event was downscaled for two years. But a Mass was still celebrated in the cemetery while restrictions were observed. This year we were able to return to full participation and we were so glad to be able to meet the families of our deceased members once again.

Cemetery Sunday is a very special moment for the families and Columbans to come together. It is an expression of gratitude to families for their support of their deceased missionaries and for Columban mission.

November, the month of the Holy

Souls, is universally marked throughout the world. Visiting graves is the norm. In Asian culture, and in some religious denominations, special effort is made to remember the dead. People often travel long distances to be present at the graves of their ancestors. This most solemn occasion is sometimes marked by placing some wine and food at the graves.

This year we are again remembering those who died as a result of the pandemic, as well as war, violence and hunger linked to climate change, which is desecrating planet Earth. But we remember the dead with the hope of resurrection. As a Buddhist poet once wrote: *'As winter brings death to nature's span, so does spring awaken life again'.* ●

Fr Michael O'Loughlin

01. Cemetery Sunday June 2023 in Dalgan.

Image: ColumbanMissionImages

DALGAN CEMETERY by Fr Raymond Husband

Standing in the midst of the headstones
Memories come flooding back of a faraway place of different shores.
Men strong and vigorous, enthused by Christ's call to go "make disciples of all nations".

Years have passed, their work is done, they rest now in anticipation of another call to rise and join their Lord in joyful celebration.
Their journey now complete they lie side by side in Dalgan's cemetery serenaded by the blackbird's lonesome song.
A life well lived, treasured not forgotten.

Memories of faraway shores join with the blackbird's song in honouring you my Columban friends.



01



02

Fr Joe Joyce recalls the days leading up to and immediately after the Pinochet-led coup which ousted President Allende's coalition in Chile.



04

President Salvador Allende's *Unidad Popular* Coalition came to power in 1970, about three years after I arrived in Chile. Things went OK for over a year and some important legislation like the nationalisation of mines was passed. But the initial opposition to a socialist government gradually built up, with considerable help from groups with varied agendas. Richard Nixon had given the order "to make the economy scream."

As the economy began to collapse almost all basic commodities became scarce. Even queues for bread got longer - in a country where many people often bought bread twice a day. Some of the problems were real, others the fruit of manipulation. Protests in which people beat empty pots became common. Massive street protests happened every other day - for and against the government. A key event was the national strike of lorry drivers. Chile is 4,300 km long and transport is vital.

I remember Monday 10 September 1973, the day before the coup. A peculiar calm had come over Santiago in the evening. As I walked with a friend past the new government owned UNCTAD building, normally busy and guarded, we noticed the doors were open. We thought it would be nice to try our luck to see if we could view the city from 23 floors high. Nobody stopped us.

At around nine the following morning Fr Seán Conaty, a Columban associate from Newcastle Diocese (and Cavan) and a colleague in our parish of *Santa Catalina* rang. "Have you heard about what's going on? The military have taken over." I became aware of people rushing past on the street close to my front door. Then I noticed some were crying aloud. Later a plane passed low overhead and not long afterwards I could see men on the roof of a nearby factory;

shooting began. It soon stopped and the men were no longer to be seen. Sometime around the middle of the day Allende was able to give an emotional speech before the last radio station was closed down by the military. Later, I heard the passing voice of a sobbing woman saying, "They've killed him." (It is generally accepted that Allende died by suicide).

In the late afternoon a woman from one of our parish solidarity groups delivered a hasty message; a man had been shot within our parish boundary. "Where exactly?" "I don't know!" I wondered if I should tie a pillowcase on a stick and go out looking for him? The sound of shots was all around; the soldiers were not asking questions. I didn't go searching and to this day the memory troubles me.

The National Stadium was only about a mile from my house. It was immediately converted into a detention centre, a place of torture and at times, death. One morning, a few days after the coup a parishioner I knew well told me a chilling story. The previous night he had seen a group of men being lined up against a wall near his house and then they were mowed down by gunfire. The bodies were left on the street. I was

A SEPTEMBER REMEMORANCE

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told by neighbours in another sector that a man had taken refuge in one of our chapels and bullets were fired in through the windows. The holes were there to prove it, but I never learned the fate of the fugitive.

On one of those days, I returned home to find a soldier with a machine gun at my gate. With some kind of false courage, I pushed past him saying, "This is my house." Inside, a group of soldiers were carrying out a search. Our stocky and courageous cook, Ana, was trying to hurry them along from one small room to the next assuring them there was nothing there of interest to them.

There was in fact. The military had announced an arms amnesty. Anyone with a gun could hand it in to a police station or a parish. Some guns had been given to me but I didn't have the time to bring them to the police. They were hidden under the fridge. Had they been found I would no doubt have had questions to answer. I'd possibly have made it into the now controlled newspapers as the revolutionary priest who had been caught red-handed. These were the days of a new Latin American theology and the word *liberación* appeared on the covers of some of my books. I tried to clarify that liberation



was a biblical word before it was a popular political one. Finished with the house the soldiers demanded to see the inside one of our nearby chapels. The stories circulating of me walking down the street flanked by armed soldiers brought me a brief hour of accidental fame.

The overthrow of Allende and the military takeover led by General Pinochet had causes that were both internal and external. One of the objectives of Allende's *Unidad Popular* Government was to free Chile from the controlling influence of the USA, an idea that invited trouble in the Cold War era. At first President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had tried to prevent Allende from taking office.

In later years as official documentation from the Nixon/Kissinger years became public, one transcript of a phone conversation the day after the coup was of special interest. Nixon asks him if the hand of the USA was very evident in what had happened. Kissinger says, "No, we didn't do it" but goes on to explain that "we" did everything possible to create the conditions for a coup. Plenty of money and advice on strategy was made available.

Some weeks later on a Sunday afternoon Fr Mark Mengel, a Columban, and I decided to ride our motor bikes to look for Allende's home on *Avenida Tomás Moro*. His house was now guarded by a solitary *carabinero* who by coincidence was a resident of *Santa Catalina* parish and knew me. "Any chance of a look inside?" I asked him. "OK, but short!" he replied. The house was damaged and unoccupied and the doors were unlocked. Through the window things could be seen scattered around. A presidential portrait lay on the floor having been trodden on: a moving symbol of a chapter of history that had come to an end. ●

Fr Joe Joyce was ordained in 1967. He now serves on mission in Pakistan.

01. An anti-Allende protest moves along Alameda Bernardo O'Higgins in Santiago in June 1973. Photo: Fr Alo Connaughton.
02. Columban Fr Denis O'Mara is escorted on to a plane in Santiago after his expulsion from Chile for participating in protests against torture. Photo: Airport photographer.
03. A tense relationship: Diocesan chancellor, Fr Herrera accompanies Chilean leader, General Pinochet, wearing the presidential sash, to his seat in Santiago Cathedral for an Independence Day commemoration. Photo: Fr Alo Connaughton.
04. Campaign for a No vote. The country was invited in 1988 to vote Yes (to allow Pinochet continue in power) or No. The No won 57% of the poll. Photo: ColumbanMissionImages.
05. July 1986 in Santiago: Protestors held aloft bibles and flowers in front of a banner which says 'The Church the Servant of Life. No More Deaths.' Columban Fr Tom Hanley is on the right. Photo: Fr Alo Connaughton.
06. Columban missionary Fr Joe Joyce.
07. Fr Alo Connaughton's memoirs of his time in Chile.





INCARNATIONS OF THE GOOD NEWS

Dr Trish Hindmarsh, a Columban supporter from Tasmania, writes about her visit to Fr Vincent Busch and the Subanen Crafters in Mindanao.

In June 2023, I travelled with my husband Vin to Ozamiz City to visit Columban missionary, Fr Vincent (Vinnie) Busch. Vinnie arrived at the airport in his 25-year-old all-road vehicle, sporting one of his colourful Creation Story t-shirts, and wearing a big grin.

He informed us that part of the mission of Columban parishes and ministries in Mindanao is to save damaged habitats so that these God-given habitats can again feed and shelter all who live there into the future.

Vinnie's home is a small dwelling in a compound where he shares the dirt road, dust, brownouts, chickens, cats, dogs and the occasional rat with more than a dozen other dwellers. It is a small close-knit community. We visited the small simple workshop of the Subanen crafters. No-one passing this cluttered little workspace would suspect that miracles of creativity and artistry take place there.

In two small, rented rooms, Subanen women gather each day to work on the latest Christmas collection - those beautiful

cards we, the friends of the Columbans, dispatch proudly each December to our own family and friends.

Vinnie sees this livelihood project as a means of employment which develops the talents of the young artists. It also presents the crafters with the opportunity to work in a warm, generous-hearted community which honours their own indigenous culture. For Vinnie, these crafts offer catechetical tools that celebrate the Christmas story as Good News for the entire Earth community.

The Subanens have chosen 'Oasis' as the theme for their Christmas cards this year. Oasis is a word often used to describe a place where people in need can find shelter and refuge. In Bethlehem the Holy Family found such an oasis in a stable. The Subanen Christmas cards place the Holy Family within the sheltering 'oasis' we all share - our blue-green Earth.

And when the Holy Family fled to Egypt to escape Herod's soldiers, they literally took refuge in desert oases. In one Subanen card for example, Joseph helps

Mary up a rocky ledge so that she can see a distant oasis where they can rest for the night. He carries their belongings in a Subanen-like basket as Mary holds Jesus in a sling, like a Subanen mother. This card also places them within our solar system where the Earth is our shared oasis.

As a catechist, I could imagine a class of students, or their parents and grandparents, delighting in the cards as a way of telling the traditional Gospel story. The 'oasis' theme offers rich catechetical opportunities. The word oasis is a metaphor for all that refreshes and renews the spirit of living beings. Earth itself is the oasis for life in the midst of the cosmos.

Sadly, oases in deserts everywhere are affected by climate change. At the same time, homeless people in every country have no oasis where they can be themselves and feel at home. Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato Si'* (217) about the growing effect of desertification on our planet due to the 'dryness' and aridity (desertification) of our own human hearts: "The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast". The Pope calls us to a "profound ecological conversion", living out our "vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork".

The most serious life concern of the Subanens is the destruction of their habitat. Deforestation through unregulated logging has depleted the Subanens' food, water and housing resources and has led to ever-increasing flooding of lowland villages and rice farms. Logging operations

did provide employment for a few years but, as a result, both the Subanens and their lowland neighbours now face a future with less food and few local livelihoods.

The Subanen workers appreciate the significance of their role as skilled workers, patiently and painstakingly adding colour, texture and dimension to each Christmas card. The cards are completely rendered by hand and packaged in that small workshop for dispatch internationally. This is a unique small business. Mercy Gawason, a Subanen, manages the financial side of the enterprise.

Later in our visit to Mindanao, we made our way up into the homeland of the Subanens in the mountainous area of Midsalip, where the Columban Sisters founded the 'Midsalip Subanen Ministry' in 1983, a cultural centre for Subanen youth. Dynamic young Columban missionary, Sr Winnie and her colleague Sr Minerva, together with a dedicated team, run the Centre, with its six indigenous pre-schools scattered across the region for the Subanen children and a boarding programme at the Centre for adolescent students. This means they can stay in town during the week and attend school, as it is a two-hour walk, each way, from Midsalip to their homes in the mountains.

A thriving community garden at the Centre grows vegetables and nurtures seedlings for the future. Sewing classes produce traditional Subanen costumes for children to wear at school. New skills are developed while pride is built in the Subanen people's own culture. ●

Dr Trish Hindmarsh has worked as a teacher and leader in Catholic Education across Australia. She has always been committed to inculturation - bringing the Gospel into dialogue with the culture in which we are called to minister.

01. Dr Trish Hindmarsh and her husband Vin with Columban missionary Fr Vincent Busch and Subanen Crafters at their workshop near Ozamiz, Mindanao (Philippines).
02. Suban Christmas Cards for 2023 showing Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus spotting a distant oasis.
03. The Holy Family refill their water bags at a desert oasis.

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02



03

THE DIVINE IN EVERY MOMENT

Máire Ní Dhuibhir looks at the closeness of St Columban and other early Irish saints to nature and suggests that during this time of Synodality we should celebrate our interdependence with nature in the liturgical life of our parish communities.

The Divine is hidden in creamy clouds, sparkling stars, whistling wind, mists and moss, trees and tangled teasels, pretty primroses and heavy-scented honeysuckle, primeval pigs and busy beetles. The Divine is celebrated with joy in the words of men and women of prophecy through observation, listening, intensely knowing and loving their environment. A short poem from the 9th century translates:

*"The bird which calls from the willow;
Beautiful beaklet of clear note;
Musical yellow bill of a firm black lad;
Lively the tune that is played, the
blackbird's voice."*

Patricius, Patrick, Pádraig was a lonely carer of swine on a wet hillside. He had a story to tell our people. They celebrated the Divine at *Imbolc*, at Summer Solstice, at *Samhain* and at Winter Solstice. Seasons measured, the sun, moon and stars their compass. They were story tellers too. Patrick shared with them the story of a lonely carver of wood, the son of a carpenter, Jesus, who walked the arid deserts of the Middle East.

The Winter Solstice became a celebration of his birth, and his death and resurrection settled around the Spring Equinox. So, our annual church community calendar and the story of the life of Jesus was knitted around the old seasonal patterns. The old fire of Tara became the new fire of Easter night. Patricius, Patrick, Pádraig - he set the scene where the Divine was in his every breath.

When we arise with confidence each day, we assuredly give thanks to the Great Dreamer of new dawns - our daily resurrection. We remember the early dreamers of a new dawn for our people: St Finnian of Clonard/Naomh Ciarán of Oileán Chléire, Naomh Éanna of Árainn, St Colmcille of Doire Cholm Cille, Cluain Ioraird, Ciaran of Clonmacnoise/Cluain Mhic Nóis, Kevin of Gleann Dá Loch/ St Columbanus of Mount Leinster and Bangor.

The women preachers and teachers: Naomh Gobnait of Baile Mhúirne, Naomh Íde of Cill Íde, Naomh Bríd of Cill Dara. They walked the forested pathways, sailed the unsettled seas, rowed the meandering rivers to choose enchanting, awe-inspiring places to call home; to build their huts, to sow and reap, to toil and pray, sensing the Divine in every moment of their day from dawn to dusk, from dusk to dawn - the Divine in them and they in the Divine.

More Irish pilgrims and teachers brought a new dawn to a darkened Europe. St Columbanus of Luxeuil, Annegray, Bregenz and Bobbio, St Killian of Wurzburg, St Gall of San Gallen. This early church was deeply rooted in the asceticism of the Desert Fathers; a life of prayer, labour and study, steeped in an intimacy with the Divine. Whether you are in the high hills over Bobbio or down beside the town's ancient bridge, you cannot but be inspired to turn to Columbanus, to feel the Divine in the

01. Aerial view of Glendalough and the ruins of the monastery founded by St Kevin, overlooking the lower lake. Image: Shutterstock.

02. St Columbanus came to Cleenish Island as a young man to study under St Sinell, who had founded a monastery on the shores of Lough Erne. Image: Máire Ní Dhuibhir.

03. UNESCO World Heritage Site, Skellig Michael, the site of St Fionan's monastery. Image: Máire Ní Dhuibhir.

landscape around you, while the secluded cave high in the hills above Bobbio where Columbanus sought and found solitude, reminds me of the opening lines of a 9th century old Irish poem:

"All alone in my little cell, without a single human being along with me; such a pilgrimage would be dear to my heart before going to meet my death."

Being alone in the hills, under the 'clouds of heaven', with the trees, and shrubs, the scent of wildflowers, sounds of wild animals around them, brought their thoughts closer to the Divine because they sensed the Divine in all that wonder around them. Perhaps we've lost some of that sense of wonder.

I like to think of the Trinity as a tree; the trunk, the Father or Mother or both, solid, grounded, rooted; leaves reflect the birth of Jesus and of us all, budding, blossoming, decaying and dying and re-budding again. But the real energy comes from the roots and fungi and sap oozing life through to the tip of each branch, bud and leaf - the Spirit.



02

These early Irish monastic communities of Clonard, Cleenish, Bangor, Clonmacnoise, Monasterboice, Kildare, Derry lived in and loved the countryside around them, preaching the love of God, working the land with God and praising creation and its fruitfulness.

Let us learn from them in our Church communities during this time of Synodality and give expression and celebrate our interdependence with, and closeness to nature in the liturgical life of our parish communities. The spectre of climate change should make us alter our way of looking at the Creator, Jesus, who walked a simple life with the lilies of the field and the Spirit, who energises and breathes life on all of nature, including us. ●



Teacher and composer Máire Ni Dhuibhir is the founder of the Music Matters School of Music. She conducted the Galway Mass for the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1979 and wrote the music for the 1400th anniversary Mass of St Columban which was celebrated in 2014 in Dalgan. Máire's aunt and uncle were Columbans, Fr Paddy Sheehy and Sr Clement Sheehy.

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03

PAPAL HONOUR FOR SR CATHERINE LILLIS

Columban Missionary Sr Catherine Lillis was delighted when she learned she was to receive the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice (For Church and Pope) medal in recognition of her many years of service to those suffering from various forms of addiction. Born on the 23rd of October in 1929 in Querrin, Kilkee, Co Clare, Sr Catherine spent the early part of her career as a missionary in the Far East, before developing a keen interest in addiction. She trained as an addiction counsellor and worked in the Rutland Centre in Dublin initially and subsequently in Dublin's Inner City for many years with the Health Board. She realised that a desperate need existed in the North East of the country for additional treatment facilities for recovery follow-up. Tabor House



opened for men in Navan, Co Meath in 2005. This service would not have been possible without the support of her many benefactors and co-workers. Sr Catherine's goal now, at 93 years of age, is to establish a similar service specifically for women. Having been given a piece of land near Tabor House, she is now working tirelessly towards sourcing the funds to finance the building of the centre. ●





01

Founder of 'The Prayer Trust', Fr Pat Sayles, is celebrating the golden jubilee of his ordination with a new book titled, 'Jubilee Prayers and Pictures'. He spoke to Stephen Awre about his missionary journey from Peru to his prayer apostolate.



02

10

SHARING PRAYER EVERYWHERE

SA: How did your journey as a Columban missionary begin?

PS: I was born in 1943 in Aldershot, England, and one of my earliest memories is of being asked by one of the nuns in my primary school to think about being a priest. I returned the next day and said it wasn't for me! After graduating from Leicester University, I worked in the car industry before training as a Secondary School teacher. It was on a diocesan training course that the thought of becoming a priest began to grow. Eventually, I applied to the Birmingham Archdiocese and was sent to study in Rome. There, I felt drawn to the missions and with the blessing of Archbishop Dwyer I joined the Columbans.

SA: Your missionary journey has taken you to Peru and the Philippines. What memory do you cherish most from your cross-cultural encounters in other countries?

PS: Following my ordination in 1973 I was assigned to Peru and I went to work in the shanty towns of the capital, Lima. One of my great joys in a parish of more than 100,000 people was the children's Mass attended each week by hundreds of children. Another joy was the setting-up of the very first soup kitchen when it became apparent that many of the children were malnourished. Eventually, there were thirty soup kitchens spread across the parish.

SA: What are you most proud of from your time as Editor of the Far East?

PS: It was a great privilege to present stories from the priests and sisters to the people at home and to show the missionary activity of the Church at grassroots level. I was often busy gathering articles, taking photos and writing editorials, ably supported by the late Columban Missionary Sr Redempta Twomey. I recall the time we moved the process on to computers for the first time. It took hours! But we met the deadline! To all the many wonderful people who have supported, and still support, our magazine, helping to fund our work around the world, I say a very special "Thank you!"

SA: In the Prayer Trust booklets and your new book, every prayer has a picture and all of them are photographs taken by you. How important has photography been to your life as a missionary?

PS: I have long had an interest in photography and being editor of the Far East gave me an even greater appreciation of the power conveyed by a good photograph, just as Jesus used imagery in his preaching. The Prayer Trust began in the Millennium year 2000 and photography was of paramount importance. We wanted each prayer to be accompanied by a photograph that enhanced its meaning, such as a simple flower to express sympathy or joy, or a striking landscape to show God's beautiful creation. A number of the photographs in 'Jubilee Prayers and Pictures' were taken around the parish in Warwickshire where I served for 17 years.

SA: The Prayer Trust receives book orders from all over the world. What is the secret to its universal and enduring appeal?

PS: The Prayer Trust has printed over seven million books, which have



found their way into parishes, homes, prisons, hospitals and schools. We publish the prayers, but the people who ask for them are missionaries too. They have joined us in our mission to share prayer everywhere and so encourage as many as possible to know and love the Lord. They come from all the various Christian Churches, many with no specific role in their parish, group or community, but who want to do something to share God's love with others. At the significant moments in people's lives and to join in the Church's seasons and feasts, people buy the booklets to share with friends and relatives, neighbours, colleagues, with those who are ill or suffering and those who feel far away from the Lord's love. The Prayer Trust's secret is simple – giving the possibility to so many to share in the Church's mission and to serve the Lord.

SA: 'Jubilee Prayers and Pictures' is a celebration of your life as a missionary with the Columbans and with the Prayer Trust. How did you choose the prayers included and what is your prayer for those who buy the book?

PS: With great difficulty! There were many to choose from, though I also wanted to include some new prayers composed in my jubilee year. Many of the prayers in our booklets are read aloud in groups and at gatherings, and this was an important consideration. I like to choose words that are simple, uncomplicated for their sense and for their delivery in public, and accessible to all, so that everyone can become part of the Prayer Trust family. My simple prayer for those who buy the book is that they may know God's love and that they are welcome to join our mission to share prayer everywhere. ●

Stephen Awre is Mission Office Administrator in Britain.

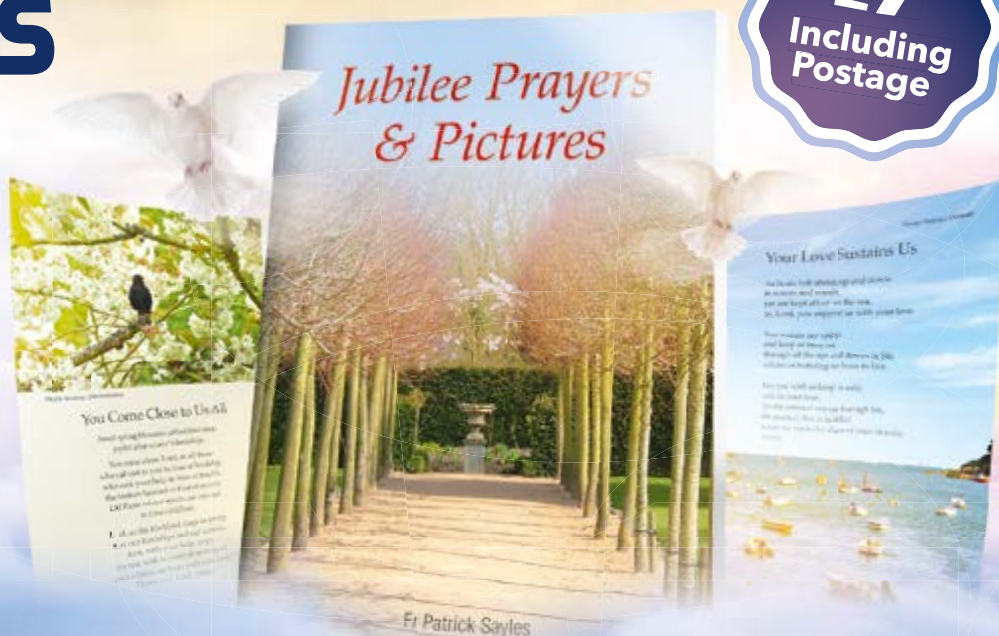
01. Fr Pat Sayles at what was the first home of the Prayer Trust in the parish of Wootton Wawen, Warwickshire.
02. Fr Pat on mission in Peru outside the very first soup kitchen for children in the parish.
03. Fr Pat celebrates the Children's Mass in Lima, Peru.
04. Fr Pat with camera in Banawe, the Philippines.

The Prayer Trust has merged with the Columban Missionaries Britain and now operates under the charity number 221594. See the advert below for details of how to order 'Jubilee Prayers and Pictures'. For details of other titles, visit www.theprayertrust.org.uk or Tel: 0044 (0)1564 773 246

PRAYER FOR ALL SEASONS

Fr Pat Sayles is celebrating his Golden Jubilee as a Columban priest. In 'Jubilee Prayers & Pictures', Fr Pat has carefully selected **68 prayers and photographs** lovingly dedicated to all who are called to share prayer everywhere. This hardback book is an ideal gift for any occasion.

 **COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES BRITAIN**



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Cheques payable to 'Columban Missionaries'.

PILGRIMS FOR CHRIST



TURAS COLUMBANUS
THE COLUMBAN WAY

“Whether we are Franks, Irish or Britons, we are members of one body.”

Columban missionary Sr Ann Gray writes about this year's Columban's Day gathering in the Swiss city of St Gallen, named after one of the 12 monks who left Bangor monastery in Co Down with St Columban in the 6th century as 'Pilgrims for Christ'.

While the Feast of St Columban takes place each year on 23rd November, the day on which Columban is reputed to have died, many parishes and communities across Europe come together each year at the beginning of July to celebrate 'Columban's Day'. This annual gathering began as an initiative of the then parish priest of *San Colombano al Lambro*, northern Italy, Canon Mario Capelli and Mauro Steffenini, in the lead up to Jubilee 2000 and it has continued ever since.

This year the event was celebrated in the Swiss city of St Gallen, which bears the name of the 7th century Irish monk Gall, one of the 12 companions who left the monastery of Bangor, Co Down with St Columban as 'Pilgrims for Christ' to continental Europe.

The activities began with representatives from Ireland, France, Switzerland, Italy and Liechtenstein of Churches, local Councils, cultural groups and Columban Missionaries that make up the Columban Way pilgrim and cultural route. They came together in the Angel's Chapel in St Gallen for the official signing of the Columban Charter of Partnership. In this Charter, we declare our intention "to help support and promote pilgrimage, cultural and scientific activities relating to Saint Columbanus and to his travels and those of his followers, including St Gall, in all regions and countries where their memory remains alive."

The following day, over thirty of us

who had travelled from Ireland, led by the Columbans from Dalgan and Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare & Leighlin, joined the Friends of St Columbanus from Switzerland, Liechtenstein, France and Italy on a pilgrim walk. We set out with a reminder that as we walk we connect with the ground we walk on and the beauty of Creation; with "God and the Holy Spirit that speaks to us in the silence from within; with those who have trod the road over centuries, pilgrims and wayfarers; with one another and with those we meet on our pilgrim way along the road; and with those who cannot make the journey due to their ill-health or other circumstances, we carry them with us".

This walk took us through lush forests, paths alongside the river, railway tracks, small farms of llamas, hens and ducks. We had the opportunity to engage in conversation with a wide variety of people or to walk in silence as we connected with nature and one another. Our goal was to reach the town of Arbon, the place where St Gall set up his hermitage in the beautiful region of Lake Constance. There, in the small oratory, we listened to the story of St Gall and the odyssey of the Irish monks that relit the fire of the Gospel and Christian values across Europe. We prayed and gave thanks.

Walking like this on the Columban Way, I not only feel overawed with the sense that I am walking on paths which St Columban most likely walked centuries ago but I have the opportunity to make contact with people from France, Switzerland, Austria





and Italy, people whose lives today continue to be influenced by Columban.

In the evening, despite being very tired after walking 13km on a very hot day, our next activity was an unforgettable visit to the famous Abbey Library of St Gallen which includes among its books, a 7th century *Irish Gospel of St Gall*, a 9th century *Priscian's Grammar - Latin and Old Irish*, both from Ireland, and several early medieval manuscripts that were preserved at a time when Ireland was being invaded by the Vikings. To be surrounded by so many ancient original manuscripts and books and just to be in this library was an unforgettable and awesome experience.

Solemn Evening Prayer and veneration of the relics of St Gallus and Columbanus brought the day to a close with prayer for peace throughout Europe and the whole world. At the end of this service of prayer, Bishop Markus Büchel of St Gallen presented to Fr Joseph Gunn, parish priest of St Comgall's, Bangor with a relic of St Gall and in return, Fr Gunn gifted Bishop Markus and the people of St Gallen with a copy of the Bangor icons of Saints Columban and Gall.

Sunday morning then saw us gathering once again in the Cathedral of St Gallen for the Solemn celebration of Mass. Dedicated to St Gall and built above his grave around 719AD, this is a truly magnificent cathedral and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The final day of our pilgrimage was a visit to Bregenz, across the border into Austria to the modern-day parish of Saint

Kolumban. Consecrated in 1966, this parish has strong links with Luxeuil, Bobbio, Dalgan and Bangor. With St Columban playing a prominent part in parish life here, the parish priest was delighted to be presented by Columban Fr Ray Husband with a banner illustrating the Harry Clarke stained glass window of Columban from Dalgan, symbolising yet another connection between Bregenz and Ireland, Columban's place of birth.

With this visit, our pilgrimage had come to an end. During the days together, as I made new friends from Ireland, France, Switzerland, Austria and Italy and spent time once again with those I had met on previous pilgrimages, I was filled with wonder at the connections we can make through a shared respect, admiration and love for St Columban. On Sunday, at the end of the Solemn Mass in the Cathedral of St Gall, Bishop Adriano Cevolotto of Piacenza-Bobbio reminded us of the heartfelt appeals of Pope Francis for a tired Europe that it might "hold together unity and diversity" and always remain illuminated by the light of Christ. Pilgrimage on the Columban Way is certainly one response to this appeal. ●

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 and one term as congregational leader. She is now based in Magheramore and is Assistant Editor of the *Far East* magazine.

01 & 02. Over thirty people who had travelled from Ireland, led by Columbans from Dalgan and Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare & Leighlin, joined the Friends of St Columbanus from Switzerland, Liechtenstein, France and Italy on a pilgrim walk. .

03. Bishop Denis Nulty rings the Columban bell after signing the Columban Charter of Partnership in July 2023.

04. (l-r) Bishop Markus Büchel of St Gallen with Bishop Donal McKeown, Bishop Noel Treanor, Bishop Denis Nulty and Bishop Michael Duignan celebrating Mass in the Cathedral of St Gallen.

05. Signatories from Ireland, France, Switzerland and Italy of the Columban Charter of Partnership including Bishop Markus Büchel of St Gallen, Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare & Leighlin, Columban Missionaries, Fr Raymond Husband and Sr Ann Gray as well as other Irish representatives from the Columban Way in Carlow, Meath and Bangor.

06. Irish bishops: Michael Duignan, Denis Nulty, Noel Treanor and Donal McKeown with Bishop Markus Büchel of St Gallen as well as Columbans Fr Raymond Husband and Fr Donal O'Keeffe, and parish priests Frs Joe Rooney and Joseph Gunn.

07. Fr Raymond Husband, Regional Director of the Columbans in Ireland, presents Bishop Markus Büchel of St Gallen (centre) with a banner illustrating the Harry Clarke stained glass window of Columban from Dalgan, watched by Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare & Leighlin.

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"FOR THE SAKE OF HER CHILDREN"

Sr Mary Ita O'Brien writes about the work of the Women Empowerment Base (WEB) in Myanmar and its efforts to protect women from all forms of gender-based violence.

Ma Hkawn was married for 20 years. She lived with eight family members including her five children, their grandmother as well as her sister-in-law and her husband in the same compound. Brang Zet, her husband, was the bread winner and Ma Hkawn stayed at home and took care of her sick mother-in-law and their five children. She could not earn any income herself. Her husband drank a lot and regularly got very angry with his wife and children. Sometimes, when he got drunk, he threatened Ma Hkawn.

On one occasion, when he was not satisfied with the meal she had prepared Brang Zet told her, "This food is tasteless... it is like food for a pig." Ma Hkawn replied, "I have to take care of my mother-in-law and our children. But I did what I could to prepare the food nicely." Her husband told her to be quiet and slapped her cheek. Ma Hkawn warned him, "You have no right to hurt me." But knowing she was financially dependent on him, he told her, "You are my wife, and I can kill you if I want." He then took a small axe and tried to hit her. Luckily, she moved quickly and managed to avoid his attack.

But then he came after Ma Hkawn with a knife. Three of the children clung to their mother and the other two children clung to their father's leg and cried out, "Daddy, don't do that to mummy. If you want to beat mummy, hit us first." It was only then, the father set the axe aside. But he was still very angry and continued to verbally threaten his wife. The children sent their mother temporarily to a neighbour's house.

Sadly, Ma Hkawn suffered violence not only at the hands of her husband, but she also suffered sexual and verbal abuse from her sister-in-law's husband, who was staying in the same compound. Ma Hkawn's husband passed away at an early age. Her inheritance had been made clear before he died but after Brang Zet's death, Ma Hkawn's mother-in-law no longer wanted to give her the inheritance and tried to get rid of her by negotiating a marriage for her with another man. Because of her love for her children, Ma Hkawn opposed her mother-in-law's wishes and refused to marry again. For the sake of her children, she patiently continues to live "at risk" of further abuse from her mother-in-law and sister-in-law's husband.



In 2020 as a response to the situation of women like Ma Hkawn I worked with three colleagues to set up a space called Women Empowerment Base (WEB), which seeks to promote gender equality and human dignity within families. Each year since then, we target different urban villages where we promote the protection of women from all forms of gender-based violence (GBV), as well as preparing a community-based resilience group on gender-based violence in communities.

We try to enable and empower women:

- by facilitating growth in self-awareness through counselling, psychological/legal care and medical treatment for survivors and those at risk
- to choose and make decisions for their own families and also in other social contexts
- to have a regular income by using their skills in projects that generate money.

We realised that very few women in some areas of our State could make decisions on the development of their lives, their families and their communities. Decisive factors in many instances of gender-based violence are women's low level of education, their lack of a regular income, and the low level of awareness around community development. Many cases of

domestic abuse continue to occur because of reluctance on the part of parents or other significant persons in the family to report it. Some cultural and traditional practices result in silence which enables abusers while it leaves the victims to suffer.

Despite many obstacles, we support victims of gender-based violence through awareness sessions in their local communities. We refer victims for medical, legal, emotional treatment and to the security of a safe house. These sessions have made us aware of how the risk of gender-based violence is greatly intensified at times of a pandemic such as Covid-19 and in times of war.

We promote a message which helps people to understand that our services are life-saving interventions and different to the traditional 'silent way'. We have supported and accompanied many victims towards inner healing and growth in self-esteem and self-confidence. Now, more of them have a voice, good inner strength and are growing in awareness of their rights as a human person. They are now on the road to discovering their own dignity as women and they know they have a support group with a safe place to which they can go in time of need.

We are grateful to all our benefactors and friends who enable us to provide this space and assistance to victims of this violence and to help them grow in freedom and hope towards a life in abundance despite all the restrictions and challenges they face. ●

Columban missionary Sr Mary Ita O'Brien has been on mission in Korea and has spent 20 years in Myanmar.



01. Sharing experiences of gender-based violence.
02. Sr Mary Ita O'Brien and some women meet at the Women Empowerment Base (WEB) which promotes the protection of women from all forms of gender-based violence in Myanmar.
03. Nan Nan makes baskets to generate an income.

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JOURNEY TO THE PERIPHERY II

In the second of his two articles on synodality, Fr Tom O'Reilly looks at what the Acts of the Apostles has to say about the need for a synodal Church to listen to those on the periphery.



FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH
community | participation | mission

In the first article we saw how Peter's listening to the Gentile centurion Cornelius at the margins, and the listening of those at the centre to Peter, gave the Church a better understanding of its identity as a universal community, and not just an ethnic group (Acts 10:1-11:18).

But the practical implications of this understanding still had to be worked out. As a result of the missionary outreach of Paul and Barnabas, more and more Gentiles in far-flung places were coming into the Church. This brought up the question of Christian identity again with greater force. The matter came to a head in Antioch when some Jewish Christians from Judea insisted that Gentiles must be circumcised before they could become Christians. Paul and Barnabas strongly opposed this and found themselves in a delegation sent to Jerusalem where Church leaders assembled to discuss the

matter and seek resolution (Acts 15:1-29).

The Council of Jerusalem opened in an atmosphere of debate with each side trying to convince the other. The breakthrough came when the participants shifted from an argumentative to a listening mode. They listened to Peter sharing his experience of the coming of the Spirit on a Gentile household. From that experience Peter had learned that Jews and Gentiles alike are saved by the gift of the same Spirit, rather than any law.

After Peter finished speaking, the meeting remained silent and listened to Paul and Barnabas sharing their experience of what God was doing among the Gentiles. Implied in all this sharing is the call for the Church to recognise God's presence and action at the peripheries and cooperate with that.

James, the local leader in the Jerusalem church, pointed out that the experiences at

the peripheries gave a deeper insight into what is said in the Scriptures about God's plan to include Gentiles in a reconstituted people of God (Acts 15:15-18). He then presented a way forward with which the whole assembly concurred. The consensus of the Council was to press on with mission among Gentiles without imposing the Jewish ritual of circumcision on them.

Gentiles, however, are asked to refrain from some practices which are prohibited by Jewish law. This should not be taken to mean that Gentiles are bound to observe at least part of the law. Rather, an appeal is made to Gentile Christians to have a sympathetic understanding of Jewish Christian sensitivities and agree to compromise, so that common life in mixed Christian communities would be possible.

Practical steps are taken to provide regular opportunities for people from different cultural backgrounds to intermingle in an atmosphere of mutual sharing and with openness to be enriched by each other's experiences. So, we could say that the Council of Jerusalem, having listened to experiences from the peripheries, succeeded in fostering a synodal Church in which communion between Jews and Gentiles was strengthened and their participation in mission together was made possible. What happens at the peripheries is transforming the Church.

In reaching a consensus about the way forward, those present at the Jerusalem Council were able to say, "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). They felt the Spirit was guiding them as they faced new questions and challenges. In the present synodal process, we are being asked to prayerfully discern where the Spirit is leading the Church in its life and mission today. What happened

at the Jerusalem Council suggests how we are to proceed in this discernment. We must shift from an argumentative to a listening mode. Rather than arguing about issues, we need to have a process of mutual sharing and listening in which each one has something to contribute and something to learn in a common search for the way forward. And we must make a special effort to listen attentively to those whose views are different from our own and to those on the peripheries.


We have seen that the Council of Jerusalem put in place practical arrangements for ongoing sharing and listening between people of different backgrounds and views. Hopefully, the synodal process today will lead to structural change in the Church to facilitate sharing and listening in which the voices of all are heard. This should include seeking practical ways for much wider participation in the Church's decision-making processes. The ultimate reason for any reform of Church structures is to become more receptive and responsive to the voice of the Spirit speaking to us, often in surprising ways and from unexpected places. ●

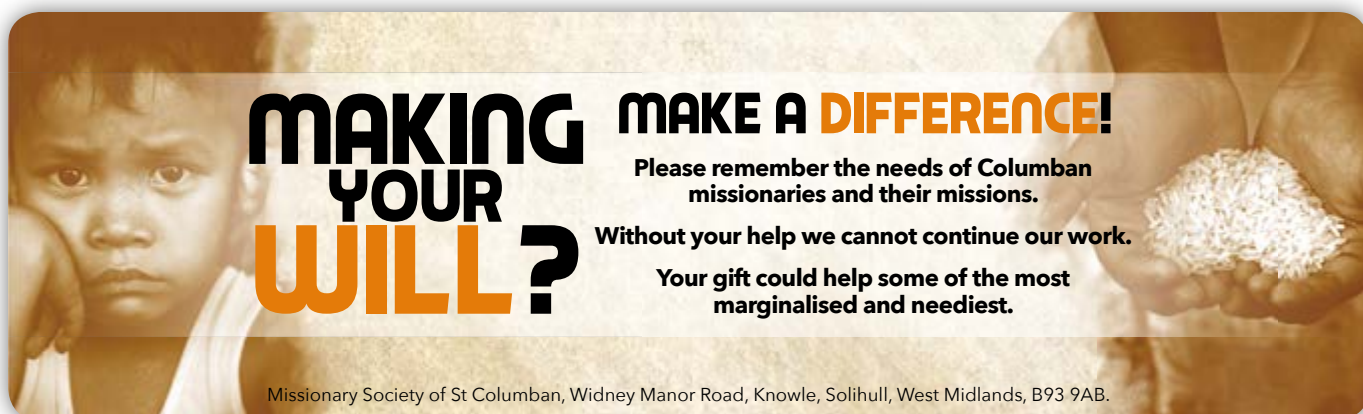
Fr Tom O'Reilly is a Scripture scholar. He holds a degree in scripture studies from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and has lectured in St Columban's Seminary, Navan, and in the Kimmage Mission Institute in Dublin. He also worked as a missionary in Pakistan and as regional director of the Columbans in Britain. His book, **Acts of the Apostles – A Reading for Mission Today** is published by Veritas. www.veritas.ie

01. The Apostles giving a blessing to St Paul and St Barnabas in Jerusalem. Stained glass from All Saints' Anglican Church.

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Fr Rolando Aniscal



Japan, Peru,
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Fr Jude Genovia



Korea, Philippines



02



THE COLUMBAN WAY: A ROUTE TO JUBILEE 2025

Cristian Colombo writes about the completion of the Columban Way in Italy and its recognition by the Italian Tourist Board.

Cristian Colombo is an Italian academic who has studied at the Catholic University of Milan. He is a member of the Association of Friends of San Colombano al Lambro in Italy.

It all began with a dream. St Columban's mother dreamt that the sun descended into the womb of a woman and that this sun in turn escorted the world out of darkness. She dreamt that fourteen centuries ago in 543AD prior to giving birth to her son, Columban, who would pioneer the concept of European unity: a saint recognised in both the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

St Columban's mission: *Peregrinatio pro Christo* continues to resonate today with the followers of St Columban and the Columban fraternity who seek to spread the Irish monk's message. The Columban Way is a Europe-wide route that crosses from north to south, linking up a network of historic sites associated with St Columban, from Ireland, across England, through France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Liechtenstein and Italy.

As it continues to develop, this heritage trail is becoming one of the great pilgrimage routes of Europe, along with the *Camino de Santiago*. The Columban Way celebrates the heritage of the 'Irish missionary movement' of the 6th to 8th centuries, in particular the story of St Columban or Columbanus and St Gall, who travelled across Europe in this period of great turbulence and conflict, founding monastic communities that would flourish until the late middle ages.

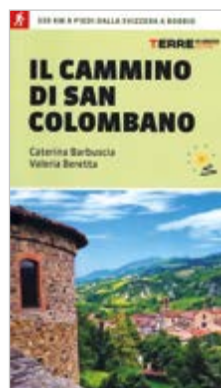
The European Association of the Columban Way has supported and researched the development of the heritage trail, using anecdotes recorded by Jonah of Bobbio in the *Vitae Sancti Columban* and beginning with Columban's initial journeys in his native Ireland and ending in Bobbio.

It is a cultural and religious project aimed at tracking one of the oldest paths in European history through historic villages in rural areas, across eight countries. The legacy of St Columban was the inspiration for a bold dream in 2014, when the Columban route was mapped by the European Association of the Columban Way. We are delighted that the final 330 kilometres, corresponding to the Italian section of the route was, earlier this year, included in the Catalogue of Italian Religious Paths.

This puts the Columban Way in Italy on the map for the Catholic Church's 2025 Jubilee of Hope as a route. Three associations, founded on the Columban spirit of fraternity, have contributed to the mapping and development of the route. They are: *Associazione Amici del Cammino di San Colombano* of Vaprio d'Adda (from the Swiss border to Milan), *Associazione Amici di San Colombano per l'Europa* of San

Colombano al Lambro (from Milan to the ford of Sigerico) and the *Associazione Amici di San Colombano* of Bobbio for the last part of the pilgrim route.

The stretch from Milan to the tomb of St Columban in Bobbio (150 kilometers) is structured in eight stages based on the model of the *Camino de Santiago*. Stamps certifying participation in the pilgrimage will be issued to pilgrims. Those who travel a distance less than 150 kilometres will still be awarded a *Chartula Peregrini*, a certificate given to all pilgrims arriving in Bobbio regardless of the distance travelled. It recognises that it is not the distance travelled that makes the pilgrim, but the spirit with which he or she arrives in Bobbio. ●



03

01. A group walking the Columban Way route in Italy with the Bishop of Piacenza-Bobbio, Monsignor Adriano Cevolotto (centre).

02. The full Columban route from Ireland to Italy.

03. Guidebook for those undertaking the Columban trail in Italy. This year the Italian section of the route was included in the Catalogue of Italian Religious Paths.

04. The final part of the Columban Way, from Milan to Bobbio, where St Columban was buried in 615AD.



20

USING OUR TALENTS

Jesus also described the kingdom of heaven in another story: a rich man going on a long journey divided his money between his servants, according to their abilities.

To one he gave five measures of gold, or talents, to another he gave two, and to a third, one.

The first two servants traded their gold and were able to double what they had been given, but the third buried his one talent safely in the ground.

Their master returned and sent for them. "Sir," said the first, "I have made five more talents for you."

"And I have made you two more," said the second.

"Well done!" said the rich man. "You have both been

faithful in small things so I shall put you in charge of greater things. I am very pleased."

But the third servant said, "I was afraid I would lose your money so I hid it safely in the ground."

His master was furious. "If you were worried about losing my money," he cried, "you should have put it in the bank to earn interest for me." And he ordered the servant to be thrown out of the house.

God gives each of us different gifts, or talents, and he wants us to use them well if we are to serve him and enter his kingdom. ●

Read also: Matthew 25:14-30



BIBLE QUIZ

NUMBER
109

1 In 2 Kings ch.4, what Old Testament prophet instructed his servant, "Get some flour"?

2 In Matthew ch.15, who said to Jesus, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table"?

3 In 1 Kings ch.5, did Solomon, Hezekiah or Ahab say, "I intend therefore to build a temple for the Lord, my God"?

4 In Judges ch.11, who made the request of Jephthah, "Come, be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites"?

5 In 1 Samuel ch.1, who asked his wife, "Don't I mean more to you than ten sons"?

6 In John 12, who made the request of Philip, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus"?

£15 vouchers for the first three correct entries received!

Consult your Bible, answer the questions above and send your entry to: Bible Quiz N° 109, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 30th November 2023.

Bible Quiz N° 107 Winners: Adam Jospeh, Lancashire • Elizabeth McAdams, Lanarkshire • Catherine Riordan, Middlesex.

Name:

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VOUCHERS
TO BE WON!



we have our break! And we all said of course even if we hadn't remembered. He told us what they do in his place. All go to visit the graves with flowers and candles and they have prayers and hymns the whole day. And when we reported back to Ms Flinn she said we had the best huddle ever... I can't wait to be telling our mammy's old aunt Mamie next time she visits drinking tea and askin am I learning anything in school. And when I tell I betcha she'll be so happy she'll say here's something to buy yourself a nice treet! yippee...



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

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St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull,
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1. What is the world's wettest animal?
2. What is a wet bear called?
3. What's worse than it raining cats and dogs?
4. What do you call it when it's raining ducks and geese?
5. What was one raindrop overheard saying to another?
6. What is a type of bow that can't be tied?

1. Rain-deer
2. A drizzly bear
3. Hailing taxis
4. Fowl weather
5. Two's a company, three's a cloud
6. A rain-bow

COMPETITION WINNERS

JULY / AUGUST 2023



The image shows three podiums representing winners for different age groups. Each podium has a number on it (1 or 2) and a name above it. The first podium is for the 'Colpaint - Aged 7 and Under' group, with Erin Vaughan from London as the winner (1st place) and Niamh Neligan from Worcester Park as the runner-up (2nd place). The second podium is for the 'Colpaint - Aged 8 and Over' group, with Layton Wood from Darlington as the winner (1st place) and Betsy Quaranta from Liverpool as the runner-up (2nd place). The third podium is for 'Pudsy's Dirty' and shows Neave Whyman from Leicestershire as the winner (1st place).

Age Group	1st Place	2nd Place
Colpaint - Aged 7 and Under	Erin Vaughan London	Niamh Neligan Worcester Park
Colpaint - Aged 8 and Over	Layton Wood Darlington	Betsy Quaranta Liverpool
Pudsy's Dirty	Neave Whyman Leicestershire	

Puffins: Parrots of the Sea

By Elizabeth McArdle



Did you know there are parrots in this part of the world? I have seen them, but they are not like the green and blue parrots you would see in the tropics. In fact, they are not true parrots at all, but puffins which have been nicknamed “parrots of the sea”. Their colourful, triangular beaks reminded people of parrots and the name stuck. These very cool birds are skilled swimmers and strong fliers. When flying, they can average speeds of 80km (fifty miles) per hour and are known to flap their wings between three and four hundred times per minute. If you, my dear children, tried to do this, your arms might fall off!

Baby puffins have the delightful name of pufflings and they live in burrows which their parents dig out of sandy cliffs. One egg is laid and when they are young, they depend entirely on both parents for their survival. Puffins are one of the few birds which can hold many small fish in their beaks. One survey showed that 10-12 fish was the

average for one foraging trip. All this hard work by parents ensures that the precious baby gets well nourished and ready for its challenging life ahead.

By seven weeks the puffling is ready to survive by itself. It heads out to the open sea and after two years, it returns to its birthplace, but it must wait another three years before it can mate and begin the cycle all over again. Puffins spend the winter months in the open sea, in the vastness of the North Atlantic Ocean, possibly, without touching ground for eight months.

How different their lives are from ours. It is unimaginable that at seven weeks these birds can fend for themselves. We know they are in God’s care as they live far away at sea. We are all in God’s care too and He looks after all His creation be it human or puffin. ●



Image: Shutterstock

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Age:

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BRITAIN

WRITTEN PRIZES

• 1ST £500
• 2ND £250
• 3RD £150

IMAGE PRIZES

• 1ST £500
• 2ND £250
• 3RD £150

