

far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

NOVEMBER 2024



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Sisters Honour
St Columban

MYANMAR FLOODS

Rehabilitation Centre
Damaged

BISHOP QUINLAN

A Letter
Unearthed

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06 "Labour Until Evening Falls"

Fr Donal O'Keeffe recalls the life and mission of Columban Missionary, Bishop Thomas Quinlan, and we publish a letter Bishop Quinlan wrote in 1968 reminiscing about being one of the first fourteen Columbans to go to China in 1920.

08 Old Growth Sprouting Progress

Fr Oliver McCrossan visited the Filipino parish community of Pitogo in Zamboanga del Sur which has replanted its mangrove forest as part of their commitment to care for the earth.

10 A Saint for Man... the Isle of Man

Tradition has it that St Maughold, Patron Saint of the Isle of Man, was a contemporary of St Patrick and a forerunner of St Columban, explains Fr John Boles.

12 Floods Damage Rehabilitation Centre

"We are all safe and well," writes Columban missionary Fr Eamon Sheridan from Myanmar, where torrential rain resulted in the mighty Irrawaddy River breaking its banks and damaging the buildings of the Rebirth Rehabilitation Centre in Myitkyina.

14 God Gives the Increase

Sr Ann Gray spoke to Sr Joan McDermott, Sr Yoon Mi Kim and Sr Julietta Choi about the Columban Sisters' historic decision to begin a mission in Pakistan and the change in their approach to mission.

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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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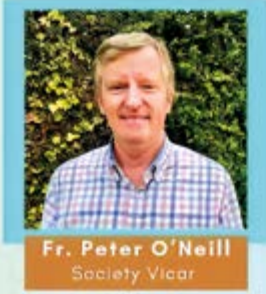
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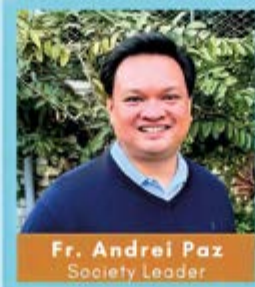
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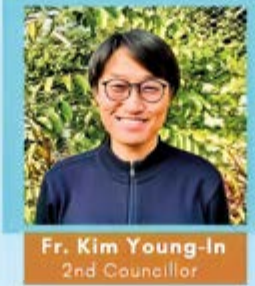
The Ponte Gobbo which crosses the Trebbia River into Bobbio, where St Columban died in 615AD.
Photo: Friends of St Columban.



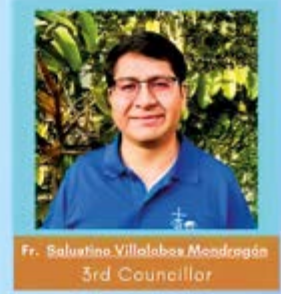
Fr. Peter O'Neill
Society Vicar



Fr. Andrei Paz
Society Leader



Fr. Kim Young-In
2nd Councillor



Fr. Salustino Villalobos Mondragon
3rd Councillor



"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." - Proverbs 4:23



**MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST COLUMBAN
NEW LEADERSHIP TEAM**

In June this year, we Columbans held our once-every-six-years General Assembly. The members of the Society's new international leadership team elected are: Society Leader, Fr Andrei Paz from the Philippines, Fr Peter O'Neill from Australia, Fr Kim Young In Gregorio from Korea, and Fr Salustino Villalobos Mondragon from Peru. Our last team was multicultural too, but this is the first time our Society Leader is not from Ireland, Britain, the US, New Zealand or Australia.

This is not a sudden event. We have been moving in this direction for some time, but now it has happened. Most religious orders are multicultural, which is not surprising given that our countries are made up of people from many different cultures.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit blessed the apostles with the gift of speaking to multilingual crowds and being understood. This is often seen as a reversal of what happened at the time of the Tower of Babel when the people were trying to build a tower to reach heaven. Their arrogance was punished by God. No longer were they one people with one language but now spoke different languages and could not relate to each other.

As Columban missionaries, learning to speak another language has always been part of our history. Learning the culture of the people where we work is a great joy but not easily achieved. Even after many years of living in another country, we do not always understand the culture.

As Christians, we believe that the Spirit is at work in our world building communion amongst us. Reading the first chapter of the Bible we see that, "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them." Our desire to form relationships with others and the need for community is not just something we have made up so that we can have a functioning society with all the politics and economics that go with that. Our desire for relationship with one another is a sharing in God's desire for a relationship with us. The circle of love that flows within the Trinity is the model for us. Our love of others mirrors the love of the three persons of the Trinity.

Some theologians have been writing about the work of the Holy Spirit not just in other religions but also in other cultures. In every person God is present. In every culture, God is working to help people grow in freedom and love. When we see so many people of other cultures in our churches, when we see priests and Sisters from other cultures ministering in our midst, let us give thanks to our God who gifts us with the challenge of intercultural living so that God's kingdom may be realised in our world of conflict and change. ●

Fr Trevor Trotter

Fr Trevor Trotter was ordained in 1970. He lives and works in New Zealand.



Missionary Sisters of St Columban



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PILGRIM GUESTS

As part of the Centenary celebrations five Columban Sisters walked in the footsteps of their patron, St Columban. Sisters Virgie Mozo, Ha Suk Shin, Lucia So, Kathleen Mary Riordan and Ann Gray reflect on their pilgrimage.

"We are guests in this world, not just travellers but pilgrims."

Our itinerary included most of the places where St Columban established monasteries – Luxeuil, Annegray and Saint-Valbert in France, San Gallen and Arbon in Switzerland, Bregenz in Austria, Piacenza and Bobbio in Italy. In Piacenza we joined the European Friends of Columbanus for the annual celebrations in honour of St Columban.

Sr Kathleen Mary

In Luxeuil, we were privileged to participate in 'European Day' part of which was a lecture on 'Robert Schuman and Europe'. He envisioned a united Europe after World War II and recognised Columban as the first to speak about such unity. To our surprise we discovered that Mother Mary Patrick, one of our first Sisters, had helped to organise a group of European Friends of St Columban from Ireland to participate in the International Congress celebrated in Luxeuil in July 1950 to honour the 14th centenary of the birth of Columban. At this Congress the Schuman Declaration was presented, the most important stepping stone towards creating unity. May the

prophetic voice that inspired Robert Schuman and others continue to inspire politicians today. In Luxeuil I felt we were walking in the footsteps of our founding Sisters. As we celebrate this Centenary year, I give thanks to God for the past, and I feel challenged "to live the present with passion and look to the future with hope" (Pope Francis).

Sr Ha Suk

Jesus said to them, "Come and you will see." The pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Columban was a great invitation to see and touch the experience that St Columban had for Christ. It was a wonderful experience for me, especially during the year of the centenary of our Congregation. As a Korean Sister, I witnessed not only how St Columban's spirit spread in Europe but also other countries such as: Korea, China, Philippines, Peru, Pakistan, Chile and Myanmar through our Columban Sisters, Fathers and many friends who love to follow St Columban. The pilgrimage opened my eyes to recognise St Columban in his message "Let us be Christ's and not our own."

Sr Virgie

I felt so blessed and humbled to be part of the 2024 St Columbanus pilgrimage which also highlighted the Centenary year of our Congregation. Bobbio was one of the highlights, the resting and forested place of a great missionary, a place that was an inspiration to St Columban. I felt so connected as I trod the ground, the sounds of the water and the colourful wildflowers brought me so much life and communion with God's creation. Reaching the final resting place of St Columban, I offered flowers and prayed with a thankful heart for St Columban who rekindled the missionary zeal and continues to inspire us in spreading the Gospel message. In truth our patron saint is inviting us migrants and pilgrims in the path of peace and harmony with all of creation. With gratitude to St Columban, I prayed as he did in one of his sermons, "We do not seek a God dwelling far off but a God who remains in us." Amen.

Sr Lucia

As I was standing on the Bobbio bridge, I found myself in a valley which was so close to the nature of God the Creator. The bridge became for me as Christ - bringing us all toward God's Kingdom. St Columban imitated his Divine Master just like that bridge, bridging relationships, uniting nations, bringing people together in peace and love. While I was there, I felt that the bridge was so nourishing, so alive and active, leading and guiding those who were willing to walk and pass by. And I thought of Mother Mary Patrick, co-founder of the Columban Sisters, who worked so hard for the poor and was concerned for the unity of Europe. Columban had stepped onto the soil of Europe and planted the seed of Christ wherever he went. His ancient bell is still ringing. Our lands still need planting, the bridge of Christ is still inviting us, the flame once kindled still needs to burn even brighter.

Sr Ann

Walking along part of the European Columban Way and participating in the various events to celebrate our patron last summer during our Centenary pilgrimage, the words that frequently came to me were, "How awe-inspiring this place is." This was not my first experience of Columbanus in



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Europe but I was once again amazed at the sense of connection I have with the Friends of Columbanus in Europe. This connection comes from the love and respect that we all have for this man who lived so many centuries ago. This was particularly clear the day of the Eucharistic celebration in Piacenza.

Standing on the steps of the Cathedral before Mass began, I marvelled as I watched people of all ages and clearly from different parts of Europe and beyond, make their way towards the church from all directions of the city - such a strong illustration of Columban's words to describe our life as a road - "long for some, short for others, broad for some, narrow for others, joyful for some, sad for others." I was so aware during this pilgrimage that I was carrying with me the joys, suffering and concerns of all the Sisters in our Congregation, our families and all those who have so generously supported us to live our call to mission over the last hundred years. For each of us, the days we spent in Europe were very meaningful. As we prayed at St Columban's crypt in Bobbio, we particularly remembered all of you who have encouraged and supported us over the years. And we thanked God for calling us as a Congregation to follow in the footsteps and spirit of St Columban. ●

01. The Ponte Gobbo - Hunchbacked Bridge - over the River Trebbia in Bobbio, Italy, where St Columban died on 23 November 615AD. Photo: Sr Ann Gray.
02. The five Columban Sisters who celebrated their congregation's centenary by walking in the footsteps of their patron: (l-r) Sisters Virgie Mozo, Ha Suk Shin, Kathleen Mary Riordan, Lucia So and Ann Gray. They are standing in front of a statue of St Columban in the grounds of St Columban's Abbey, Luxeuil. Photo: Sr Ann Gray.
03. Unveiling of the plaque commemorating Venerable Robert Schuman at St Columban's Abbey in Luxeuil (France). Photo: Sr Ann Gray.
04. A signpost at Annegray in the foothills of the Vosges Mountains in eastern France where St Columban founded a monastery around 591AD. Photo: Sr Ann Gray.

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