


# far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES

MAY/ JUNE 2025

## ECOLOGY SPACES

Laudato Si'  
in China

## JUBILEE: PILGRIMS OF HOPE

Competition Winners

## MYANMAR QUAKE

Hope Amid  
Suffering



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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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"Not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these" (Mt 6:29). Butterfly pollinating early summer white flowers. Image Shutterstock.



Colombia in South America has suffered a devastating bloody civil war for decades. The country has seen communities pitted against each other, neighbour against neighbour, even families against families. In the late 1990s, Fr Leonel Narváez participated in the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and leaders of the rebel forces. From this experience and studies at Harvard, Fr Leonel became interested in developing a programme for forgiveness and reconciliation.

He thought about what process is needed to begin healing. He created ESPERE, a Spanish acronym for School of Forgiveness and Reconciliation. In 2009, I participated in ESPERE's work while living in Lima, Peru. Through ESPERE I came to understand that although interconnected, forgiveness and reconciliation are two separate processes.

Forgiveness is about how I relate to the offence and what happened to me. Like many, I have been hurt by others. My mind was cluttered with how the universe was going to bring me justice. If the offender's name was mentioned, nothing but negative energy came forth from me. In time, carrying these negative thoughts consumed energy and prevented happiness.

Eventually, I had to learn that forgiving was not for the offender, it was for me - so that the offender and the offending events don't dominate my perspective on life.

The saying: "forgive and forget" is misleading. We cannot forget but we don't have to let the memory prevent happiness. Much like the resurrected body of Jesus that was no longer on the cross but carried the wounds of the cross. The wounds are a reminder of what He lived through but no

longer hold any power over Him.

Reconciliation relates specifically to what kind of relationship I will have with the offender. There can be no reconciliation unless there is forgiveness. If the offender is still alive, what type of relationship can there be? Through ESPERE, I learned there are three possibilities.

First, is the 'Separate Worlds' model. Basically, it means there is no relationship. Although I no longer harbour negative feelings towards the offender, I keep to my world, the offender to his/her world. Second is 'Interconnected Worlds'. In this model, I come in contact with the offender only when it is necessary. Our contact is cordial and civil but doesn't go beyond that. An example is a divorced couple who only meet to discuss and resolve issues concerning their children. Otherwise, they are not in contact with one another.

Lastly, is the 'One World' model. In this model, I have reformed my relationship with the offender. An example is a couple that have experienced infidelity by one. Through counselling and much dialogue, they remain together and forge a new relationship.

Which model is best? The one that is possible and won't rob me of my peace and happiness. As the saying goes, the greatest revenge is to be happy. ●

### Fr Chris Saenz

Fr Chris Saenz is a native of Nebraska. He was ordained in 2000 and served on mission in Chile and until 2024 was Director of the Columbans in the US.

01. The resurrected body of Jesus carried the wounds of the cross, as depicted in this painting of Jesus with Thomas and the other Apostles by Sebastiano Santi from Chiesa dei Santi Apostoli in Venice, Italy. Image: Shutterstock.



“For  
I was hungry and you  
gave me something to eat,  
I was thirsty and you gave  
me something to drink, I was a  
stranger and you invited me in, I  
needed clothes and you clothed  
me, I was sick and you looked  
after me, I was in prison and  
you came to visit me.”

Matthew 25:35-36

## WELCOMING CHRIST IN EVERY STRANGER

In her new ministry at the Hope Workers Centre, which was founded by the Columbans in Taiwan nearly 40 years ago, Columban Lay Missionary Reins Mosqueda has discovered that hospitality goes beyond kindness. It is about creating a space where everyone feels truly welcome.

These words from Matthew's Gospel were written in Chinese characters on the wall outside the building where I served for 11 years in my ministry with mentally and physically challenged adult Taiwanese students. They served as a daily reminder of my call to show compassion and love in every aspect of my work. Little did I know that this same message would resonate with me again as I moved into a new ministry with migrants.

In my new role, I quickly learned that hospitality - offering kindness and care to those in need - is crucial in building a welcoming and inclusive community. Just as Christ extended His love to all who came to Him, we are called to open our hearts to the hungry, thirsty, strangers, and those who are struggling. Hospitality is not just about offering food, drink or shelter; it's about creating a safe space, showing kindness without expectation, and offering warmth to those who may feel unseen or unwanted.

In the church, ushers exemplify this spirit of hospitality. Their warmth and friendliness ensure that everyone feels welcomed and valued as they enter. Their role goes far

beyond simply directing people to their seats. They help create a sacred space where individuals can open their hearts and prepare to receive God's presence in the Holy Eucharist. The ushers' selfless dedication to hospitality has taught me that this practice isn't just about actions; it's a presence of love and care that transforms the entire environment.

However, the role of an usher is not without its challenges. Some parishioners may disregard or disrespect them, yet these volunteers continue to greet everyone with grace and kindness. Their actions reflect Christ's love, even when faced with adversity. I've learned that to offer true hospitality, one must be willing to endure hardship and show love, even when it's difficult. The ushers' resilience, their ability to remain composed and loving despite difficulties, has deeply inspired me. They embody the very spirit of hospitality that I strive to practise in my own ministry.

As I step into my role at the Hope Workers Centre, I am reminded of the importance of hospitality in creating a community where every person feels

01. Hope Workers' Centre ushers welcoming parishioners in Taipei, Taiwan.
02. Reins Mosqueda with fellow Columban Lay Missionaries and Fr Keneth Laorden of St Christopher Parish in Taipei.
03. The Hope Workers Centre in Taiwan which was founded by the Columbans in 1986.



valued. Many of the migrants I work with have left behind their homes, families, and cultures in search of a better life. They arrive with little more than hopes and dreams. Though many have faced great hardship, they continue to open their hearts to others.

The ushers themselves are migrants, so they deeply understand the challenges fellow migrant workers face. Even when they are tired or have personal concerns, these volunteers still dedicate their time and energy to serving God and the parishioners. Despite their lack of sleep or the fact that Sunday may be their only day off, they show up with friendly smiles and warm attitudes, welcoming everyone into the church. Their selfless commitment is an inspiration to me as a missionary. Through their example, I have learned that true hospitality is not about perfection or comfort - it's about selflessness, sacrifice, and a willingness to serve even in difficult circumstances. Truly, they are embracing the call of Jesus to be hospitable to all kinds of people, and it encourages me to do the same in my own ministry.

Reflecting on my journey with the migrants for several months now, I've been deeply touched by their hospitality, which has drawn me closer to God. As I adjust to my new roles, their support and encouragement became a constant source of inspiration, making my work more meaningful. Though the work has been challenging at times, the warmth and care of the migrants around me has made the journey more fulfilling. Their kindness has fuelled my passion for mission.

As I reflect on the passage from Matthew 25, I realise that every act of hospitality is an opportunity to welcome Jesus Himself. As a

missionary, I am called not only to serve others but also to see Christ in every person I encounter - whether they are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, or in need. The example set by the ushers has deeply inspired me, reminding me that true hospitality goes beyond meeting physical needs; it is about embracing others with the love and grace of Christ. In offering care and warmth to those I serve, I am not just extending kindness, but I am welcoming Jesus into my life and ministry. ●

Columban Lay Missionary Reins Mosqueda is from Los Baños, Laguna in the Philippines. She is now living and working in Taiwan.

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**COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES  
BRITAIN**







# FAITH LEADERS BUILD PEACE

Columban Missionary, Fr Pat Colgan, is a member of the Dublin City Interfaith Forum. He writes about a gathering in Dublin which brought together representatives of the major faiths in Ireland and Britain.

Last September a group of 17 faith leaders from the cities of Birmingham, Edinburgh and London arrived at Dublin Airport and were brought by special Garda (Irish Police) escort to the Mansion House, official residence of the Lord Mayor of Dublin.

They were there to take part in a symposium titled, 'Building Peaceful and Resilient Communities in Our Cities'. They were joined by colleagues from the Dublin City, Northern Ireland and Midwest Interfaith Forums, and the Irish Humanist Association, Garda Community Policing Officers, academics, an Anglican group from Co Mayo, as well as children and teachers from the Church of Ireland High School in Dublin. The genesis of this meeting was a visit by members of the Dublin City Interfaith Forum (DCIF) to Birmingham in February 2024 to see the work done by Columbans in interfaith dialogue.

Dublin experienced its first major riots in decades on St Columban's Day, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023, linked in part to the rise of anti-immigration messaging. Britain was later rocked by unrest following the stabbing of three young girls attending a Taylor Swift themed dance class in Stockport, Liverpool, on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024. This violence in Britain was falsely blamed on Muslim immigrants, though the assailant was in fact a naturalised, non-Muslim British

citizen of Rwandan origin. Social media disinformation stoked unrest all over the UK, including Northern Ireland.

At the conference in Dublin, we heard stories from Belfast-based Muslim academic Dr Naomi Green about the relentless and continuing attacks on Muslim businesses and families during and since this incident. Dr Johnson McMaster of the Irish School of Ecumenics at Trinity College Dublin said: "I have since heard comments from many otherwise middle class 'respectable' people. Remarks such as: 'Perhaps these rioters have a point'; 'Immigration has gone too far, it needs to be controlled'; 'Christianity is under siege in our islands'; 'These people [sic] are clogging up our hospitals and schools.'" These sentiments, he warned, "are equally destructive to social cohesion, and give tacit, if unintended, ammunition to more violent and/or malignant actors."

Other academics who addressed the meeting stressed the need for civic education, myth-busting, reining in the power of social media, rediscovery and loud visible proclamations of what our values in Europe in fact are. Mahmooda Qureshi of the Faith and Belief Forum in Birmingham shared: "I have never before seen such tension among people of faith... and I have had to turn to friends of other faiths for advice, because I simply don't know what to do. I do see hope, and that hope comes





precisely from people like us, trying to be honest and loving with each other - these ripples can and will change the world."

In his words of welcome, Dublin's Lord Mayor, Cllr James Geoghegan said that due to migration, "our hospitals run better, our universities have been enriched, communities have extended their expertise, and we want to make sure that Ireland, and its capital Dublin, continue to be centres of welcome. When migrants arrive in a new country, they automatically look for their place of worship, as an oasis of friendship and safety... your event today is of immeasurable importance to this, and all modern cities, and I wish you every success."

The next day, our Birmingham visitors were welcomed in four worship centres across South Dublin, namely the Ahlul Bayt Islamic Centre (Al Hussain House); the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland - Clonskeagh; Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar; and finally the Progressive Jewish Synagogue. In each place the religious leader spoke of the challenges and hopes of their respective communities. A repeated theme was that, despite the rapid rise of 'Far Right' ideology in Ireland, relationships on the ground are still largely both intact and good.

Since Islam, in particular, is experiencing a phenomenal growth rate - from 3,000

to 100,000 in three decades in Ireland - their leaders have put much emphasis on engaging with local communities and the Gardaí on matters of mutual concern, such as parking, making spaces available for vaccination, shared sports, and education.

On the final day of their trip, the visitors came to Dalgan Park, headquarters of the Columban missionaries in Ireland. Guided by ecologist, Elizabeth McArdle, they spent some time outside appreciating (in the rain) the Dalgan oak grove, the holly and ragwort plants and even our two donkeys! We then heard from two Birmingham-based Muslims about the contents of *Al Mizan* (A Covenant for the Earth), launched in Nairobi in February 2024, which has been called the '*Islamic Laudato Si'*'.

There was a strong sense that participants did not want these three days to simply become a pleasant memory but a stimulus for common action for the future. In fact, plans are now afoot for a Columban Interfaith Pilgrimage over two days in July 2025, covering some of the ground we believe St Columban walked 1400 years ago, to which members of the Dublin and other Irish Interfaith Forums, as well as our colleagues from Birmingham will be invited. Each religion present will offer a prayer or teaching from its tradition on the meaning of 'pilgrimage', 'hope', or 'Jubilee', as we walk the 36km together. ●

Fr Pat Colgan is from Belfast. He was ordained in 1994 and worked on mission in Fiji for 17 years. He was also a member of the General Council in Hong Kong. He is now based in Ireland.

01. Hilary Abrahams of the Dublin Progressive Synagogue shows the Torah to members of the Birmingham and Dublin City Interfaith groups. Columban lay missionary Angie Escarsa is seen 3rd from left while Fr Pat Colgan is 6th from left.
02. Members of the Birmingham and Dublin City Interfaith groups visit the Ahlul Bayt Islamic Centre. Columban co-worker Mauricio Silva is at the centre of the photo in the orange jacket.
03. Welcome for faith representatives from the Lord Mayor of Dublin.

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# MATT TALBOT: COLUMBAN BENEFACTOR

On the centenary of the death of Venerable Matt Talbot, Fr Seán Coyle recalls this popular patron of those struggling with alcoholism who may become the first person connected with the Columbans to be canonised.

Venerable Matt Talbot died one hundred years ago on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1925, which was Trinity Sunday that year. He was on his way to Mass in St Saviour's Church in Dominick Street, Dublin, and dropped dead on Granby Lane, behind the church. He was 69. Some penitential chains were found on Matt's body. He wore these on special occasions, a symbol of having made himself a slave of Our Blessed Mother, following the spirituality of St Louis-Marie de Montfort. These chains led people to discover his remarkable story.

Matt was born in 1856 in the North Strand area of Dublin, the second of the ten children of Charlie, a heavy drinker, and Elizabeth. Between the ages of 11 and 12 he sometimes attended nearby O'Connell's Primary School and was noted in the roll book as a 'mitcher' (truant). He was barely literate when he left to take a job in a bottling company where he developed a taste for drink and was an alcoholic by the age of 16. This continued until he was 28. He often bought a drink for others but one evening in September 1884, when he had no money, nobody would buy him one. This was like a knife through Matt's heart but that knife was God's 'scalpel'.

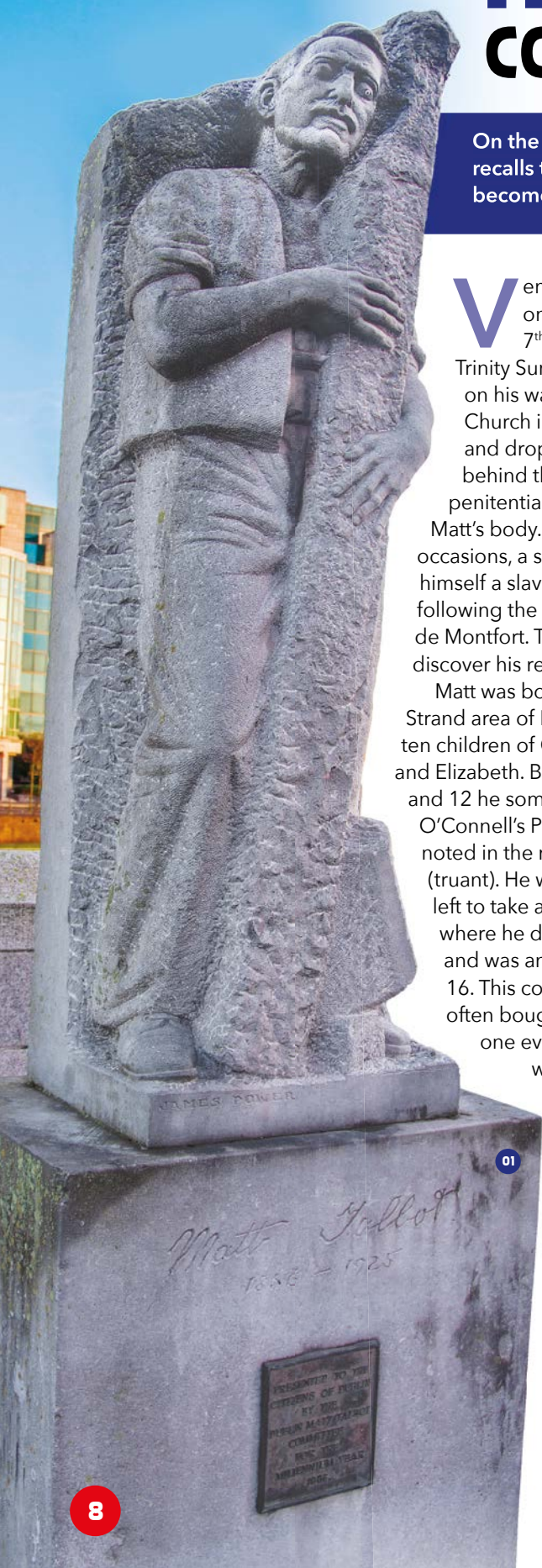
He went home and told his mother he was going to 'take the pledge', to promise God he would never drink again. He went and spoke to a priest in nearby Clonliffe College, the Dublin Diocesan

seminary which closed in 2019. He had long since stopped receiving the sacraments, though he went to Mass every Sunday and said the *Hail Mary* every day.

Matt began to live a life of intense asceticism of prayer and penance based on that of the early Irish monks, under the direction of Fr James Walsh and later under Fr Michael Hickey. He went to early Mass daily before going to work as a labourer on the Dublin docks in T&C Martin's timber yard. On Sundays he attended several Masses in churches in the city centre. His workmates respected his deep faith and during breaks he would find a quiet spot to pray. Fr Hickey encouraged Matt to read works by St Augustine, St Catherine of Siena and others, which required a lot of work by Matt as up to then he could hardly read or write. One of his favourites was St Thérèse of Lisieux, canonised by Pope Pius XI three weeks before Matt's death.

Matt spent very little of his wages on himself and gave most of his money to his mother, which he had failed to do during his drinking years. He shared the rest with others. These included the Maynooth Mission to China, as the Columbans were initially known in Ireland. In December 1924, six months before his death, Matt wrote to the Columbans: "Matt Talbot have done no work for past 18 months. I have been sick and given over by priest and doctor. I don't think I will work any more. There one pound from me and ten Shillings from my sister." (See image 2). This amount was more than a week's wages at the time for an unskilled labourer, an enormous amount for a man who had been unemployed for 18 months. The letter is in the Columban archives here in Dalgan Park, Navan.

Before his death Matt was known only to his family, neighbours and workmates. In 1931 Archbishop Edward J. Byrne of Dublin



01



Matt Talbot have Done  
no work for past 18 months  
I have been sick and  
given over by priest and  
Doctor I Dont think I  
will work ~~any~~ any more  
there onl pound from me  
and ten shillings from  
my sissar

02

became the Matt Talbot Retreat Movement for recovering alcoholics. That has spread throughout the US and Canada. There are various other ministries and programmes for recovering addicts in Ireland and elsewhere that use Matt's name.

Matt was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery but in 1972 his remains were removed to a newly-built shrine in Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Seán McDermott Street in the area

where he spent most of his life. God has used Matt to give hope to countless persons caught in addiction. Matt once said to his sister Susan, "Never think harshly of a person because of the drink. It's easier to get out of hell than to give up the drink. For me it was only possible with the help of God and our Blessed Mother." ●

Fr Seán Coyle is from Dublin. Ordained in 1967, he spent most of his life on mission in the Philippines where he was Editor of *Misyon* magazine. He is now retired and living in Dalgan.

03

## THE MYSTERY OF MATT TALBOT

Father Morgan Costelloe  
Vice-President of the  
Case of the Venerable Matt Talbot



opened the process for the beatification of this unskilled labourer from the slums of Dublin. By then Matt was a household name in Ireland. In 1947 he was given the title 'Servant of God'. In 1975 Pope St Paul VI, who was familiar with Matt's story from his days as a young priest in the Nunciature in Dublin, declared Matt 'Venerable', the step before beatification.

He became known outside of Ireland when in the early 1940s a small group of AA members in New Jersey began what

01. Statue of Venerable Matt Talbot close to Talbot Memorial Bridge in Dublin. Image: Shutterstock.
02. Letter from Venerable Matt Talbot to the Columbans dating from December 1924. Courtesy: Columban Archives in Dalgan.
03. Cover of Fr Morgan Costelloe's book on Matt Talbot, 'The Mystery of Matt Talbot' which is illustrated with the only known image of the Dublin ascetic - first on the left with the moustache.

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And Jesus said to them,

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:16



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# ECO-SPACES

Fr Dan Troy writes about Columban efforts to establish ecology spaces at retreat houses, pastoral centres and convents in China.

**E**cology workshops given in China in recent years by the Irish geologist and botanist, Dr John Feehan, placed an emphasis on combining personal experience with scientific learning and prayerful reflection. Personal experience involved going outdoors each day to observe nearby geological formations as well as looking at the marvels of wildflowers and other features of the natural world.

In looking at the wildflowers, we were asked to consider the marvellous interdependence of these flowers which require a moth or a bee to complete a pollination cycle so that the next generation of flowers can emerge a year later. Participants in the workshops got a further glimpse into this mystery through hand lenses and microscopes which enabled them to see into the depths of the flowers, revealing their beauty and complexity. An experience of awe for those who were seeing with new eyes! Occasionally within the depths of a small flower, a tiny insect was seen moving around in its colourful home. During these experiences and in the lectures that were part of the workshops, John Feehan would also pose a crucial question: "what does this tell us about God?"

This same question is at the heart of *Laudato Si'*, the 2015 encyclical written by Pope Francis on care for our common home, this beautiful but fragile planet. In the early part of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis invites us "to see nature as a magnificent

book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness" (LS 12). This understanding is attributed to St Francis of Assisi.

St Francis understood that God created each form of life with loving care and attention, and all of these life forms have been assigned a unique place within an immense universe that was created with the same loving care, a universe that continues to unfold over the vast expanses of time and space. Pope Francis also reminds us that the inexhaustible richness of God is reflected in the vast diversity of the natural world, no one species being capable of fully representing divine goodness, the vast array of biodiversity therefore being an expression of the immense depths of God.

Following on from these workshops in China, the Columbans initiated a project to establish ecology spaces at retreat houses, pastoral centres and convents in China. During a recent visit to the pastoral centre in Xiantao, near Wuhan, Fr Joseph Li, Administrator of the Diocese of Hanyang, delighted in showing me the ecology space he has put in place. The top shelf is a space to hold fossils, shells and stones, each reflecting a unique aspect of God's creation.

The ecology space at the pastoral centre in Xiantao also includes books on astronomy, geology, botany and other life sciences. With the immense growth of scientific knowledge over recent decades, the scientific community provides

01. Dr John Feehan giving an ecology workshop in China in autumn 2018.

02. Fr Joseph Li, Fr Dan Troy, Sr Paula Li and Sr Mary Bai beside the ecology space at Xiantao Pastoral Centre.

03. Display area in one of the ecology spaces. In recent years the Columbans in China have sponsored six communities in setting up ecology spaces displaying items from the natural world as well as relevant books, lenses and a microscope.



the Church with a new perspective to understand in a deeper way the meaning of the creation story that is presented to us in the Book of Genesis. Scientific research provides us with insights into the mysteries of life that were not available to previous generations. This requires us to have a broad enough image of God that includes all the insights that emerge from the scientific community. As scientific knowledge expands, the horizons of our understanding of God also need to grow.

According to Fr Joseph young people in China are open to this approach of deepening their understanding of God because they are already studying science at school. If their scientific education is accompanied by faith formation, it encourages them to appreciate how our creative and loving God is involved in the shaping and unfolding of the universe, and they are able to integrate their education with their Christian faith.

In recent years the Columbans in China have sponsored six communities in setting up ecology spaces, each following a similar design so that items from the natural world are available with relevant books as well as hand lenses and a microscope. As retreats and days of faith formation take place in these areas of China, we hope that participants will deepen their appreciation of the delightful reference by Jesus to the beauty of wildflowers when he said, "not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these" (Mt. 6:29). Hopefully their opportunity to hold a small flower and peer into the depths of beauty bestowed on it by God will stir their hearts

to appreciate how God delights in them and all of creation. ●

Fr Dan Troy is from Cork. He was ordained in 1999 and he has lived and worked on mission in China since 2000.



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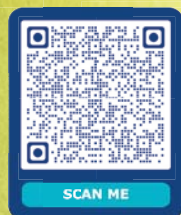
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FREE WILLS  
NETWORK**



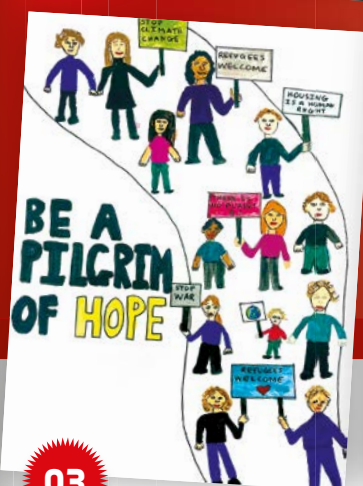




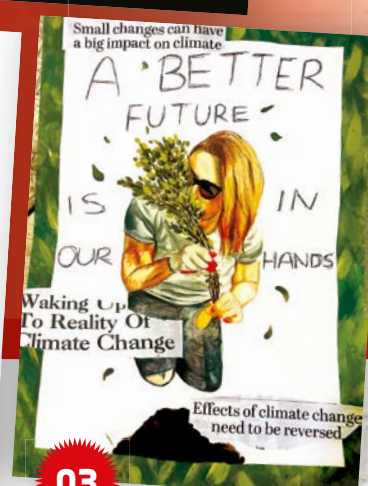
01



02



03



03

01. 'Love God's World' by Arianna Boardman from Loreto Grammar School in Altrincham.  
 02. 'Jubilee: Pilgrims of Hope' by Favour Eze of All Saints, Dagenham.  
 03 + 03. 'Be a pilgrim of hope' (left) by Alice Holt of Loreto Grammar School, Altrincham + 'A Better Future Is In Our Hands' (right) by Cassi Walesiak of St Paul's, Milton Keynes.

## JUBILEE: PILGRIMS OF HOPE COLUMBAN COMPETITION WINNERS

**S**tudents aged 13-18 were invited to produce a piece of writing or create an image on the topic 'Jubilee: Pilgrims of Hope' for the 2025 Columban Schools Media Competition. Their task was to highlight a community or group bringing hope in the world in this Jubilee Year, making a difference locally, nationally or globally. The competition attracted a record 272 entries across Britain and Ireland, the highest number in the eight years the Columbans have run the competition with the **Far East** magazine.

The article winners in Britain were

1<sup>st</sup> place: **Armance Young** of St Catherine's in Twickenham; 2<sup>nd</sup> place: **Aleksandra Niklewska** of Loreto School in Altrincham; and 3<sup>rd</sup> place: **Elsie Healy** from Bishop Challoner in Birmingham.

The Image winners were 1<sup>st</sup> place: **Arianna Boardman** from Loreto Grammar School in Altrincham; 2<sup>nd</sup> place: **Favour Eze** from All Saints, Dagenham; and joint 3<sup>rd</sup> place: **Alice Holt** of Loreto Grammar School, Altrincham and **Cassi Walesiak** of St Paul's, Milton Keynes.

One of the judges, Columban Missionary Fr Ed O'Connell said of

the 1<sup>st</sup> placed image, "The image is strong and understands the connectedness of us humans with the whole of creation. It represents well the Laudato Si' Movement."

Congratulations to all the winners! We would like to thank every student who made the effort to enter the competition. The judges paid tribute to the very high standard this year. Thank you also to all our judges for their time and expertise. ●

The full list of winners can be seen here: [www.columbancompetition.com](http://www.columbancompetition.com)



# HOPE: AN ACTIVE RESPONSE TO HARDSHIP

by Armance Young of St Catherine's School,  
Twickenham.

**O**n 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2024, Pope Francis urged his followers to be "sower(s) of hope". He reminded us that hope is not a silent or passive state but an active force for change. In a world where conflict, suffering and injustice seem overwhelming, hope drives tangible action. The Jubilee Year of Hope, which comes from the Book of Leviticus in the Bible, calls for renewal, mercy and action. Pope Francis has encouraged Catholics to be 'Pilgrims of Hope', signifying their duty to cultivate kindness, compassion and support.

Consider Gaza, where approximately 69% of the infrastructure has been destroyed due to the ongoing conflict, and 47,000 lives have been lost. Amid this destruction, the resilience of the community shines through. Doctors working in facilities like the Al-Shifa Medical Complex, which has been partially destroyed, risk their lives to provide essential medical aid. Volunteers distribute food to the starving and churches offer shelter to those with nowhere else to turn. These individuals - who act when it seems there is no hope - are the true sowers of hope.

Yet hardship is not confined to war zones. Across the globe, hundreds of thousands face struggles that often go unnoticed. In the UK alone, as of 2022, there were 231,597 refugees, and as of 2023, an estimated four million families were in financial deficit and 320,000 were homeless. In Matthew 25:35, Christians are called to respond to suffering with compassion and action: "For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." The Bible urges us to be active participants in alleviating the suffering of others.

Catholic charities and organisations are embodying this call. The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), the official aid agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, delivers emergency relief, such as food, clean water, medical supplies and shelter, to war-torn countries. Moreover, it supports long-term recovery initiatives, such as rebuilding infrastructure. Today,

CAFOD has been active in conflict-affected regions such as Syria. Furthermore, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) assists refugees and asylum seekers, launching the Global Education Initiative in 2015, which aimed to increase access to education for refugees. Lastly, the Sant'Egidio Community, a Catholic lay movement dedicated to social service, played a role in negotiating the General Peace Agreement for Mozambique in 1992, which ended a 16-year civil war. These organisations exemplify how meaningful action can lead to transformative change. Individual actions can ripple outwards, transforming the lives of thousands in turn. Had these organisations never been established, countless might have remained in desperate need.

Personally, charity has always been an integral part of my life. In 1991, my great-aunt, Jane Nicholson, founded FARA (meaning "without" in Romanian) to house children 'without' family, who were treated inhumanely in state-run orphanages. Her initial steps included leading aid convoys from the UK to Romania, where she and a team of volunteers provided essential care. Through her initial efforts, over 10,000 Romanian children have gained access to education and shelter, vastly improving their future prospects. Jane's dedication to transforming the lives of Romania's most vulnerable children exemplifies how hope, when coupled with action, can create lasting change. Her life's work serves as a continual source of inspiration for me.

For the past three years, my school has been fundraising for Mary's Meals, a charity that provides meals to schoolchildren in Ethiopia. Initially, the contributions I made through bake sales and donations seemed insignificant. However, I soon realised that the collective impact of the school community was profound. For some, these donations are a lifeline: their funded meal is their only stable source of food. Upon learning that it costs only £19.15 to feed an Ethiopian child for a year, I felt inspired. If one school could impact so many lives, just how many could an entire community change?

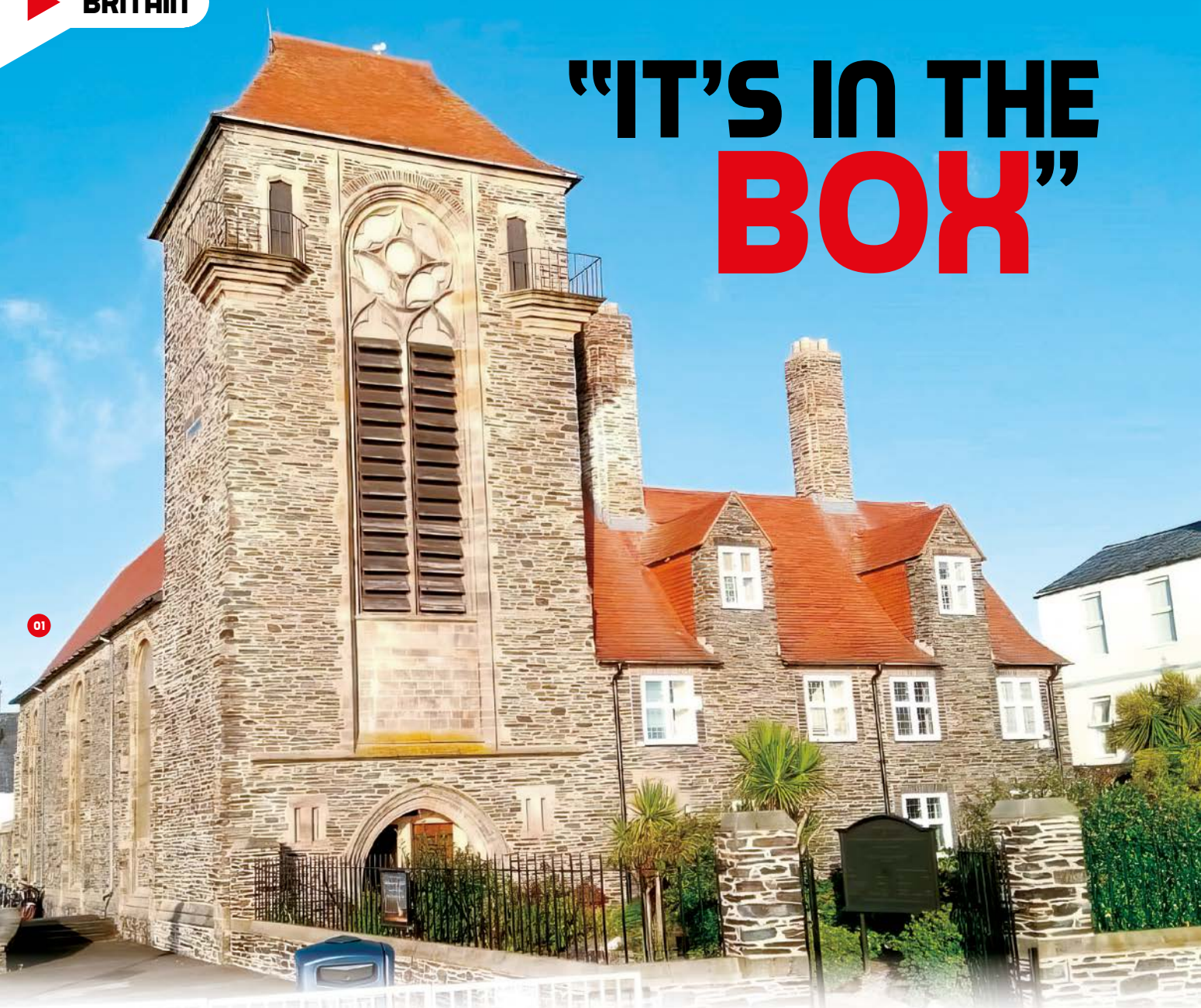
If the 1.39 billion Catholics in the world united in solidarity, offering hope and compassion to those in need, what could we accomplish? Hope is not just a thought - it is action, persistence, and shared commitment. As Pope Francis reminded us, "Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfilment." Reflecting the belief that true fulfilment comes from giving, not receiving.

I encourage all Catholics to recognise the power of communal action. Even the smallest acts - donating, volunteering and advocating - can offer hope to someone in need. Hope will always emerge from hardship, but we should not allow it to remain a distant thought. Instead, we must act on it, turning it into a force that inspires change, uplifts communities and transforms lives. Hope must become restorative, lighting the way for those in darkness. ●





# "IT'S IN THE BOX"



Fr John Boles finds out what an iconic British red telephone box is doing beside the Catholic church in Ramsey

01. Our Lady Star of the Sea dominates the seafront at Ramsey on the Isle of Man.  
Photos: Fr John Boles.

02. The interior of 'Our Lady Star of the Sea'. The architect, Giles Gilbert Scott, blended Gothic, Modernist and 'arts and crafts' styles in his design.

03. Parish priest Fr Brian O'Mahoney and his beloved K6 red telephone box beside the church wall.

**T**he seafront at Ramsey on the Isle of Man boasts some impressive structures, but pride of place must go to the Catholic church. Dating from 1910, it is legally protected as a 'listed building' due to its beauty and architectural merit. Yet, take a closer look and you will notice something odd. Next to its side wall stands a classic 1935 K6 telephone box. The 'red box' is recognised the world over as a symbol of Britain. Although de-commissioned in 1985 it has retained a place in the public imagination. But why is it here? Did it just 'materialise' like Dr Who's Tardis?

The answer lies in the identity of the church's architect. Our Lady Star of the Sea

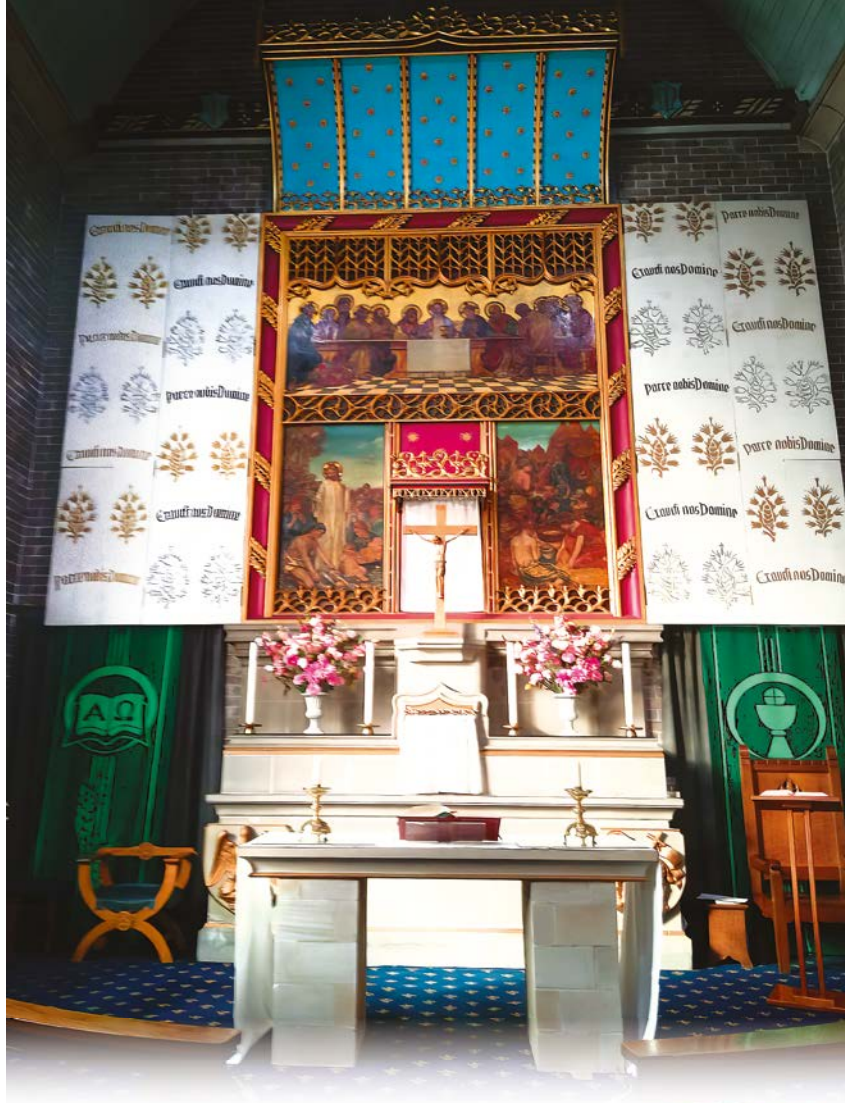
is the work of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, part of the renowned Gilbert Scott architectural dynasty. His more famous grandfather, Sir George Gilbert Scott, produced many notable buildings in the Victorian era, chief among them London's Albert Memorial. Giles himself was responsible for such works as Battersea Power Station by the River Thames and Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral. However, he is probably best known for having won the 1924 competition for the design of a national telephone box. Crafted in a classical style, topped by a dome and painted red, the box became standard issue throughout the country. The population immediately took it to their hearts.



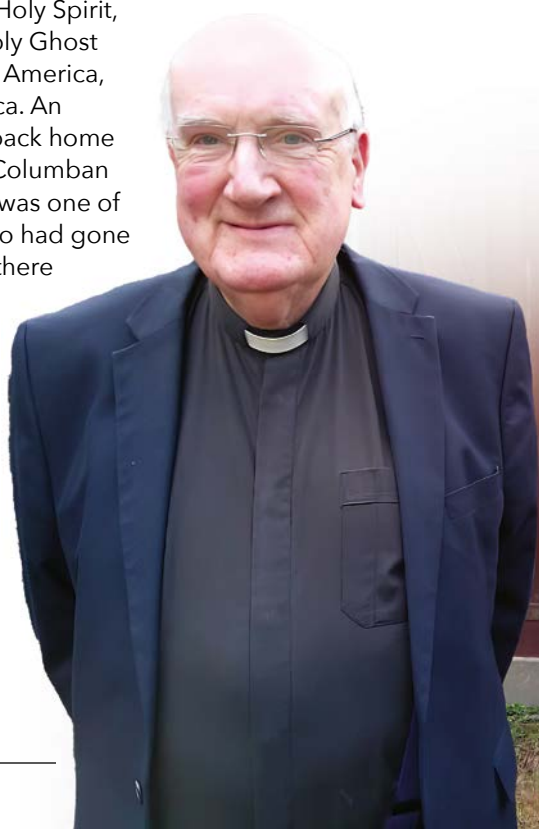
One of those who retained an affection for it was Ramsey parish priest Fr Brian O'Mahony. Struck by the link between it and the church, he decided it would be a good idea to have them side by side. The problem was, how was he to obtain one? Since disappearing from the streets they had become collectors' items and increasingly difficult to find. While I was conducting an appeal on behalf of the Columbans in his parish, Fr Brian told me what happened next.

"I asked the telephone company if I could buy one, but they said they didn't have any left. Then, I received a tip-off, telling me that someone had two of them. I went over and talked to the owner. Maybe he would sell me one? He said, 'Yes, maybe... for £4,000!'" That was impossible. Fr Brian was walking away, when suddenly the gentleman called him back. "'What's your interest?' he asked. I explained the situation and he said, 'Look, I'm a Christian too. I help support an orphanage in Belarus. Give a contribution to the orphanage and you've got the box.' So I did."

Fr Brian needed a crane to lift the call box into place, but he assured me the effort was worth it. The connection had been made. As we talked, it became clear that there were connections between him and me as well. As a Columban, I am a missionary priest, and it turns out he is too. He is a Spiritan, a member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, formerly known as the Holy Ghost Fathers. I served in South America, he had ministered in Africa. An early inspiration for him back home in Liverpool had been a Columban – Fr Hugh Bennett. Hugh was one of our old 'China hands', who had gone to China in 1934, stayed there during the war years and was expelled by the new regime in 1951. That is God for you: He often manifests Himself in life's connections. Connections between missionaries. Connections between Christians. Connections, even, between a church, an architect and a red telephone box. ●



Fr John Boles is from Stockport in Greater Manchester. Ordained in 1996, he served on mission in Peru for 25 years. He is now Director of the Columbans in Britain.





# INHERENT WORTH

01



Columban Missionary Sr Julietta Choi writes about her ministry planting seeds of self-love in the hearts of young vulnerable girls in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, I work at three shelters, referred to as 'hostels', which provide food, lodging and education to over 100 girls aged 7 to 20 who come from difficult circumstances. Three times a week I accompany these girls who are from economically disadvantaged families, orphans, or victims of domestic violence, both verbal and physical.

Before coming to Pakistan, I spent many years serving in the cemetery of Manila in the Philippines, where families lived among tombstones. I thought the children born there faced the most tragic of destinies. And in some ways, that may be true. Yet, as I now witness the lives of these girls in Pakistan, I find myself saying something different.

The children in the cemetery were indeed poor, but at least they lived with their parents, who overflowed with love for them. Each morning, mothers in the cemetery would iron their daughters' school uniforms, prepare a very simple breakfast, and braid their daughters' long hair.

In contrast, the girls at these shelters do everything on their own. They not only care for themselves but often take on the responsibility of caring for younger siblings - washing their clothes, ironing their uniforms, and braiding their hair. Then, when they leave the shelter, they must navigate life alone in a country like Pakistan, where it is extremely dangerous for women to live independently.

When I first met these girls in May last year, their expressionless faces and lack of laughter tugged at my heart. I thought, "If only I could bring a small smile to these beautiful faces." I began to question God: "Lord, what is Your purpose in sending me





here?" Gradually, I felt a quiet conviction that my mission is to prepare these girls to recognise the angels that God sends into their lives. I am to plant seeds of self-love in their hearts and help them feel God's love for them.

Through activities like meditation, music, mandala art - a meditative tool for self-reflection, biblical drama, and liturgical dance, I provided the girls with opportunities to explore and express their emotions honestly. These experiences allowed them to discover their uniqueness and understand that it is okay to think differently to others.

One day, after a mandala art session, a 17-year-old girl named Sonia shared her creation. Her mandala was painted black on the outside but was yellow on the inside. When I asked her about her colour scheme, she explained, "The world is full of struggles and hardships, but God shines His light on them, and that gives me hope." This was a poignant moment that revealed how deeply these girls feel

the weight of life.

Another girl, 10-year-old Sirat, meticulously decorated her mandala with elements from nature. Her serious expression and focused gaze were striking. On finishing, she asked me to place a candle in the centre of her mandala. She explained that her mandala was a representation of her prayer, and lighting the candle would help her prayer reach God.

One day, we shared our reflections on the question, "Why did God create me?" During this discussion, a 16-year-old girl named Muqaddas asked, "Does God have something He desires of me, too?" Her question pierced my heart, and I realised anew that my mission is to help these girls gain confidence, recognise their inherent worth, and understand that each of us is uniquely created by God. God loves them deeply and treasures them as His creations. And He loves and values each of us in the same way, including the person sitting beside us. ●

**TO SUPPORT THE COLUMBAN SISTERS PLEASE SEE THE ADVERT BELOW OR EMAIL [FAREAST@COLUMBANS.CO.UK](mailto:FAREAST@COLUMBANS.CO.UK) FOR DETAILS OF HOW TO DONATE.**

Columban Missionary Sr Julietta Choi is from Seoul in Korea. She was professed in 2010 and has served on mission in the Philippines. She is now working in Pakistan.

01. Sirat explained that her mandala was a representation of her prayer, and lighting the candle would help her prayer reach God. All photos: Sr Julie Choi.
02. Praying with the young girls and helping them understand that God loves and values each one of them equally.
03. Some of the girls preparing their mandala designs.

**"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.**

**We do that thanks to our generous supporters in Ireland and Britain.**

**Please help us continue our work with those on the margins. We cannot do it without you!**

**To donate online see:**

**[www.columbansisters.org/donation](http://www.columbansisters.org/donation)**

**or write to the Columban Sisters, PO Box 2628, Crumlin, Dublin 12.**



**Missionary Sisters of St. Columban**







# THE CROSSES WE CARRY

Living in Myanmar teaches you to live one day at a time writes Columban Missionary Fr Kurt Zion Pala.

01. Fr Kurt leads the young people in Myitkyina in the Stations of the Cross for the Feast of the Holy Cross.

02. At the 14 stations, we highlighted 14 different struggles and challenges young people in Myanmar face today.

03. On the Last Station, a huge cross was placed in front of the grotto, to remind the young people that they are not alone.

04. The Cross reminds the young people that there is hope in their suffering.

05. Life in Myitkyina is not getting easier.

06. 24 students are participating in Fr Kurt's programme.

Usually, every September on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, a huge crowd of people gathers at the foot of the Holy Cross Mountain in the Diocese of Myitkyina in Myanmar. They climb it with devotion as a pilgrimage. But last year the Diocese decided to keep the celebrations simple and in local parishes as the roads to Holy Cross Mountain were controlled by the Burmese Army and many feared arrest.

On the Feast of the Holy Cross, we decided to celebrate with a special Stations of the Cross for the youth. About 40 young people took part. At the 14 stations, we highlighted 14 different struggles and challenges young people in Myanmar face today. At every station we read a reflection and paused for a few minutes to pray for young people struggling with a particular situation. We then prayed together for the intentions of these young people. The 14 crosses young people are challenged by are:

- War and Conflict in Kachin land
- Violence Against Women and Children
- Young people in prison
- Child Labour
- Climate Change and Pollution
- Internal Displacement
- Poverty
- Mental Health issues
- Human Trafficking
- Access to Education
- Unemployment
- Broken families
- Drug Addiction and HIV/AIDS
- Teenage Pregnancy and Abortion

On the Last Station, a huge cross was placed in front of the grotto, to remind the young people that they are not alone. The Cross is a reminder to them that there is hope in their suffering and struggle. Life in Myitkyina is not getting easier. The price of basic commodities has increased. Phone connection is limited and access to internet has been restricted. Now you need to go





to 'internet shops' to access internet.

Living in Myanmar for the last six years has taught me to live one day at a time. It is very difficult to plan ahead. Situations can change in an instant. But it has also taught me to be grateful for the little things even more, to be more compassionate and generous and above all to be hopeful. Help

us bring some relief and hope to many distressed young people. Support our Student Learning Resources Centre (SLRC) and the Catholic Student Action Myitkyina (CSAM) movement. ●

Fr Kurt Zion Pala is a Columban from the Philippines. He was ordained in 2015 and now lives and works in Myanmar.

To make a comment on this article go to:



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## MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE UPDATE

Columban Fr Neil Magill founded the Higher Education College (HEC) in Mandalay after realising that many young people in Myanmar were struggling in life and had difficulty finding jobs. The college was "severely damaged" in Myanmar's earthquake.

**Y**ou will have been shocked and distressed by the reports about the devastating earthquake in Mandalay. In 2007 I started a Higher Education College (HEC) in Mandalay for bright but poor young women and men to train them as teachers and development workers. We have hundreds of graduates who have returned to remote villages to teach.

The past 17 years have been challenging but the happiest time of my life. I have never met in any other country such kind, gracious and appreciative young people with cheerful eyes and joyous hearts. However, for the 160 young people presently studying at the HEC everything has changed. They have been living under a brutal military junta since the military overthrew Aung San Suu

Kyi's government in the coup on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021. 50,000 have been killed, 25,000 are languishing in dilapidated prisons, 3.5 million have been displaced and are living in Internally Displaced camps.

The military has turned the country into a failed State with a humanitarian crisis. Villages have been wiped out, Christian churches, Buddhist monasteries and Muslim mosques have been bombed and burnt. Two of our graduates were shot dead by the military, another one is in prison and others have disappeared with no contact.

On top of this tyranny the powerful earthquake has brought further devastation, grief and suffering. The junta compounded people's suffering by continuing airstrikes within hours of the earthquake and as people searched for loved ones in the rubble.

Our Higher Education College (HEC) in Mandalay has been severely damaged. The teachers and students were lucky to get out of the classrooms safely when the earthquake struck as bricks, lumps of concrete and debris from the ceilings was raining down on them. At present the students cannot go back into their classrooms or dormitories as they are so badly damaged and very unsafe. At night they sleep on the ground outside. Most people are living and sleeping on the streets. Food, medicine and clean water are scarce. ●



**Please pray for the students and teachers of the Higher Education College in Mandalay. The situation in Myanmar is making it difficult for the Columbans to send financial aid at this time. If you wish to support the people of Myanmar to rebuild their lives, please donate via CAFOD to the Disasters Emergency Committee Myanmar Earthquake Appeal – [www.cafod.org.uk/myanmar](https://www.cafod.org.uk/myanmar). Thank you.**





# STEPPING STONE OF LOVE



I often see poor children in Pakistan who ride to school on old motorcycles with their fathers in the mornings. These worn-out motorcycles, which look as though they could break down at any moment, carry three or four children together with their father. Younger siblings sit one in front and one behind their father, while the eldest often clambers on from the back.

I remember one such scene where the eldest child, jumped up and tried to grab the edge of the seat but because of his small frame, he repeatedly fell back to the ground. Watching this, I found myself silently blaming the father. Why doesn't he help his child, I thought.

Struggling and holding onto his sibling's clothes for balance, the boy tried again but failed once more. Finally, he managed to climb on. His success might have been the result of his determination and effort, but the main factor was his father's shoulders. By holding firmly onto his father's shoulders, he found the strength to climb up. His father's shoulders provided a stepping stone, enabling the boy to achieve his aim.

Watching that scene, I was reminded of the term "priming water." It refers to the small amount of water poured into a pump to draw up a larger supply. It is the beginning - a small catalyst that allows something greater to emerge. I realised that the father's shoulders were the "priming water" for his child. Those shoulders provided the foundation and strength that prevented the boy from falling and allowed him to succeed. When we are young, the shoulders of our parents are the entire world to us.

In our own lives, are we not also moving forward towards our dreams, regaining strength when we stumble, because of the sturdy shoulders of someone in our past? I realise that there is no need to worry about what I do or my limitations. Through small acts of daily kindness, we can make God's love known, felt and experienced. We can be light and salt for others. Offering one's shoulders for others to lean on – that is love. ●

Sr Julietta Choi

01. A family in Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.



# JESUS APPEARS FOR THE THIRD TIME

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

**P**eter, James and John and four other disciples went out fishing one night, but they returned to the shore empty-handed.

A man was waiting for them on the shore. He called out as they brought in the boat: "Have you caught anything?"

"No," they shouted back.

"Throw out the net to starboard and you'll catch some fish," said the stranger.

So they dropped the net into the water again and immediately it became so full of fish that they could not pull it back in.

"It is the Lord!" said John. Peter looked across at the man on the shore, and then he grabbed his cloak and leaped into the water to join Jesus, leaving the others to bring in the catch.

When the others came ashore, Jesus had breakfast ready for them: bread and some fish cooking on a charcoal fire. After they had eaten, Jesus turn to Peter.

"Simon Peter," he said, "do you love me more than these others do?"

Peter answered, "Lord, you know I do."

"Feed my lambs," said Jesus. Then he asked Peter again, "Simon Peter, do you love me?"

Peter said, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

Then Jesus asked a third time, "Simon Peter, do you love me?"

Peter was upset that Jesus should ask him three times.

"Lord, you know everything; you know I love you!"

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Then Peter understood, and the shame of his earlier denial of Jesus was lifted from him. ●

**Read also: John 21:1-19**



## BIBLE QUIZ

NUMBER  
120

- 1 In 2 Kings ch.19:3, which king sent a message to the prophet Isaiah saying: "Today is a day of trouble for us, a day of reproof and contumely (disgrace)"?
- 2 In John ch.3, which disciple asked, "How can a man be born when he is old?"
- 3 In 2 Samuel, ch.18, which king, inspired by his love for Absalom asked, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"
- 4 In Acts ch.7, who asked the first Christian martyr, "Are these charges true?"
- 5 In Galatians, ch.2, who argued against Peter saying, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew"?
- 6 In Ezra, ch.10, which son of Jehiel said to Ezra, "Rise up this matter is in your hands and we are with you."

**£15 vouchers for the first three correct entries received!**

Consult your Bible, answer the questions above and send your entry to: Bible Quiz N° 120, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

Bible Quiz N° 118 Winners: Christipher Molyneux, Lancs • Margaret Glynn, West Midlands • Marie Woods, Bucks.

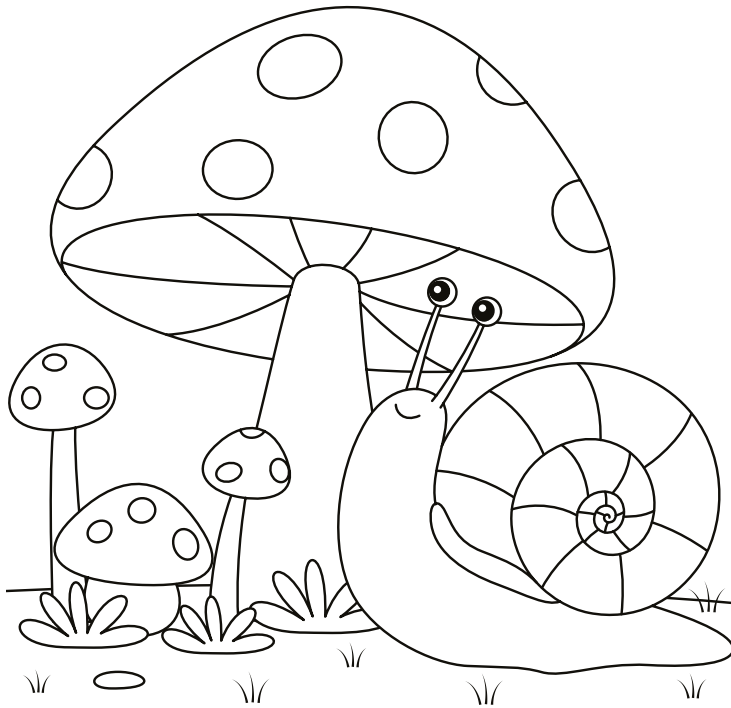
Name:

Address:

THREE  
**£15**  
VOUCHERS  
TO BE WON!



Colpaint



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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 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

Name:

Age:

FOUR PRIZES TO BE WON!

Address:



## WORD SEARCH

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

WOODPECKER

FOX

BEAR

TURTLE

DEER

BADGER

TIGER

RACCOON



Image: Shutterstock





Image: Shutterstock

# The May Bug

By Elizabeth McArdle

**M**ay is the month of the cockchafer; a big bumbling beetle which may look and sound a little scary. On late summer evenings, this gentle giant, known also as the May bug, is out and about in search of a mate. Because of the whirring sound made by their wings, they are often heard before they are seen, but do not be afraid, this wonderful insect is completely harmless.

The cockchafer has a three-year life cycle. After mating, the female digs about 20cm into the soil and lays between 10 and 20 eggs. After 21 days her eggs hatch and the larvae remain in the soil for a further two years. They feed on the roots of grasses and other plants.

Their cream coloured bodies with brown heads are familiar to gardeners and farmers, who often encounter them while preparing the soil for crops and vegetables.

Feeding mainly on tree leaves, the adult cockchafer in this part of the world rarely cause any significant damage to crops or orchards. However, in Europe they were once a common pest with population explosions every three years. Up until the mid 1900s, people in France and Germany captured cockchafers and a delicacy known as cockchafer soup was made from them. I am reliably told that it tastes like crab soup, but my dear children, I will not be partaking of this rare delicacy!

The names cockchafer and May bug are just two of an impressively long list of imaginative local names. These include spang beetle, billy witch, dumbledarey, mitchamador and bummmler.

British evolutionary biologist and geneticist, JBS Haldane, teased that God, whom we believe created all things, must have had a special fondness for beetles because one out of every four animal species on Earth is a beetle. That may be true but we know that God loves all of creation, be it beetle, human, bird or plant. ●

## HA! HA!

1. Where do sheep go for summer holidays?
2. Why did the teacher wear sunglasses?
3. What do snails do on the last day of school?
4. Why is history a sweet subject?
5. Why does maths class make students sad?
6. Why did the scientist remove her doorbell?

1. The Baa-hamas!
2. Her students were so bright!
3. Shell-abrate!
4. Because it has many dates.
5. Because it is full of problems.
6. She wanted to win the no-bell prize.



## COMPETITION WINNERS

### JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2025



**Eliza Fleming**  
Hampshire

**Gaibriel Mulkeen**  
Wetherby

**1**

**2**

**Colpaint - Aged 7 and Under**

**Mila Stefanovska**  
Newcastle

**Phoebe Lincoln**

**1**

**2**

**Colpaint - Aged 8 and Over**



# SAVE THE DATE

## HOPE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

A pilgrimage through the diocese of Salford, from the Laudato Si' Centre, Wardley Hall, to Salford Cathedral's Temporary Church.

Organised jointly by the Columban Missionaries and the Laudato Si' Centre to celebrate the Season of Creation in the Jubilee Year.

**25<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025**



Laudato Si' Centre



**COLUMBAN  
MISSIONARIES  
BRITAIN**



# FAITH IN ACTION VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

**LEARN AND SERVE WITH THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES**

We're recruiting young adult volunteers to support Columban projects connected to refugees and asylum seekers, interreligious dialogue and justice and peace education.

The year-long programme will commence in September 2025.

As a volunteer you will:

- Engage in projects supporting refugees and asylum seekers
- Assist young people to explore the relationship between justice and peace
- Engage in a journey of learning and reflection on your own faith

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: Friday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2025 (midday).**



**COLUMBAN  
MISSIONARIES  
BRITAIN**



SCAN ME

Scan for more about the programme and how to apply. Email to request an informal chat with a Faith in Action volunteer. Interviews will take place in central Birmingham on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2025.

[invitationtomission@columbans.co.uk](mailto:invitationtomission@columbans.co.uk)

[WWW.COLUMBANS.CO.UK](http://WWW.COLUMBANS.CO.UK)